Niger Delta ALERT Issue 04 • April 1998

EDWIN MADUNAGO

EGILAND

'Kill-and-Go' Police Shoot Protesters for Elf Over NLNG

IRKED BY THE increasing deterioration of their environment, social destabilisation and worsening economic conditions, the Ogba-speaking people of Egiland comprising 17 communities in Ogba, Egbema, Ndoni local government, ONELGA, of Rivers State have been protesting peacefully against the oil and gas operations of the French oil giant Elf Petroleum Nigeria Limited. The multinational oil company ,MNOC, came to Egi 34 years ago but for all its operations, it has no single standard environmental assessment report as required under Nigerian and international laws. Not surprisingly, it commenced work in August 1996 on the Obite Gas plant, one out of four such facilities to service the Liquefied Natural Gas project in Bonny, Rivers State. The others being Soku, Obirikom and Akukutoru.

For the Egi communities, the Obite Gas Project has actually deepened their already precarious plight and increased their anger against Elf and its contractors, notably the Italian oil services company Saipem Nigeria Limited.

In the latest manifestation of mutual distrust, mobile policemen, popularly known as 'kill-and-go' police on account of their notoriety and ruthlessness invaded Obite village this April 20 on the invitation of the pipeline contractors to Elf Saipem, local inhabitants told *NDA*. Acting like men in the battlefront, members of the dreaded force who filled two trucks indiscriminately shot live bullets at crowds of youths, wounding several people and abducting 13 others to Sam Royal Hotel, Ahoada, Rivers State.

Before the raid on the community, Obite youths were protesting the refusal of Saipem and its principal Elf to meet their promise of employing community people. Both companies continued to play games with them, forcing the youths to do something dramatic. They decided to seize two vehicles belonging to Saipem. The company's response was the April 20 invasion by the para-military police, an incident which left blood in its trail. Those critically injured include one Ejike Uzoigwe who is still a patient at Central Hospital, Akabuka were two bullets were removed from his body. Another youth Richman Eda had his head broken by the butt of a policeman's gun and a woman Stella Elemele was beaten to a state of coma. Ejike Uzoigwe's brother Anthony Uzoigwe is still being held for complaining to the police about his brother's condition. Those who were abducted to Sam Royal Hotel and tortured were Stella Uzoigwe, Ndukaku Elemele, Aboyi Igwe, Ndude Agali and Okechukwu Williams. The others were Ikenna Ordu, Nwaegwu Umah, Chestman Ugo, Chinedu Ebirika, Stanley Igwe, Gift Mbonu, Shoemaker Okwuikpo and Happiness Egba. They have all been released.

But in a similar case, six natives of Akabuka village are being held at a military camp in Port Harcourt for protesting against Saipem. They are Nnenna Owhor, Augustine Agbor, Nwankwo Anamakiri, Chukwudi Okanyi, Okwukwu Charles and Humphrey Okwu.

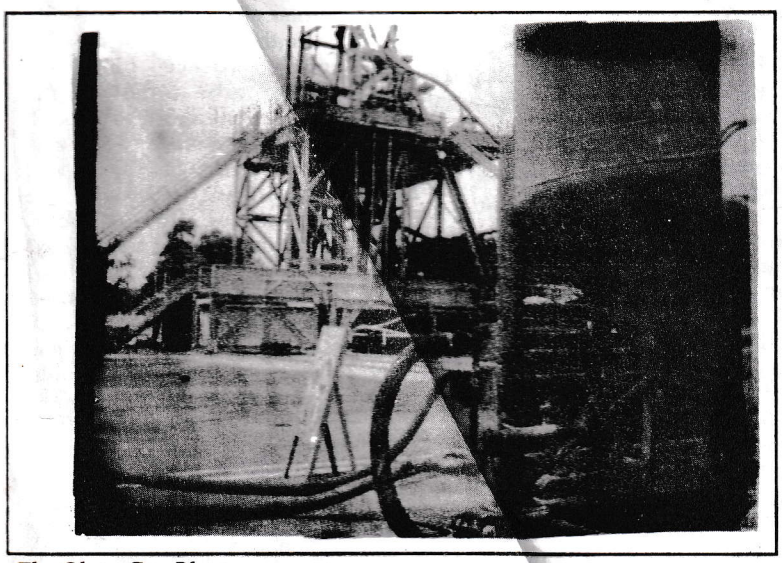
The invitation of the 'kill-and-go' police to suppress demands of the local people has become the standard practice of MNOC's operating in the Niger Delta. For instance, in 1990 Shell secured the services of the same force to massacre the people of Umuechem for protesting against the oil mogul. Elf itself had used the same unit to visit violence on inhabitants of Obagi ,Rivers State.

