

# UNEP In Ogoniland Newsletter

September 2011

## Water deliveries under way

The Rivers State Government has stepped in to provide alternative water supplies to communities in Nsisioken Ogale, in Eleme local government area, where the groundwater was found to be heavily contaminated and posing a public health risk.

According to the *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* report, the water in five of the community's wells was found to contain concerning levels of benzene, a known carcinogen.

The report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provided clear operational recommendations for addressing the widespread oil pollution across Ogoniland, but it recommended that the contamination in Nisisioken Ogale warranted emergency action ahead of all other remediation efforts.

UNEP has therefore welcomed the State Government's intervention to address this critical issue.

The Rivers State Commissioner for Water Resources and Rural Development, Mrs Patricia Hart, was quoted in media reports this month as confirming that the government had commenced daily deliveries of 100,000 litres of potable water to Nsisioken Ogale and that this service would continue until a nearby water station at Eleme had been rehabilitated.



A water tanker supplies potable water to a community in Nisioken Ogale on 15 September

## State House, Abuja, 4 August 2011



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The President of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, is presented with the *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* report by the Director of UNEP's Division for Environmental Policy Implementation, Mr Ibrahim Thiaw, in Abuja last month

Following the release of UNEP's report, hundreds of people around the world have contacted the UNEP project team to provide feedback, make enquiries and express their support for improving the well being of communities in Ogoniland. Answers to the most frequently asked questions are provided overleaf.

*Note:* The information generated by the assessment is presented in UNEP's 258-page report and in 67 separate site-specific fact sheets which amount to more than 1,000 pages.

The *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* report is now available at: [www.unep.org/nigeria](http://www.unep.org/nigeria)



At the request of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has conducted an independent assessment of the environmental and public health impacts of oil contamination in Ogoniland, Rivers State, and options for remediation. The report and data on which it is based are available at: [www.unep.org/nigeria](http://www.unep.org/nigeria)

## *Your questions answered*

The UNEP project team appreciates the strong interest in its assessment report and the important issues it addresses. We wish to thank everyone who has taken the time to contact us with their comments and enquiries.

Here are answers to the most-asked questions since the release of UNEP's report.

### *Now that UNEP has handed over its report, what will happen next?*

The Federal Government is currently considering the findings and recommendations of the UNEP report and it is ultimately up to the government to decide how it wishes to proceed with the environmental restoration of Ogoniland.

The President moved quickly in August to establish a high-level government committee to review UNEP's report and make recommendations to the Federal Government on immediate and long-term remedial actions.

The Special Committee is chaired by the Minister of Petroleum Resources, Mrs Diezani Allison-Madueke, and its vice-chairman is the Minister of Environment, Mrs Hadiza Ibrahim Mailafiya. Other members appointed to the committee include the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Mr Elder Godsdan Orubebe; the

Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Mr Mohammed Adoke; and the Director-General of the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), Mr Peter Idaboh.

Having completed its two-year environmental assessment, UNEP has concluded what it was requested by the government to conduct. However, UNEP has reaffirmed its readiness to assist the government with further steps to support the planning and implementation of a clean-up of Ogoniland, if formally requested.

### *Is the proposed Transition Phase likely to proceed, and if so, when?*

A Transition Phase is recommended to maintain momentum and enable detailed planning to begin in the period between the release of UNEP's environmental assessment and the commencement of a clean-up operation guided by an Ogoniland Environmental Restoration Authority. The government is due to decide on how it may wish to proceed.

Based on the findings and recommendations of the assessment report, UNEP has provided a follow-up note to the government outlining the key issues for consideration during the next 12 months to ensure that a full-scale restoration of the environment of Ogoniland, and the surrounding creeks, can commence in an efficient manner at the earliest possible stage.



Ogoniland community leaders attending a Community Consultation Committee briefing in Port Harcourt on 8 August



A boy in Nsisioken Ogale collects water from a new tank provided by the Rivers State Government to alleviate local public health concerns highlighted in the UNEP report

## *What has UNEP been doing since the report was released?*

Following the report handover and a press briefing in Abuja, UNEP held a subsequent media briefing in London on 5 August at which several experts involved in the study stepped journalists through more of the detail in the report.

On 8 August, UNEP convened a meeting of the project's Community Consultation Committee in Port Harcourt to provide a detailed briefing on the report to community officials and seek the reaction of the community and of local agencies.

The briefing prompted lively discussion and debate among the 45 participants, who included the chairmen of the Gokana and Tai local government areas as well as other senior community leaders and government officers. Overall the reaction was positive – in terms of the scientific evidence of the nature and extent of oil contamination now being available internationally in the report – but there was also caution expressed about managing community expectations about how soon a major clean-up might begin. The participants expressed interest in seeing UNEP's role as a neutral broker continue into the Transition Phase.

Over the past month, UNEP staff have been distributing the report edition of this newsletter (available in English and Pidgin) and posters to communities in Ogoniland.

UNEP has been maintaining contact with the Federal Government, and members of the project team have also briefed representatives of non-governmental organizations and the oil industry on aspects of the report and listened to their

views on next steps. In addition, current and former project team members and partners at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology attended a post-launch briefing in Port Harcourt.

## *Where can I get a copy of the report?*

The report is available for download from the UNEP website at: [www.unep.org/nigeria](http://www.unep.org/nigeria)

Hard copies of the report are being progressively delivered to key stakeholders in Nigeria. Copies may be collected from UNEP's offices in Geneva. If you wish to seek a copy, please send an email with your address to [ogoniland@unep.org](mailto:ogoniland@unep.org) but note that due to the large number of requests being received, UNEP is unfortunately unable to meet every request.

## *My company provides services in environmental remediation. How can we get involved in the clean-up of Ogoniland?*

Until the detailed planning of the clean-up is under way and decisions have been made about which entity or entities will manage the procurement for a range of different services, it is too early for companies to submit their credentials. Companies should visit the UNEP project website and related sites for updates and in due course are advised to monitor the Nigerian newspapers for calls for tender.

Your questions for the UNEP project team can be sent to: [ogoniland@unep.org](mailto:ogoniland@unep.org)

### **New poster**

A memorable image by photographer Mazen Saggar of an Ogoni woman wading through oil-contaminated water features on a new UNEP poster aimed at maintaining awareness of the serious environmental issues facing Ogoniland. Please see overleaf.

### **For more information on UNEP's Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland project**

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# Oil pollution doesn't have to be a fact of life



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