

Participatory Action Research

IMPACTS OF EXTRACTION ON WOMEN IN AFRICA

NIGERIA

Dirty Oil, Destroyed Livelihoods – Ibeno, Nigeria



Oil pollution is a serious political issue in Nigeria. Communities in the Niger Delta in particular, are neglected and deprived of basic amenities by both the government and oil companies. The failure of government to regulate the activities of the oil companies and hold them accountable for the pollution and devastation suggests a conspiracy against the interests of the people. Exxon Mobil appears unwilling to comply with environmental protection laws and the government appears unwilling to hold the company to account.

Indeed, years of agitation and public campaigns in the Niger Delta have failed to eliminate pollution, poverty and paucity in oil-producing communities. Pollution from extractive activities of multinational oil companies is responsible for a wide range of misery across this region. Participatory action research (PAR) was conducted in Ibeno, Ibo State by the Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre, in collaboration with the WoMin – African Gender and Extractives Alliance.

To begin, 25 community women were trained as research assistants. They conducted in-depth interviews,

oral history, film screenings, public meetings, focus group discussions, transect walk and social mapping. The PAR project took the community women to locations in and around Ibeno where they heard from members of the community about their experiences.

According to PAR respondents, after decades of Mobil's oil operations in the coastline communities of Ibeno, the people still have no source of clean drinking water. Oil politics have left the communities impoverished. Aquatic life has been all but destroyed because of regular oil spills. This, in turn, has destroyed traditional fishing grounds, which are key to community livelihoods.

Community members were vocal about the injustices they suffer. Mr Moses Ekot Ekot from the community of Itak Udim Ukpa:

'Our drinking water is polluted by the oil spill. Our crops are also affected by the spill. We are calling on government to do something to stop this suffering. Mobil has not done anything since the spill occurred.'



Community women explained how oil company activities have caused severe problems:

'[There is] no clean drinking water for us. Oil has spoilt our farmlands, our rivers and streams. It is if we are not existing ...'

Another community member lamented:

'Once there is oil spill it affects Igwo-okpom Opolom because we are close to the Atlantic ... Many of our children have died because of this. There is one sickness that has come into this community; body scratching ... When we go to the hospital the doctor will tell us there is no problem.'

Speaking on sources of livelihood Agnes Ifum said that women have no sustainable means of livelihood. Mobil oil activities have disrupted their economic life. She said the people still live in thatched houses and structures are constantly damaged as a result of gas flaring. Another respondent, Helen Abraham, said,

'We are dying slowly. Even our herbs, plants, moreover the fishes are dead. Since Mobil came into this place there is no more fish.'

Poverty caused by oil pollution is the biggest challenge to the economic survival of women and children in Ibena communities. Women are differently impacted than men because they constitute the majority of the subsistence farmers and fisher folk. Finding alternative sources of income is challenging. Men own the land that women farm on and compensations are paid to men who own the land, not to the women who do the farming. Men are the community leaders and gatekeepers so they are the ones who negotiate with companies and relate with government officials. This makes it easy for men to become contractors

with the corporation and government.

Common ailments in the community are skin rashes, skin cancer, malaria, worm infection, diarrhoea. Meanwhile, there is no hospital in Igwo-Okpom Opolom. The existing health facility is a one-room establishment, popularly known as the Drug Store. It has three staff (two women and one male nurse), who are paid by the State Ministry of Health. Once a year they receive paltry supplies of medication from the Exxon Mobil Clinic. The Drug Store cannot offer maternity services, so pregnant women are referred to the Polyclinic at Ukpenekeang, many kilometres away by boat and motorbike. There are three traditional birth attendants in a community with a population of about 5,000 persons, 2,000 of them women.

Emerging from the PAR process were the following recommendations:

- Political will must be exerted to punish environmental crimes and make pollution unfashionable.
- Oil pollution in Ibena can be eliminated by strict enforcement of existing laws.
- All spill sites must be remediated with polluters paying for this and victims duly compensated.
- Types of dispersants and other chemicals used in tackling oil spills must also be disclosed and approved before usage.
- Ibena women need vocational skills as alternative means of livelihood.
- Women need capital to start trading and other businesses.
- Provision of Health Centres should be established in all the coastline communities in Ibena.
- Roads and bridges should be constructed where they are needed within Ibena.

This participatory action research project was generously supported by the following funders:

Action Aid Netherlands, Africa Groups of Sweden, CCFD – Terre Solidaire, Dreikonigsaktion, Fastenopfer, Ford Foundation, Heinrich Boll Foundation, Mamacash, Norwegian People's Aid, and Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa.

For the full report see <http://womin.org.za/images/docs/nigeria-report.pdf>

This research project is a collaboration of WoMin and Kebetkache Women and Development Resource Centre (KEBETKACHE)



**KEBETKACHE WOMEN DEVELOPMENT
& RESOURCE CENTRE**

Kebetkache Women and Development Resource Centre (KEBETKACHE) is a women's rights organisation using community action, education and advocacy to address development and social justice issues affecting women and children in Nigeria and around the world. http://kebetkachewomencentre.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=featured&Itemid=435



WoMin – African Gender and Extractives Alliance brings together non-governmental organisations and grassroots women resisting destructive extractivism, focusing on mining, oil and gas in Sub-Saharan Africa. Established in 2013, WoMin and its allies undertake women-led research, solidarity exchanges, education and campaigns to promote development models advancing gender, ecological, energy and climate justice. www.womin.org.za