

# History of the Conflict and Environmental Pollution in Ogoni Land

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## Abstract

*This essay evaluated Ogoni land's environmental degradation and strife. Today's world is shifting from being anthropocentric to being biocentric, which promotes biodiversity. Even with increased understanding of the importance of biodiversity, third-world countries continue to face grave circumstances, especially those that are home to multinational corporations such as Nigeria. The Ogoni Community, which is situated in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, is one such community. The study used secondary data that was subjected to content analysis as part of its methodology. The study emphasized how the development driven by oil resulted in environmental injustice because the multinational corporations in charge of the region's oil exploitation were unable to implement best practices in their operations due to strong opposition from the Ogoni people, which sparked disputes. The research suggested, among other things, that the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project make sure the Ogoni cleanup and remediation operations presently underway are completed in accordance with the United Nations Environmental Project's suggestion. The Nigerian government ought to be dedicated to handling the Ogoni land issue and give greater thought to organizing and carrying out initiatives that directly affect the populace. As a result, the federal, state, and local governments should be in charge of building infrastructure, including roads, buildings for schools, hospitals, and homes, as well as clean water and power. Since genuine progress requires peace and quiet, the Ogoni people are exhorted to embrace peace and reject ideologies that oppose peaceful coexistence. The Nigerian government ought to demonstrate unwavering dedication to addressing the conflict in Ogoni land while prioritizing the meticulous planning and effective execution of initiatives directly benefiting the populace.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, environment, environmental pollution, impact, justice, Ogoni

## INTRODUCTION

The environment is man, and man is the environment. Human survival is guaranteed by the environment, which serves as a natural home for humans [1]. Environmental resources have historically been a good measure of the prosperity of people who can use them. Despite this, in recent years, there have been significant global issues related to environmental degradation and climate change. They are now the main source of conflict, particularly in developing nations where

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multinational firms are based. It seems that the majority of African nations have not made effective use of their natural resources, including the environment. Instead, there is severe environmental inequality and pollution, which leads to discontent and insecurity.

The Niger Delta region, which produces the majority of Nigeria's resources amid a high concentration of petroleum and oil production activities, is heavily dependent on crude oil. Environmental degradation in the region is

common, leading to health issues, loss of livelihood, and restlessness among young people. There is a severe example of environmental degradation in Ogoni territory as a result of deforestation, natural gas flaring, and oil spills [2].

Ogoni land now occupies a nearly permanent position in the press and public consciousness due to conflicts, political unrest, and livelihood issues. The region's high rate of conflict has drawn significant and ongoing attention. Concern regarding the motivational underpinnings of disputes is indicated by controversy. Some argue that the confrontations are a justifiable response by local people trying to protect their way of life and environment [3–6]. Some view the confrontations as little more than a localized effort to get access to the State's network of patronage or distribution [7].

People are more aware than ever of the need to preserve their ecosystems, which is why conflict and security studies have expanded recently to address concerns brought up by industrialization's detrimental effects on the environment and ecosystem. Therefore, there is a demand for environmental ethics, biodiversity, and the acceptance of the Gaia principle. Thus, this study looked into Ogoni land's environmental contamination and conflict [8].

### **THE Ogoni STRUGGLE**

The Ogoni dispute began in 1958 when Shell began to drill 96 wells to bring nine oil fields online and begin the process of extracting oil from the region. The Ogoni conflict began in 1970 when Ogoni elders presented a petition against Shell to the military ruler of the area. The petition claimed that the firm was gravely endangering the Ogoni people's health and potentially their lives. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was founded in 1990 as a result of the ignorance that seemed to have gone unnoticed for decades following the complaint filed in 1970. As a nationwide organization, MOSOP coordinated a campaign against the Nigerian government and international companies on behalf of the Ogoni people. Numerous requests were made by MOSOP, which were enumerated in the Ogoni Bill of Rights and submitted to the Nigerian government with an appeal to the international community. Political autonomy to engage independently as a unit from the Nigerian State is one of the demands. According to Itulua et al. [9], further claims in the Bill of Rights include (a) the right to manage and utilize a reasonable amount of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development and (b) the right to prevent further destruction of the Ogoni ecosystem and ecology. Additionally, MOSOP made its demands known to Shell, Chevron, and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the oil firms that operate in Ogoni area.