Sadly, the April 20 incident is only one out of several woes of the Egi communities. Pipelines crisscross farmlands, oil and gas wells are largely located in the village backyards, poisonous hydro-carbon gas is pushed into the atmosphere daily causing severe heat, flora and fauna have been degraded while the people themselves remain socially disturbed.

A great concern of the Egi communities is the location of the gas plant which is less than 40 metres from living homes. The buffer zone of the project even falls within human settlements. Out pressure, the company relocated a household in the area.

On February 26, 1998, a major

continued on Page 3



•The Obete Gas Plant

INSIDE

Armed police stall talks between Shell and Nembe youths *-P 2*

Agip displaces 1000 farmers in Oguta *-P 4*

Shell admits paying soldiers to invade Ogoniland *-P 4*

CBS/3/94

Briefing

•On Monday, April 20 four Port Harcourt-based correspondents were arrested and detained for three hours under a tree at Onne in Eleme local government which is part of Ogoniland by Major Obi Umahi, commander of the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force, RSISTF and ASP Shedrak Habila, commander of the Mobile Police Force in the state. Messrs. Tokunbo Awoshakin (ThisDay); Stepp Offi (TELL); Chris Ikwunze (Vanguard) and Lawson Heyford (The Source) had gone to the community in the line of duty to cover Ogoni women who were protesting half-nude the non-employment of their sons and husbands by the over 300 companies operating in the area, including Elf; Saipem; Mobil; Slumberger Dowell and the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria. The women numbering about 800 blocked the busy Eleme/Onne road before they were dispersed by the RSISTF. They were tear-gassed, flogged and arrested. By press time, six of the protesting women were still being held in the state capital at an undisclosed location. The former chief judge of Rivers State and paramount ruler of Onne Hon Justice S.A. Wai-Ogusu condemned the treatment meted out to his people, explaining that the women took to the streets only after efforts to hold talks with the companies produced no meaningful results.

Umahi accosted the journalists with a white pick-up with registration number RV 2731 DC. They were searched thoroughly and their notes vetted by the major himself who also seized a mini-tape recorder belonging to the Vanguard correspondent. The tape is yet to be returned and the journalists were warned not to write about the incident.

•Beginning this June, the Environmental Rights Action, ERA, (Friends of the Earth Nigeria) shall publish a quarterly magazine called *ERACTION*. According to ERA, the quarterly "is published to disseminate information on environmental human rights; to stimulate debate and to campaign for environmental sustainability, corporate responsibility and

NEMBE

Armed Police Stall Talks Between Community and Shell

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN representatives of Ewelesuo community in Nembe local government of Bayelsa State and Shell Petroleum Development (Nigeria) Limited, SPDC, have hit the rocks following the presence of armed policemen invited by the oil company.

"We walked out of the meeting because of the intimidating presence of the armed policemen", the youth leader of Ewelesuo and delegate to the meeting, Mr. Terry Thomas told *NDA*. The talks were called by Shell against the backdrop of the closure of the Nembe Creek 3 Flow Station of the oil company by local youths on Thursday, March 5.

On that day, about 30 youths stormed the flow station in two hand-pulled canoes, sacked all SPDC personnel on the site and put out the burning gas flames, thus shutting down the facility. They ordered that no work should take place until they direct otherwise.

