

UNEP In Ogoniland Newsletter

December 2010 - January 2011



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 is now completed. The laboratory analysis and report writing are ongoing. The report will be published in early 2011.

Fieldwork draws to a close

The fieldwork for the major environmental assessment of Ogoniland is now finished.

In December and January, the scientific teams working for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) collected the final samples of soil, sediment, water and plant and animal tissue. New satellite images of the Ogoni region were also obtained.

The fieldwork involved a reconnaissance phase and sampling phase and took 14 months to complete.

The reconnaissance phase involved desk study and field observations by UNEP experts and trained local recruits who surveyed Ogoniland for obvious signs of oil impacts.

In April 2010, UNEP's scientific teams began collecting samples of water, soil, sediment and air, as well as tissue from plants and animals, including aquatic life.

A range of monitoring equipment was installed. Groundwater monitoring wells were dug.

The fieldwork was varied and often intense. It included the UNEP project team collecting samples of soil, ground water and surface water, at varying depths and strategic locations in the landscape.

Students and staff from Rivers State University of Science and Technology and hundreds of local community members contributed. Chiefs, women, youth and elders throughout Ogoniland contributed by volunteering their knowledge, time and resources.

By the end of January, more than 4,000 samples had been collected and sent to various laboratories.

The remaining stages of the assessment project involve completing the laboratory analysis and presenting the findings in a report.



Professor B.B. Faka, some senior lecturers and students at the end of year gathering at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology

Project contributors farewelled

In December, with the labour-intensive stage of the assessment project winding down, UNEP bid a fond farewell to the members of its project team and its key partners whose valued roles had been completed.

At a function in Port Harcourt on 14 December, certificates of achievement were presented to 30 UNEP staff members as well as to the Vice Chancellor of the Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST), Professor B. Faka, and the many academic staff and students who had assisted on the project.

Officers of the Mobile Police Force (MOPOL) also received certificates in recognition of their contribution to the project, having provided security support to teams in the field.

Given the strong bonds which had developed between the many contributors to the project, it was an emotional farewell. Speaking at the function, UNEP's Project Coordinator, Mike Cowing, expressed the organization's deep gratitude to everyone who had contributed to the project, thanking them for their commitment and determination in the face of many challenges.

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UNEP updates Presidential Implementation Committee

The high-level committee overseeing UNEP's environmental survey met again on 8 December 2010 in Abuja.

On the agenda of the Presidential Implementation Committee was a project update from UNEP and a discussion of potential next steps for the government beyond the completion of the scientific assessment.

The meeting, held at the Federal Ministry of Environment, was chaired by Reverend Monsignor Matthew Kukah. Representing UNEP were the Chief of its Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, Henrik Slotte, and its Ogoniland Project Coordinator, Mike Cowing.

UNEP reported that its fieldwork was nearing completion, with only pockets of sampling activity remaining, along with the acquisition of additional satellite imagery. The issue of recurring vandalism of UNEP's ground water monitoring wells was also raised as it was hampering progress.

Father Kukah reiterated his desire that UNEP's assessment should lead to a major remediation effort to clean up oil pollution in Ogoniland for the benefit of the Ogoni people and the area's sustainable development.

The Nigerian Government has already publicly committed to a clean-up exercise and, together with the Rivers State Government, has initiated discussions with potential partners, including UNEP.

Lively discussion at consultative forum

The final Community Consultation Committee (CCC) meeting for 2010 was held at UNEP's project office in Port Harcourt on 7 December.

Among the 24 participants were Chief Frank Nkoba (attending on behalf of His Royal Majesty King G.N.K. Gininwa); representatives of the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency and the Rivers State Environment Ministry; and women and youth leaders from across Ogoniland.

During the meeting, the Chief of UNEP's Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, Henrik Slotte, thanked the committee members for their continuous support and advice to UNEP since the CCC first met in May.



Members of the Community Consultation Committee in a group photograph after the meeting held in December 2010

Mr Slotte confirmed that UNEP was on track to present its findings in a report in early 2011 and appealed for the committee's continued patience while the scientific analysis and subsequent report were being completed.

Dr Desmond Nbete, representing the Ogoni Contact Group, recalled that from the beginning, the Ogoni people had specified a condition that the scientific study should be followed by a clean-up. He said that it would not do the Ogonis any good to be aware of the problems without a solution.

Dr Nbete appealed to UNEP to impress upon the Nigerian authorities the need for a clean-up of oil pollution to follow seamlessly after the study.

Comrade Ngbihoro Friday, representing Tai Local Government Area, asked who would decide which organizations would be involved in the clean-up? He said it was logical that the lecturer who gave the lessons should be the same person who evaluates the performance of the students and, therefore, UNEP, having led the assessment, should be involved.

Mr Slotte assured the committee that the concerns of the Ogoni people over a clean-up operation would be taken to a meeting of the Presidential Implementation Committee the next day (*see adjacent story*).

Responding to a question on access to the report, Mr Slotte confirmed that in addition to hard copies, the report would also be placed on UNEP's website.

The CCC is next due to meet in early 2011.

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December and January actions in the field



Professor B. Fakae, Vice Chancellor of the Rivers State University of Science and Technology in a group photograph with his students that participated in the project. (Picture at end of year gathering)



Mr. Nekabari Paul Visigah of the Land Access team (LAT) receives his certificate of participation on the project in December 2010



UNEP's Jimmy Bomo Okoroh caught in action using the hand auger



Community participation during sampling has been encouraging. They show interest and support team in the field



UNEP's Eugene Oruchin-Philip collecting Sample at B-Dere, Gokana LGA in January 2011



Hands at bottle: One of the last remaining water samples taken in Kwawa, Khana LGA in January 2011

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Remaining project timeline

- Ongoing: Scientific analysis and preparation of the assessment report
- Ongoing: Liaison with government officials, traditional rulers, Ogoniland communities
- February: Launch of Green Frontiers schools programme for 2011
- Early 2011: Release of UNEP's environmental assessment of Ogoniland report

Meet the project team



Babu (with cap) discussing field protocols while sampling at Aabue Korokoro in Tai LGA

Babu Gopinathan, Officer-in-Charge, UNEP Project Office

Babu Gopinathan is working as a technical expert and Officer-in-Charge of UNEP's Ogoniland project. Since joining the team in March 2009, Babu has been leading the laboratory sample management team and coordinating the procedures, quality assurance and control, and other common areas between the different scientific areas. More recently he has taken on responsibility for the day-to-day management of the project office.

Babu holds a PhD in Environmental Chemistry from Mahatma Gandhi University in his native India. He also holds degrees in chemical engineering, including a Masters Degree in Applied Organic Chemistry.

He has more than 20 years experience in environmental management, specializing in waste management, industrial pollution control, waste water treatment and reuse, and the design and commissioning of sewage treatment and biogas plants. His experience also includes environmental analysis, analytical technologies and laboratory management.



A vocal supporter of the objectives of UNEP's environmental survey, His Royal Majesty King G.N.K. Gininwa is the Chairman of the Ogoni Council of Traditional Rulers

Did you know?

Ogoniland has four local government areas - Eleme, Tai, Gokana and Khana - each with distinct traditional institutional structures, language and cultural aspects.

Have you visited the project website?



Background information and project updates, including the UNEP in Ogoniland newsletter, are available on the UNEP website.

This is also where UNEP's environmental survey of Ogoniland report will be available to everyone, once it is finalized and published.

Go to the UNEP homepage at www.unep.org type 'Nigeria' into the search box on the top right-hand side, and then follow the link.

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

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