On that day, Ogoni Day was observed, and MOSOP vowed to oppose injustice by nonviolent means. In response, the federal government issued a decree that declared the demand for minority autonomy to be treasonous and capital punishment [10]. The Ogonis were subjected to military persecution that resulted in numerous deaths and village devastation. Saro-Wiwa and eight other people were detained and given death sentences in 1994 for their roles in the assassination of the four traditional Ogoni elders. International outrage of their execution led to Nigeria's three-year exile from the Commonwealth (UNPO, 2017). The Ogoni issue was once again attempted to be resolved after Nigeria was placed back under civil rule in 1999. Resuming talks with the Ogonis was mandated by the federal government's Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC, the Oputa Panel) in 2000 (International Crisis Group, 2008). This, however, was unsuccessful since Shell's insistence that it had nothing to do with their problems upset the Ogonis.

To oversee a fresh reconciliation process, President Olusegun Obasanjo named Reverend Father Matthew Hassan Kukah, a well-respected clergyman, in May 2005. MOSOP brought in Kredha (International Peace Council for States, Peoples, and Minorities), while Shell invited the International Centre for Reconciliation (Coventry Cathedral). But the procedure eventually ran into problems. The first was caused by discrepancies in the suggested agendas. The International Crisis Group claims that the Ogonis requested discussions to address the following issues, among others:

- Environmental degradation and rehabilitation, including implementation of UN recommendations for an environmental audit of Ogoni land;
- Apology for past injury;
- Political marginalization and greater Ogoni control over their affairs;
- Economic issues, including the share and allocation of oil revenues;
- Compensation of victims of human rights abuses, including implementation of the same set of UN recommendations;
- Human resource development, including jobs, scholarships, and training; and
- Sustainable development, including improved electricity and water supplies, roads and telecommunications, and implementation of the UN recommendations for a development audit.

On their part, Shell came up with a proposal limited to the following:

- Environmental study of Ogoni land by a reputable independent organization acceptable to both parties;
- Shell Petroleum Development Company inspection of its facilities to make them safe and prevent future environmental and safety accidents;
- Assessment of past community projects and undertaking of new, sustainable community development projects;
- Regular inspection of SPDC facilities for safety and environmental purposes; and the future of SPDC operations in Ogoni land [11].

Shell's agenda seems too limited to the Ogonis. The second barrier to the mediation was how the Ogoni situation was framed [11]. Kukah was designated to settle what the government believed to be a dispute between Shell and the Ogoni. On the other hand, the Ogoni argued that their complaints were directed against both Shell and the federal government, who they saw as Shell's ally in the fight. At the Federal Republic of Nigeria's request, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) carried out an impartial evaluation of the effects of oil contamination in Ogoni land in 2009 in an effort to change the Ogoni conflict.

In August 2011, the Federal Government of Nigeria received the report that was the result of the UN environmental assessment of Ogoni territory. The report's conclusions highlight the fact that there are, in a considerable number of places, grave risks to public health, ranging from tainted drinking water to worries about the health and productivity of ecosystems. In addition, pollution may have permeated deeper and farther than many had previously thought [12]. The UNEP report also restates that the Ogoni people's suffering will only be made worse and needlessly prolonged if urgent public health concerns are not addressed and a cleanup effort is not started, given the dynamic nature of oil pollution and the level of contamination found in UNEP's study. On June 25, 2009, Musa Yar'Adua, the Nigerian president at the time, took one of the most audacious moves toward establishing peace in Ogoni land by offering the insurgents operating there complete amnesty. Because the insurgents, who were made up of young militants, were fighting the Nigerian government and the Nigerian security services were carrying out counterinsurgency operations to safeguard the region's oil wealth, the area had been a hotbed of low-intensity violence and warfare. Still, not much has been accomplished in the nearly four years after the Federal Government announced the well-publicized Ogoni cleanup. This implies that institutional concerns and the actions that need to be taken to carry out the exercise have been muted by constant political posturing. The Ogoni people's state of underdevelopment and the result of poverty (constant conflict) are only made worse by the Nigerian government's incapacity to implement legislation that would safeguard the environment and encourage the prosperity of its population. This emphasizes the main points of the study, which looks at environmental conflicts and development in Rivers State from 1990 to 2010, with a focus on the Ogoni conflict.