Before the closure, the now defunct Ewelesuo Development Committee had in a letter dated November 11, 1997 and signed by Messrs. Christian Ogboirie and Ngolayefa Hanson, chairman and secretary respectively demanded the following from SPDC:

- payment of compensation for an oil spillage that occurred in October 1997;
- provision of pipe-borne water;
- provision of electricity;
- sand-filling of the sea shore;
- building of a jetty and the
- building of a secondary school, etc

Ogboirie disclosed that last October after the spill, the youths closed down the flow station but "we were intimidated by the police and we spent about N30,000 to free ourselves"

On February 9, all the women of Ewelesuo went to the flow station and stopped work there in demand for payment of their compensation claims.The community liaison officer, CLO, of SPDC Mr. Meshack Igwe met with the aggrieved women and told them that their problems will be directed to the authorities for appropriate response. The promise remains unfulfilled.

Said Thomas who led the team to the flow station on March 5: "We closed down the flow station to demand for compensation for the oil spillage that occurred last October".

By the second day of the closure, SPDC requested leaders of the community to come to Port Harcourt for negotiations. At the talks, Shell was represented by Alhaji Haliru Nashuru, Mr. Dibia Johnson and Rev. Oni. Ewelesuo delegates were Deputy Chief Tariah, Terry Thomas, Joseph John, Timipre Standfast and George Magnus. With the start of negotiations, the flow station was reopened.

NDA learnt that on the first day of negotiations, SPDC flooded the venue with policemen armed with pistols and dogs. There was confusion for a while before the meeting eventually started. But no meaningful headway was made. So they adjourned to March 9.

Thomas informed that SPDC increased the number of armed police men on the second day of talks. "The presence of these armed police patrolling the venue of the meeting seriously intimidated us", he noted.

In the course of the talks, Shell offered the community N1 million as compensation. This was totally rejected by the Ewelesuo delegation as far inadequate and unfair. An attempt by SPDC to divide the team by asking some of the members to sign agreement papers failed flatly. "We walked out of the meeting . The said oil spill damaged the whole ecology, destroyed fish ponds, shrines, drinking water and most other living things in the water and on land."

Ewelesuo youths say that Shell's attitude to the community leaves much to be desired. "When the spill occurred, the company did not even send any relief materials despite the enormous damage done to our economic life and the environment.", Thomas added. "When the flow station is in operation, you can hear loud noise that disturbs the whole town and a great deal of heat comes from that place. In fact, since SPDC came here, they have not changed their pipes. That was 25 years ago."

Prior to the closure and re-opening of the Nembe Creek 3 Flow Station by the Ewelesuo youths, their counterparts from Bassambiri had on Monday, March 2 given Shell a five day ultimatum to meet with them over their problems or have all the company's flow stations in the area closed. They are angry that contrary to its earlier promise, Shell, the managing partner of the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas project has refused to employ any of them. *Amanyanabo* (king) of Bassambiri Chief Raph Owowari to intervene and persuade

Almost immediately, SPDC sent a letter to the youths not to embark on their chosen course of action. The youths refused to heed the unsolicited advice of the king.

By Saturday, March 7, Bassambiri youths in their hundreds stormed the Odeama Creek Flow Station in a convoy of eight boats and took over the flow station. The youth leader Mr. Ekiye Nicholas then contacted the CLO Mishack Igwe on phone. The latter pleaded with the youths to exercise some patience but they would not take that. So the youths went ahead to sack all SPDC personnel on duty, quenched the gas flames and went ahead to close all the surrounding flow stations, including Nembe Creek 1,2,3 and 4 by 'remote'.

Disturbed by this action, SPDC on Tuesday, March 10 sent its CLO Igwe and Alhaji Haliru Nashuru to Bassambiri to persuade the youths the youths to re-open the flow stations. The protesters reacted by seizing the company sea truck that conveyed the SPDC officials to the community. The

continued on Page 3

Elf continued

gas explosion occurred at the production centre of the project consisting of 13 cluster wells .Economic trees, farmlands and wetlands were destroyed. NDA gathered that the explosion may have been caused by excessive exploration of gas at the horizontal gas wells in plant's production centre which Saipem is handling. As yet, Elf has neither apologised to for the incident nor paid the people any compensation. It cannot even do a post-impact assessment study of the area since no acceptable EIA exists. Experts suggest that even the safety of the Saipem Drilling workers is not guaranteed.

