



Conflict Factsheet

Livelihood Conflicts in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

Type of conflict Main	Intensity 4
Conflict Locality Western Africa	Time 1990– 2015
Countries Nigeria	Resources Fish, Biodiversity, Air (Pollution), Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water, Ecosystem Stability, Resilience of the environment

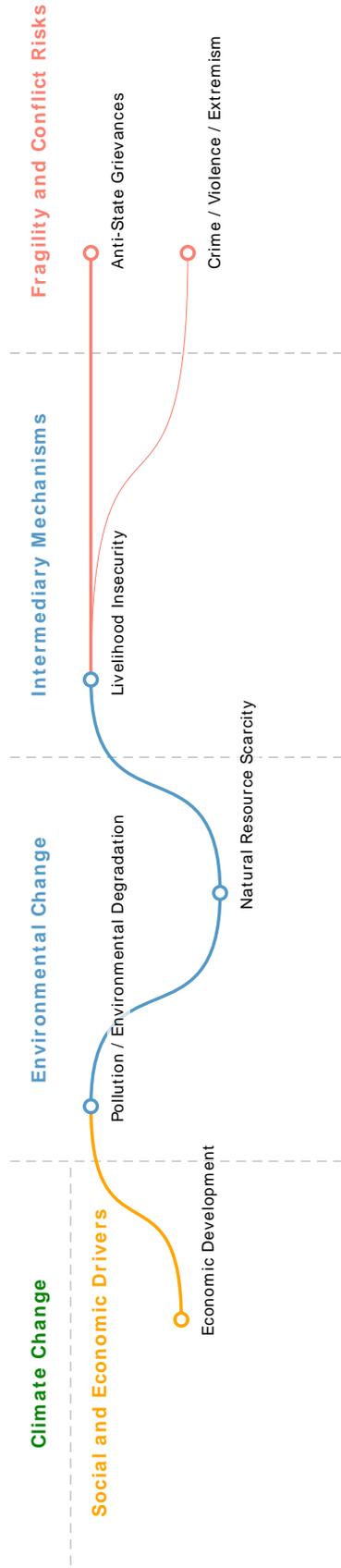


Conflict Summary

Since the 1950s and the discovery of oil on the Ogoni territory in Niger Delta, oil-exploitation activities have been conducted at the expense of the population and of the environment.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Fish, Biodiversity, Air (Pollution), Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water, Ecosystem Stability, Resilience of the environment





Conflict History

Following the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in Nigeria in the 1950s, the Nigerian Government in partnership with Shell rapidly expanded its oil-exploitation activities at the expense of the numerous local ethnic minorities, including the Ogonis – the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta – and their environment. The conflict escalated in the 1990s when the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) started demonstrations to protest against the destruction of the environment by Shell activities. The unrest of the population, which caught the attention of the international community, led Shell to stop its activities on Ogoniland in 1993. Still, today pipelines continue to cross the land, regularly causing oil spills and polluting the water bodies. After approximately 2000 conflict deaths and 30000 displaced persons since 1993, international organisations have taken the lead and continue to push Shell and the Nigerian Government to take actions to restore Ogonis' livelihood.

Discovery of oil in the Niger Delta

The Ogonis, who have lived in the Niger Delta for hundreds of years, depend on the delta's rich natural resources to sustain their livelihood and the river forms an important part of their religious life (Nnadozie, 1996). Following the discovery of oil in the delta, Shell – in partnership with the Nigerian Government –, accelerated its activities without conducting any preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment (ICE, 1997). Due to repeated leakages and ruptures of the oil pipelines, gas flaring, seismic activities and use of chemicals, the installations and the activities of Shell led to a wide pollution of the soils, air and water bodies and significantly affected the fauna and the flora of the region (Collins et al., 2008).

Protests against environmental degradation

As the degradation of their means of subsistence worsened whilst none of the exploitation revenues were redistributed to the Ogonis (ICE, 1997), the MOSOP, under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa started peaceful demonstrations in 1990 to protest against the degradation of the environment and demand more regional autonomy (Obi, 2009). However, the economic impact of oil in the Nigerian economy was an incentive for the government to turn a blind eye on Shell's polluting activities and enable it to bypass the existing Nigerian environmental regulations (CETIM, 2014).

Fearing a snow-ball effect of Ogonis' claims on neighbouring communities, the federal forces harassed and killed Ogonis for organising protests and threatening to sabotage oil installations (ICE, 1997). To contain the Ogoni upheaval, the government was also suspected to have fomented inter-ethnic violence with the neighbouring Andonis (Ibid.). The conflict reached a peak in 1993 when Shell stopped its activities on Ogoniland following a protest which gathered 300,000 Ogonis (Ibid.). The violence and the killings operated by the military were denounced internationally by organisations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International. In fact, between 1993 and 1999 – the end of the military rule in Nigeria –, reports indicate that more than 2,000 Ogonis were killed, that 37 villages were destroyed and that 30,000 Ogonis were displaced (Nnadozie, 1996). MOSOP's leader Saro-Wiwa was killed in 1995.