### **Environmental Pollution in Ogoni Land**

Okumagba [13] notes that Ogoni territory shares many characteristics with other communities in Rivers State, including uneven topography, lots of streams, shallow brackish water bodies, and a

range of flora types, including swamp woods. These characteristics are typical of deltaic environments. Although the Ogoni Community is endowed with black gold, between 1976 and 1991, 2,976 distinct oil accidents resulted in the pollution of nearly two million barrels of oil (Friends of the Earth International, 2019). Even though Ogoni territory is experiencing a decline in oil production, the pipes built by the multinational oil companies operating there continue to cross the land, creeks, and waterways. Due to leaks from dilapidated pipelines and continued sabotage by artisanal oil refiners in the community, Ogoni land is still vulnerable to oil spills. Unfortunately, most developing countries' exploitation of natural resources has not been done according to best practices, which has resulted in a multitude of disputes. In fact, the biggest worry with regard to oil and gas operations is the possibility of disastrous oil spills that cause severe contamination of the land, air, and water.

Pollution of the water and soil is a result of these compounds being released into the environment by mining operations. Okumagba EO [13] points out that hydrocarbons can have an impact on aquatic life-support systems through their ability to obstruct oxygen transmission in the water column, leading to both physical and chemical impacts. This has a disastrous effect on the health of plants and animals as well as the vegetation and breathing [14].

The Ogoni environment is severely polluted, exceeding earlier estimates, and poses serious health hazards, according to a 2011 environmental study conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Ogoniland. Ogoni's indigenous population and locals are always at risk of exposure to harmful chemicals in everything from the air they breathe to the water they drink or bathe in. This is the result of the area's illicit refining activities and the abandoned machinery that is still leaking oil. Because of the hydrocarbons in the soil, even crops that survive the harshest conditions are probably contaminated by the crude.

### **Environmental Pollution and Conflict in the Ogoni Land**

Competition for finite environmental resources, conflicting attitudes and beliefs as well as institutional factors activate and impair environmental conflicts. There was a notion following World War II that states endowed with natural resources would experience socio-political and economic growth as a result of their wealth. However, resource reliance, particularly in developing nations, is detrimental to growth and a spark for conflict rather than promoting development [1, 2, 5]. When it comes to democracy and development, the majority of states with abundant natural resources have underperformed compared to those without such endowments. The "resource curse" affects the majority of developing nations that depend on natural resources; symptoms include low income and living standards, poor economic growth and shock susceptibility, poverty and inequality, corruption, bad governance, and civil conflict [15]. The majority of these nations, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa, have not witnessed the advancements related to resource endowment. Violent conflicts have been a scourge hindering the growth of resource-rich states, in addition to pervasive corruption and their incapacity to provide basic infrastructure. In this regard, since the late 1980s, a number of studies have linked the availability of natural resources to certain socioeconomic issues, which ultimately result in environmental injustice as opposed to justice. Natural resource availability has been linked to declining growth, rising inequality, and pervasive poverty [16–18].

Numerous hypotheses exist regarding the pathways that lead to conflict. The connection between violent conflict and environmental deterioration is also extensively covered in literature, despite the fact that this school of thinking is relatively recent. Thomas Homer-Dixon is a well-known researcher on the topic. He has created a theory that includes a causal relationship between domestic armed conflict and the depletion of renewable resources. Reduced agricultural productivity, a downturn in the economy, population displacement, and a disturbance of established institutions and social relationships are the four social consequences that Homer-Dixon lists as a result [19].

Ogoni territory has a history of environmental problems due to its diverse population, including ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups, and its geographical location. As mentioned by Auty [20]:

One characteristic of the economic history of the Niger Delta has been a conflict over the distribution and control of resources. Over the past 50 years, the emergence of oil corporations in Ogoni country has not only changed the character and dynamics of environmental conflicts in the area, but it has also made them worse in ways that have eluded a long-term resolution.

According to some arguments [21], the development of oil and gas has exacerbated violence in the Ogoni region and raised environmental concerns. These issues are closely related to the politics surrounding resource ownership, appropriation, and use. Put another way, disputes over the environment that produces oil are closely related to the social dynamics that support the search and extraction of gas and oil in this unstable area.