Elf's refusal to conduct an EIA study of the Obite Gas Project has drawn strong reactions from the Egi communities, non-governmental organisations, comuunity-based organisations and other stake holders with the Egi People's Environmental Action Group EPEAG playing a vanguard role.

The result was a shabby documentation prepared by an obscure Port Harcourt-based company Oasons Nigeria Limited and sent to the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, FEPA, as an EIA report for approval. EPEAG again protested the document, describing it as "comical, and unprofessional". Even the Rivers State Environmental protection Agency, RSEPA, joined in the protest. All this made FEPA to display the shabby report for 21 days - December 29, 1997 to January 27, 1998. The displayed EIA was roundly rejected.

"The purported report issued by Oasons for Elf on the Obite Gas Project is completely irrelevant to all stakeholders. The report does not meet acceptable standards in environmental management and project implementation. The project can only be useful to humanity if the environmental and socio-economic problems arising from it are properly addressed", said the president of EPEAG. Mr. Chizor Wisdom Dike.

On March 5,1998, FEPA organised an EIA Review Panel on the project. Elf's representatives were humiliated as all the panel members condemned the report as inadequate and hurriedly prepared. The chairman of ONELGA Mr. Gift Nwokocha who is also a panelist remarked unequivocally that "the report is not genuine".

Dr. O. Ameyan, FEPA's Director of Planning, Statistics and Information also mauled the report, noting that the project has national and international significance and as such it must be properly done to accommodate the interest of all the stakeholders. The greatest condemnation came from the Rivers State Environmental Protection Agency, RSEPA. It dismissed the report as unrealistic and scanty.

An agriculturist and pollution expert Professor C.T.I. Ordu told the panel that the EIA report did not follow the due processes . He went on to accuse FEPA of weakness and playing double standards for refusing to stop the gas project until a proper EIA report is issued.

NDA gathered that FEPA's soft spot for Elf may not be unconnected with the federal government's insistence that the project's deadline of 1999 has to be met.

Meanwhile FEPA has asked Elf to embark on a nature conservation project in Egiland . It has also directed the company to initiate actions on a new EIA that would be in line with internationally acceptable standards in environmental management.

Mr.A.A Abolarin, Manager, Liaison Authorities of the MNOC has promised to comply with the directive.

In Nigeria, oil companies have an established reputation for keeping their promises in the breach•

Agip continued

the burning well head and worshippers abandoned it since March 4. Ancestral shrines were also affected.

On the spot assessment by *NDA* showed that some of the crops have started going pale as a result of the smoke which covered the farm lands at first and the heat being generated by the fire. More than that, Agip image makers' claim to have relocated the affected farmers is far from the truth. *NDA* saw over 15 people living in the bush while most others were sleeping in tents at Amanwanyiocha village, near Akiri. .In the name of compensation, a family of 12 was given one rubber plate, one rubber spoon, one rubber cup, one blanket and one umbrella by NAOC. They also supplied a laughable quantity of rice, beans and meat.

No talk is being made about compensation This is due partly to the fact that the land on which the well head is located is being disputed by a family in Umuogwuma village, Oguta and the Isikwa people from Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government of Rivers State. Thus the place is known as Nwaegwoji for the Umuogwuomas and Egwukwu for the Isikwas. Agip has been benefiting from this dispute. Although the Isikwa have been adjudged the rightful owners of the land, Agip is saying that they would not recognise them as such because the other party has appealed against the judgement. But the appeal is yet to be heard.

"I feel very bad. One cannot definitely envisage what the outcome of this whole thing would be", said Chief Joseph Odili, head of the Akono Edem family of Isikwa. For Sunday Ogbonna, one of the displaced farmers: "We now live on charity. Agip has not apologised to us. They have not made any attempt to relocate u s. Government has to intervene and cater for us to eliminate this suffering which Agip has visited on us."

Shell continued

officials were allowed to leave for 'Port Harcourt the next day via public transport, unmolested.

