

Factsheet

Shell's oil leaks in Nigeria continue



The situation in the Niger Delta is a disaster for nature and area residents. Oil leaks regularly pollute the fields, forests and water. These leaks place a heavy burden on agriculture and fishing in this overpopulated region. The cause of many of the leaks is unclear, as is the quality of the clean-up operations and the consequences of the oil infrastructure to the environment. Figures are unreliable and the government provides protection to the oil companies.

Many leaks occur each year due to inadequate maintenance or technical failure. Through our Nigerian sister organisation (Environmental Rights Action) we regularly receive notice of leaks which have major consequences for the environment and area residents. In a large number of these, sabotage is said to play a part. But this certainly does not mean that Shell is innocent of wrongdoing. The pipelines are poorly guarded and there is no electronic sensor or camera surveillance. Moreover, there is significant evidence that Shell personnel are also involved in sabotage and fraudulent 'clean-up' operations. Shell has done little to prevent this.



Leaking oil well
Photo: Friends of the Earth International

JK4

The village of Joinkrama 4, usually called JK4, is criss-crossed by pipelines running above ground. These pipelines transport oil from the numerous oil wells around the village to a collection point. There have been many leaks around the village and the village community does its best to prevent vandalism.

It is known that a number of dishonest villagers are in league with Shell employees. The gang creates leaks and passes on clean-up contracts to each other. The village council has provided Shell with the names of these people but neither Shell nor the government has responded.

The community has made it known to the

authorities that it would like to turn the gang members over to the police, but the police have not turned up to arrest them. Shell has made no reply at all and Shell personnel have put pressure on the village government to not report the members of the gang.

For ordinary villagers, life is hard. In September 2010 there was another leak and the land and fishing areas became contaminated. Because there was evidence of sabotage, no compensation was paid out. Shell furthermore cut 1000 euros from the income of a group of pipeline guards from the village that it had appointed.

Owewere

No leaks had occurred in the village of Owewere since the 1980s. But in October 2010 disaster struck. A pipeline sprung a leak and for at least a week oil escaped to the surface. Although villagers called Shell after the leak was discovered, there was no response. Nor did the usual inspection visit, together with the authorities, take place.

A few days later Owewere residents discovered people from a neighbouring village carrying off oil, led by Shell personnel. A week after this astonishing discovery oil was still escaping from the pipeline and people were carrying off large oil drums.



Geepee tanks being rolled away
Photo: Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria

The village residents suspect that Shell was

surreptitiously working on cleaning up the mess and had hired people from the neighbouring village to do so. This is a very sensitive issue. Victims of oil pollution in fact have the right to compensation and repair of the environmental damage, on the condition that there is no evidence of vandalism or sabotage. Shell skirted this obligation in this situation. Furthermore, by calling in the neighbouring community without consultation, Shell has caused serious tensions in the region.

Ikarama

In the early morning of 4 June a fountain of oil began spouting at a collecting station near Ikarama. Shell technicians succeeded in solving the problem that same morning. An official investigation never took place, but Shell nonetheless has stated that there was evidence of sabotage. It later emerged that the contractor hired to clean up the area had collected the oil in a pit a bit further away. He may have been planning to incinerate the oil.

On 15 August a leak developed from a pipeline to an oil well nearby the village of Ikarama. A local security guard informed Shell. The village community only found out something was going on when Shell personnel were seen leaving in an all-terrain vehicle after inspecting the leak.

The joint investigation visit required by law never took place. Technicians were already working on installing a clamp to stop the leak. The leak was thought to have been caused by sabotage. The leaked oil was transported to a location a short distance away and set on fire.



The incineration of leaked oil does tremendous damage
photo: Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth *Nigeria*

Mrs Rebecca Williams, 25-year-old mother of five:
'Most of their fertile lands have been destroyed and

the few places currently in use for farming give little income from farming now. I have started buying yams in the market now because my farm is polluted.'

Bodo and the Trans-Niger pipeline

The town of Bodo is situated on a creek which flows into the sea near the island of Bonny. Bonny is known for the Shell export terminal and the LNG factory located there. The inhabitants of the island and neighbouring communities such as Goi are regularly stricken by oil pollution. Leaks from the feeder pipelines to the terminal (the Trans-Niger pipeline) and from the sea come together in the creek.



Damage to nature from oil leaks is difficult to repair

The last large leak took place in 2009 and local people are still contending with the consequences. Fishers are scarcely able to find any fish fit for consumption. The mangrove forests where many fish and crustaceans had been caught were burned off in previous leaks. Restoration of the natural environment will be very difficult.

The prospects for restoration are part of the UNEP study to appear in early 2011. By now, the residents of Bodo and Goi have little hope. Nothing is known about better safety measures or systems to minimize leaks. A new oil spill could occur at any moment. This was demonstrated on 19 November 2010 when a pipe, part of the Trans-Niger pipeline, was destroyed.

More information

The most recent news on the cases can be found on the Environmental Rights Action (ERA) website: www.eraaction.org. ERA is the sister organisation of Milieudefensie in Nigeria.

