

# UNEP In Ogoniland Newsletter

August 2010



At the request of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is conducting a comprehensive, independent assessment of the environmental and public health impacts of oil contamination in Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria, and options for remediation. The fieldwork and laboratory analysis are ongoing. The report writing will start in November. The report will be published in early 2011.

## President commends progress

The President of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, has commended the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and key project stakeholders on their efforts to establish the pollution levels in Ogoniland in the best interests of the Ogoni people.

The President was speaking at State House, Abuja, on 30 August after receiving the Presidential Implementation Committee overseeing UNEP's environmental assessment of Ogoniland. After hearing a progress update from UNEP, President Jonathan urged the people of Ogoniland to support and cooperate with those conducting the assessment as its outcomes would help to ameliorate the negative impact of oil contamination on their environment. The President said his government was grateful for the central role of the committee chairman, Rev. Monsignor Matthew Kukah, and the Rivers State Government in supporting the UN study.

The UNEP delegation was led by its Regional Director for Africa, Mr Mounkaila Goumandakoye, who informed the committee that UNEP's study represented an unprecedented effort to examine the extent, nature and implications of oil contamination in Ogoniland.

"This is one of the largest environmental assessments ever conducted by UNEP and we're pleased it's part of a national longer-term goal to clean up contaminated sites for the benefit of local communities and for the region's sustainable development. Once finalized early next year, the report will provide a compilation of all results and present options to the government and interested parties on the most appropriate measures to clean up the area's environment," Mr Goumandakoye said.

The Minister for the Environment, the Hon. John O'Dey, and the Deputy Governor of Rivers State, His Excellency Tele Ikuru, were among the committee members attending the high level meeting



President Jonathan (centre) and members of the Presidential Implementation Committee at State House, Abuja on 30 August 2010

The highlights of UNEP's progress update to the committee were:

- The UNEP project team based in Port Harcourt is multi-disciplinary and comprises more than 100 people;
- The daily UNEP convoy into the field averages 12 vehicles and 40 people;
- The scientific fieldwork for the assessment commenced in April 2010 and is now virtually complete in Eleme, Tai and Khana where the only remaining fieldwork is to investigate new spill sites recently reported by community members;
- As of end-August, around 1,200 samples of soil, sediment, water, plant and animal tissue had been collected and are now being analysed;
- The scientific phase is due to be completed in October 2010 and the next stages will be the interpretation of the results, including laboratory analysis, and options for the proposed clean-up operation;
- Community awareness sessions in each of Ogoniland local government areas (LGAs) are ongoing;
- The final report, due to be completed in early 2011, will include a summary of the key findings and recommendations translated into the local Ogoni languages.

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## UNEP officials thank King of Ogoniland



From left-Mr. Henrik Slotte, King G.N.K. Gininwa and Mr Goumandakoye at the Palace in Korokoro Tai, Tai LGA

During a visit to Ogoniland following the Presidential Implementation Committee meeting, Mr Goumandakoye and the Chief of UNEP's Post Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, Henrik Slotte, called on His Royal Majesty King G.N.K. Gininwa, Gbenemene Tai Kingdom and Chairman of Ogoni Council of Traditional Rulers, to personally thank him for his contribution to the project.

King Giniwa, who also attended the meeting at State House, has been a long-term supporter of the objectives of UNEP's scientific study. Mr Slotte said UNEP was grateful for the major contribution of all the Ogoni traditional rulers to ensuring the successful conduct of the project.

## Focus on forestry and agriculture

The livelihoods of many Ogoni people depend on agricultural crops and forest products. Yet today, the region's livelihoods and food sources have been seriously affected by environmental degradation which has reduced crop yields, fish stocks and access to safe drinking water. UNEP's forestry and agriculture team is examining the impact of oil contamination on land (terrestrial ecosystems), focussing on plant vitality, food and forage quality, livestock health and local community perceptions of the effects on their livelihoods.

Assessment of the vitality of plants includes the most common regional crop Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*); the two major mangrove species (*Rhizophora racemosa* and *Avicennia germinans*); a shrub (*Waeba* or *Alchornea cordifolia*); a herb (*Awolowo* or *Chromolaena odorata*) and Guinea grass (*Panicum maximum*).

The plants are being sampled around major oil spills and along transects from the centre of the oil spill outwards. So far, plant samples have been taken at 29 sites.

The plant vitality data will be correlated with assessed soil data including petroleum hydrocarbons heavy metals, phenols, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, sulphur, cation exchange capacity, petroleum degrading bacteria, particle size and water infiltration rate. These results will be compared with vegetation and soil data obtained from an unaffected site (reference data). In addition, changes in vegetation health will be assessed by remote sensing. The results will be presented on a map.

Livestock health is being assessed by analysing the blood and weighing the organs of 80 goats and 80 chickens. With the involvement of RSUST, this has so far taken place with animals raised in Eleme and Tai LGAs and from a control site in neighbouring Imo State.

In addition, testing for heavy metals is involving 220 samples from four major crops (including cassava, yam, palm oil seeds and fluted pumpkin); four main dishes (including garri, fufu, goat and chicken meat, and wild snails), and three livestock forage species (including *Waeba*, Guinea grass and the nitrogen-fixing leguminous *Centrosema phaseoloides*).

The impact on people's livelihoods is being assessed via a questionnaire for interviewees and open ended questions for group discussions. This will allow assessing the perception of the locals regarding the impact of oil contamination on the land-use and will provide a deeper insight into this complex issue.