The first level of environmental conflict is between oil companies and the communities that produce the oil. It is centered on issues such as corporate negligence, environmental degradation, disruption of social and economic life, lack of development projects, and human rights violations, among other things. A report commissioned by Shell claims that recruiting, contracting, compensation for oil spills, and land acquisition are all areas of Shell's and other oil corporations' strategies that have the potential to "feed into, or even create conflict." For example, the Nigerian National Petroleum business (NNPC), a state-owned petroleum business, estimates that 2,300 cubic meters of oil are leaked into the environment each year, with an average of 300 spills every year [18]. According to the 2006 UNDP Niger Delta Development Report, there were around 6,800 oil spills in the region between 1976 and 2001, resulting in the loss of almost 3 million barrels of oil. These figures are supported by a research from Amnesty International that states that over a 50 year period, from 1960 to 2010, oil spills in the Niger Delta equivalent to the Exxon Valdez occurred annually in the oil-producing areas [1–4]. Nine million to thirteen million barrels have leaked throughout that time, according to the report [19]. The extent of oil spilled in the area and the veracity of the data in this regard are highlighted in a more recent study released by the Ministry of Environment. Between 2006 and 2010, Nigeria documented 3,203 occurrences of oil spills, according to Mr. John Odey, the country's then-environment minister. According to the minister, 45 percent of the documented cases of oil spills were attributable to sabotage or vandalism, while 23 percent of the occurrences were caused by equipment failure, operational/maintenance errors, and corrosion [22].

The information above makes it abundantly evident that there are frequent oil spills in the Ogoni zone, and that many of these incidents go unreported. Although residents of the area disagree, oil firms believe that most spills are caused by sabotage carried out by oil thieves and other criminal gangs rather than equipment breakdown [1–5]. Given the age and rustiness of many of the pipes, it would seem prudent for oil companies operating in the area, such as Shell, to assert that sabotage is the primary cause of their oil spills. This would legally release them from any responsibility to compensate harmed parties or affected communities. Some of these vandalism incidents, according to critics, have been known to be committed with the cooperation of employees of oil companies. Critics have also pointed out that the Nigerian government's perception of the companies that produce the majority of the nation's wealth and the lack of strict implementation of laws in the country make it harder to regulate or even censure these companies. Furthermore, it has been noted that state regulatory organizations tasked with overseeing the oil corporations, such the Directorate of Petroleum Resources (DPR), have been forced to depend on the tools and infrastructure of the oil companies for their own monitoring operations. In addition to oil spills, one of the main causes of contention between Ogoni communities and the oil firms that operate in their region is gas flaring. Up to 2.5 billion cubic feet of gas are thought to be flared annually in the Niger Delta by the Nigerian government and oil multinational companies.

When examining the Ogoni case, it is appropriate to note that the Ogoni conflict resulted from the SPDC and its affiliates' failure to handle oil exploration and exploitation in Ogoni land according to best practices, which led to a multitude of conflicts in the area. The fundamental issue here is

environmental injustice. Environmental justice refers to treating locals fairly and involving them in the administration and execution of environmental initiatives, laws, rules, and policies—regardless of their poverty, education, or race, to name a few [23].

## CONCLUSION

It has been established that environmental injustice and oil-led development have an impact on the Ogoni conflict. The ripple effect was retarded development associated with the conflicts experienced in the area. Since environmental conflict was the root cause of the Ogoni conflict, the clean-up of Ogoni land will lay the foundation for the de-escalation of the multifarious conflicts in the area. Towards achieving peace, the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project should ensure that the Ogoni clean-up and remediation activities currently embarked upon should be concluded in line with the recommendation of the United Nations Environmental Project.

The Nigerian government should be committed to managing the conflict in Ogoni land and be more concerned with the planning and implementation of projects that have a direct bearing on the people. Consequently, infrastructural projects like good water, electricity, roads, schools, hospitals, and housing projects should be built by the Federal, State, and Local Governments.

Peace and tranquillity are essential for meaningful development; consequently, the Ogoni people are advised to embrace peace and shun tendencies that negate peaceful coexistence.

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