In an attempt to call a truce, the *amanyanabo* set up a gas and oil committee which spoke to the youths to leave the flow station to no avail.

SPDC became very desperate at this point and approached the Bayelsa State government to intervene. Government House, Yenagoa did intervene on Thursday, March 12 by asking the youth leaders to come to the state capital for negotiations with SPDC in the presence of government officials.

Nigeria's single oil field which SPDC operates in partnership with others is located in Nembe land, producing about 250,000 barrels per day of the superior quality oil, Bonny Light. Like other areas in the delta, Nembe is still poor, backward and neglected•

Briefing

social justice; and to report on the people, the issues and struggles of all sensitive citizens and organisations for the protection of all human ecosystems" ERA welcomes articles of not more 2000 words and reports of not more 500 words from around the world. Deadline for the maiden edition is June 5.

•The Director-General of the National Maritime Authority, NMA, Alhaji Buba Galadima has accused oil companies operating in Nigeria of a lack of maintenance culture. The accusation came in the wake the Jones creek spill from a 28-year old pipeline belonging to Shell Nigeria. "Most of the pipes of these oil companies have spent more than a quarter of a century without repair. In this country, we have no laws that will guard against how some of these companies conduct their activities, thus the companies are not forced to be guided by the environmental concerns of the people", he observed. Adding, Galadima said "that is why it has become a regular thing to see oil spillage in different parts of the country".

Media reports however quote Shell as defending the non-replacement of the aged pipeline that leaked recently. "There is no specific life span of a pipeline. What we do is a monthly sweeping operation where certain chemicals are pumped into the pipes to clean up, while the outside is cathodically protected", the MNOC is reported to have said.

•The Zidokumor family of the Aleibiri federated communities in Ekeremor local government of Bayelsa State has demanded compensation from SPDC for the destruction they suffered from the recent fire in the community forest caused by its contractor. They submitted in a letter to the managing director of Shell Mr. Ron Van Den Berg that the family was worst affected. " This unnatural calamity will not augur well with the wishes and aspirations of our gods and goddesses, if not appeased.", they noted in the letter dated April 13.

NDA gathered that beside the spill of March 18,1997, the community witnessed a pollution within a pollution on October 27, 1997.

OGUTA

Agip Displaces 1000 Farmers

A MAJOR EXPLOSION from the Nigeria Agip Oil Company's, NAOC, 1,000 condensate Akiri Well 9 which services the Akiri Gas Plant, near Oguta in Imo State occurred this March 4, resulting in the emission of dangerous fumes and fire which is still burning. The incident has displaced about 1,000 farmers who live in farm settlements located about 500 metres from the well head.

In a meeting with journalists at its Port Harcourt regional office, NAOC alleged that the well head was set ablaze through a spark from a bush fire. The affected farmers however contest this claim vigorously. Independent investigations by *NDA* at the site of the flame also support the farmers' position.

The displaced people who were living in four separate but near settlements, namely: Umubo camp; Obua camp; Amanwanyiocha camp and Egwukwu camp now live the life of refugees, having been denied their means of livelihood and a roof over their head. When the incident occurred, Agip officials met with the people and promised to pay them N300 ($3.6) per night but ended up paying N600 ($7.2) for accommodation for one month.

The site of the fire has been cordoned off, with armed mobile and regular policemen on guard for 24 hours a day. Entry points carry inscriptions like "NAOC Restricted Area. No Entry" "Dangerous Area. No Entry". Occasionally, the police men on guard shoot indiscriminately into the air to scare away people, especially farmers who have been warned not to go near their farms again. Even Nigerian journalists are not allowed to visit the area. An attempt by two reporters, namely: Chidi Nkwopara of the National Concord and Donatus Njoku of The Statesman to investigate the incident landed them into detention, first under the scorching sun and later at the Oguta Police Station. Agip accused the reporters of espionage!