Forestry team collecting mangrove plant samples in Sugi village in Bodo, Gokana LGA

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## Remaining project timeline

- End Aug:** Sampling of water, soil and sediment due to be completed in Eleme, Tai, Khana  
**Sept-Dec:** Scientific analysis and preparation of the assessment report  
**Ongoing:** Liaison with government officials at all levels and with Ogoniland communities  
**Early 2011:** Release of UNEP's Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland report

## Setting the record straight

We are aware that recent media reports about UNEP's project have caused concern in the community and wish to clarify UNEP's position.

At the request of the Government of Nigeria, UNEP is conducting an assessment of the environmental and public health impacts of oil contamination in Ogoniland, and options for remediation. UNEP recognizes the human and environmental tragedy associated with oil contamination in Ogoniland and the fact this needs to be addressed. Determining the causes of oil spills is not part of our study and will not be covered in the report. Our fieldwork is ongoing and no report yet exists.

We appreciate the support and warm welcome UNEP's project team has received across all parts of Ogoniland, without which we could not have made significant progress with our fieldwork and so far collected 1,200 samples of water, soil, sediment, air and plant and animal tissue. The suspension of fieldwork in part of Ogoniland was temporary and we wish to reiterate UNEP's gratitude for the unerring cooperation of all LGA chairmen.

UNEP regrets that recent public statements and media coverage have caused misunderstandings in the community. Our report will be published early 2011.

*Henrik Slotte, Chief, Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, UNEP*

## Gokana stakeholders meeting

Gokana participated in a stakeholder meeting on 12 August, including chiefs, women and youth leaders and representatives of non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, local government, local businesses and UNEP.

Held at the local government headquarters in Gokana, the meeting was convened at the direction of the Secretary to the Rivers State Government, the Hon. Magnus Ngie. The Vice Chairman of Gokana LGA, the Hon Bight Kpea, reminded the audience of UNEP's mandate which had been outlined during the previous town hall meeting in Gokana in March 2010. He was relieved the scientific fieldwork was about to commence in Gokana.

UNEP confirmed that its experts are eager to continue its scientific sampling in Gokana as quickly as possible, and assured that the project team would visit all local mangroves and creeks known to be impacted by oil spills.

The Gokana Local Government Council Secretary, Mr. L Demua, emphasized the need for local communities to work with UNEP, particularly as Gokana is the only LGA yet to be assessed. He warned that any part of the LGA that was impacted and was not assessed could not therefore be included in the report, and therefore may not be included in the clean-up.

Hon. Maurice Pronen also called for widespread cooperation with the UNEP team and its outreach and scientific work. He reminded the gathering that UNEP was here to carry out an assessment of damage done to the environment by oil spills and make proper recommendations to the Federal Government, following which a cleanup exercise would follow. UNEP commenced its fieldwork in Gokana the following day.



Community leaders of Gokana LGA making contributions during the stakeholders meeting which held at the council headquarters

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## Community leaders briefed on UNEP fieldwork

During August, the scientific fieldwork was virtually completed in three of the four local government areas being studied for UNEP's major environmental assessment of oil contamination in Ogoniland. That was the good news delivered to the community and government officials attending the third Community Consultation Committee (CCC) meeting held at UNEP's project office in Port Harcourt on 5 August.

Addressing the forum, UNEP's Project Coordinator, Mr. Mike Cowing, said the collection of samples of soil, water, plant and animal tissue, sediment and air in Eleme, Tai and Khana should be completed by the end of August, after which the focus will shift to completing the sampling in the remaining Ogoniland LGA, Gokana.

Mr Cowing said UNEP experts were visiting hospitals, health centres and Ogoni communities to investigate possible links between exposure to petroleum released into the environment from oil field operations and adverse health effects as part of the UN study. In attendance were representatives from the Rivers State Ministry of Environment, Rivers State University of Science and Technology, the Gokana, Eleme, Tai and Khana LGAs, youth groups, Shell Petroleum Development Corporation, Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, Department for Petroleum Resources and the Ogoni Contact Group.

In addition, during a press briefing in Port Harcourt on 2 August, the Rivers State Government Commissioner of Information, Mrs. Ibim Semenitari, reinforced the government's desire to see the assessment of Ogoniland project succeed. The Commissioner, who is also a CCC member, stated that as a vital stakeholder in the project, the Rivers State Government wanted to see the project completed and looked forward to the clean-up of Ogoniland.

### *Did you know?*

*The Niger Delta is the third largest mangrove ecosystem in the world and a major fish breeding ground for West Africa.*

### Project key facts (as at 30 August 2010)

Number of samples (soil, water, ground water, sediments) taken	1,200
Number of community outreach meetings	84
Number of participants at outreach meetings	21,300
Number of medical records reviewed	412
Plant samples analysed	750
Ground water monitoring wells installed	109
UNEP project team (Nigerian and international staff, university, volunteers)	110

## Meet the Project Team



Thorsten showing sampling team the scientific procedure of sediment sample collection in Kwawa community, Khana LGA

### Thorsten Kallnischkies, Technical Team Leader

An international expert in contaminated land and waste management, Thorsten Kallnischkies, is leading the project's technical team. His role centres on overseeing the project's scientific phase, including the ongoing sampling of water, soil, sediment, air and plant and animal tissue.

A German geologist, Thorsten has worked on more than 200 remediation, waste disposal and demolition projects for governments, the World Bank, UN agencies and international NGOs around the world, including in Mexico and Bulgaria. He has been part of three previous environmental assessments for UNEP in Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and China.

### For more information on UNEP's Environmental Impact Assessment of Ogoniland Project

Please contact:

UNEP's Community Liaison Assistants based at each local government council:

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