A continuous fight to get reparations for environmental damages

Despite the death of MOSOP's leader, the Ogonis have continued seeking reparation for Shell's environmental damages. The election of Obasanjo as president of Nigeria, which led to the conduct of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)



was a turning point. Nevertheless, both the government and Shell are yet to engage in the clean-up recommendations they committed to (Vidal, 2015). The climate of distrust towards Shell and the government has been exacerbated by the fact that the destruction of the livelihoods of many Ogoni fishermen or farmers has led many of them to engage in criminal activities, such as kidnappings, ransoming of employees (Obi, 2009) or sabotage of pipelines and oil theft (Vidal, 2015).

Resolution Efforts

Environmental Impact Assessment and measures taken

After assessing the UNEP's EIA, the Nigerian Government and Shell committed to follow UNEP's recommendations. The government set up the Hydrocarbon Pollution Restoration Project (HYPREP) to implement the environmental clean-up in Ogoniland and conduct EIAs in other parts of Nigeria impacted by oil contamination (UNEP, 2011). Three years after the finalisation of the EIA, no actions have been taken by the HYPREP (EJA, 2014) and several organisations such as Amnesty International have taken the lead of the resigned population to denounce the inaction of both the Nigerian Government and Shell (New African, 2012).

Communities turn to UK courts to seek reparation

Facing the lack of action of the government and Shell and the incapacity of the Nigerian Judiciary to help them in their fight against Shell, another ethnic group in Niger Delta – the Gokanas – turned to UK courts to seek reparations. In January 2015, the company was sentenced by a UK court to pay £55 million to a Niger Delta community following major oil spills on Gokana territory (Vidal, 2015) (see [Niger Delta, Nigeria: Shell's pollution punished](#)). This turning point, which further increased the international pressure against Shell, might mark acceleration in the conflict resolution (Ibid.).

Measures for conflict resolution

According to reports and studies on the conflict, a certain number of measures are necessary to solve what has become an "intractable" conflict (UNEP, 2011). First, implementing environmental legislation requires more funding and technical experts (Collins et al., 2008) as well as the creation of regional spill responses in Ogoniland (UNEP, 2011). Second, to ensure that Shell complies with the Nigerian regulations in terms of gas flaring, binding international mechanisms to prohibit gas flaring should be set up (CETIM, 2014). Last but not least, an essential aspect of conflict resolution pointed out is the importance to involve the Ogoni population in the process and to build the capacity of local governments, what the Nigerian Government failed to do as no Ogoni representative was included in the HYPREP.

However, the report of the Centre for Environment Human Rights and Development pointed out some weaknesses in the conflict resolution methods in that these recommendations oversee some human rights aspects, such as the economic compensation for the damage caused, the political control of Ogoni Affairs by Ogonis as well as the right to use fair proportion of economic resources for the development of the region (UNPO, 2015). On top of this, including win-win solutions such as to use the gas from flaring to



produce electricity in villages or to use industry wastes for the petrochemical industry could increase the likelihood of conflict resolution ([ICE, 1997](#)).

These measures, under the supervision of the international community, seem indispensable to engage in clean-up procedures in a sustainable way and to restore trust between the parties after decades of conflict. Efforts to restore the land of the Ogonis seem to be an essential condition to bring the conflict to an end. Finally, it appears urgent to avoid any further delays in starting the clean-up operations. In fact, Sea-level rise due to climate change predicted by scientists would only increase erosion and floods ([CREDC, 2007](#)), therefore intensifying the pressure on the population and potentially leading to other conflicts over resources.

To conclude, although the Ogoni population in the Niger Delta has been protesting since the 1990s to obtain reparations from Shell for the degradation of their environment, the company has been continuing its activities with the impunity of the Nigerian authorities. Although international organisations conducted reports, which highlighted the emergency of the situation and despite commitments made by both Shell and the Nigerian Government to engage in clean-up operations, nothing has been done yet. As several impediments have until now prevented the population to obtain reparations through the Nigerian legal system, some ethnic groups turned to UK courts. This could be a major turning point, which could put an end to decades of pollution for which Shell never assumed its responsibility.



Intensities & Influences

1 2 3 4



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity



Human Suffering

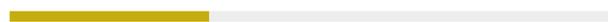


INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

Regional



Mass displacement

Less than 100.000 and less than 10% of the country's population are displaced within the country.



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



Resolution Success

Reduction in Violence

Violence reduced significantly, but did not cede.



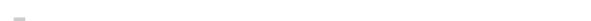
Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.



Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.



Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.



Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly ignored.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.





Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration 3

The Gokana ethnic group brought a case against Shell in front of UK courts demanding reparations following major oil spills on Gokana territory. The court ruled in favor of the Niger Delta community, and sentenced the company to pay £55 million.

Social inclusion & empowerment 0

The involvement of the Ogoni people in conflict resolution processes is crucial.

Improving state capacity & legitimacy 0

Funding and technical expertise is needed in order to implement environmental legislation. Furthermore, binding international mechanisms to prohibit gas flaring should be set up to ensure that Shell complies with Nigerian regulations.

Environmental restoration & protection 1

The Hydrocarbon Pollution Restoration Project (HYPREP) was implemented by the Nigerian Government to lead the environmental clean-up in Ogoniland and conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) in other parts of Nigeria impacted by oil contamination. However, no concrete actions have been taken.

Resources and Materials

Conflict References

[Niger Delta, Nigeria: Shell's Pollution](#)

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Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/livelihood-conflicts-niger-delta-nigeria>