But an *NDA* reporter was able to visit the farm settlements with the help of the displaced farmers. From the settlements, it was possible to see the flames. The noise emanating from there is capable of making someone deaf. Not only had the farmers abandoned their houses and farmlands along with several economic trees and crops and domestic animals, they have also been forced out of their places of worship. For instance, St. Paul's Catholic Church, Umuogwuma is near

continued on Page 3

OGONILAND

Shell Admits Paying Soldiers

AFTER YEARS OF denials, Shell Petroleum Development Company (Nigeria) Limited, SPDC, has admitted paying Nigerian soldiers who invaded Korokoro, an Ogoni village five years ago. The admission was contained in a chance response by the multinational oil company, MNOC, to ERA's report of December 4,1997 titled "SPDC in the Niger Delta, 1996/97" and submitted to the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility, ECCR, based in the United Kingdom.

It was also reproduced as ERA Monitor Report No 3 under the heading "Shell and Community Development in the Niger Delta". In it, ERA contended that "Shell has no sound policy of working with the local people who are its hosts, either in Nigeria or elsewhere On the contrary, in many ways, Shell like the oil industry as a whole, is contemptuous of local people and arrogant about its own right to do what it likes" The environmental group added that "this deep-rooted culture of arrogant contempt has institutionalised the use of lies and corruption as routine management procedure. As a result, the activities of Shell and other oil companies constitute a human rights abuse of international significance."

The report advised Shell to assume a wider role in its host communities by taking over certain welfare responsibilities for three reasons, namely: (i) the communities are compelled to host SPDC or be visited with naked terror of the controllers of state power who have an alliance with the oil company; (ii) that this political reality of armed intimidation has always had the backing of Shell and (iii) SPDC's activities have badly affected and continue to affect the welfare of the local people.

But in its reaction Shell claimed that the " ERA note contained a number of wide-ranging and unsubstantiated allegations that were based on assumptions rather than evidence."

On the continued payment of allowances to Nigerian soldiers and the police, Shell said " the payment of field allowance to Nigerian military personnel happened only once, under duress at Korokoro in 1993".

ERA reveals that :

Korokoro is a peaceful community in Ogoniland.

The community hosts one of Shell's productive oil fields.

The Ogoni people had on January 4, 1993 declared Shell a *persona non grata* in Ogoni. That declaration was supported by over 300,000 people who openly marched in the most peaceful of manner not previously known in Nigeria, singing and dancing.

Shell in defiance of that popular ban concocted a story of " a fire" incident in one of their facility. The company indeed claimed they got a telephone message informing them about the fire but there is no telephone line in and around Korokoro or in any Ogoni village.

Acting on this "hoax", the company sent one of its fire trucks to the community. This was seen by the Korokoro youths as deliberate provocation and a violation of the views of the almost 500,000 people as expressed on January 4,1993 in Ogoni. The youths apprehended the truck and sent the driver away to report back to SPDC. The MNOC's officials claimed privately the driver was maltreated. (Despite repeated calls for proof of this allegation, the company has yet to come up with any .) The truck was later burnt

Shell took a number of steps, including informing the state governor Rufus Ada-George, a former employee of the company and the hiring of two Mitsubishi buses with which 15 armed military personnel and two SPDC employees were conveyed to Korokoro on October 25,1993. Major Paul Okuntimo, then head of the widely hated Rivers State Internal Security Task Force led the team to Korokoro ostensibly to retrieve the fire truck. Shell approved the trip as their letter to the governor showed. The company also paid a huge amount of money to the RSISTF team, comprising the army, navy, airforce, police and the state security services.

The RSISTF unleashed a reign of terror never before known in the history of the community. The invasion left one person dead and several others seriously injured. Master Uebari Nnah, a seventeen year old youth was shot dead. Papa Ndah, a 70-year old man was shot through the stomach, missing vital organs only by an inch. ERA has also been able to confirm the brutalisation of Monday Nte whose buttocks was disfigured. The 18-year old boy now limps.

No SPDC official or any other military personnel suffered injury apart from the alleged injury Shell reported about Okuntimo who was treated at the company's clinic in Port Harcourt. Okuntimo was said to have been pelted with a stone by an angry youth. The degree of violence meted out to the inhabitants of the community was deliberate and calculated. Violence on the Korokoro community was over and above any provocation, real or imagined.

NIGER DELTA ALERT

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