



Gender Dynamics and Environmental Management in Ogoniland: A Study of the Ogoni Clean-up by the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP)

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ABSTRACT

The primary challenges regarding human interaction with the natural environment stem from attitudes towards environmental preservation, resource availability, pollution, concerns about global poverty, and issues of overpopulation leading to resource depletion. While some environmental issues are inherent and beyond human control, many can be mitigated or exacerbated by human activities. This paper aims to investigate the impact of gender dynamics on environmental management in Ogoniland through the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP). It examines how these approaches affect environmental justice and women's livelihoods, hindering their ability to contribute effectively to sustainable environmental management. Despite modernization influencing certain aspects of Ogoni society and its political economy, entrenched political systems, social structures, and gender dynamics persist, limiting basic environmental, economic, and societal rights. This conclusion is drawn from empirical studies on HYPREP's cleanup efforts in Ogoniland and an analysis of existing literature. A significant recommendation is the dismantling of cultural norms and political systems that hinder women's involvement in environmental management, advocating for the empowerment of women and their active participation in environmental initiatives.

Keywords: Environment, Ogoniland, Gender Dynamics, Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP).

1. INTRODUCTION

The term Ogoni is used in two senses. In one, it refers to a group of people or nationality made up of the six ancient (pre-colonial) kingdoms of Nyo-Khana, Ken-Khana, Babbe, Gokana, Tai, and Eleme. The first three kingdoms are in Khana Local Government Area (LGA), while the fourth, fifth, and sixth are in Gokana, Tai, and Eleme LGAs, respectively. Thus, Ogoni spreads across four LGAs, which cover some 1,000 km² of land mass located in the south-eastern strip of the Niger Delta basin. It has a population of nearly one million people (UNEP 2011). In the second sense, Ogoni refers to the stretch of land area, or landmass, with its offshore borders that constitutes the homeland of the Ogoni people. This sense of it is also, and more often, referred to as Ogoniland.

Ogoniland is part of the Niger Delta region. Historically and cartographically, the Niger Delta originally consisted of the present Bayelsa, Delta, and

Rivers States of Nigeria. However, in the year 2000, the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Olusegun Obasanjo included six additional states, namely Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo, and Ondo States. These nine states presently constitute the Niger Delta as officially defined by the Federal Government of Nigeria. It spans over about 70,000 sq. km. (27 square miles) and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. With the exception of Cross River State, all the other states of the Niger Delta are oil-producing states.

The physical environment of Ogoni consists of cultivable land with rainforest vegetation as well as mangroves, swamps, and rivers and their associated fauna and flora. The region, like many other parts of the Niger Delta, was a major producer of palm oil and other agricultural produce during the pre-colonial, colonial, and early postcolonial periods, until some years after 1958, when commercial production of

petroleum commenced in the area. As rightly noted in the *UNEP Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (2011), Ogoniland is “characterized by typically deltaic features: uneven terrain, numerous creeks, shallow brackish water bodies, and a variety of vegetation types, including swamp forest” (p. 30). The Ogoni are a culturally distinct and, until the ‘divide-and-rule’ strategies of control that came with oil politics, a socially cohesive people. They have lived in the Niger Delta for hundreds of years in close-knit rural communities, their livelihoods based on agriculture and fishing. The total population of the four LGAs of Ogoni was 831,726 in 2006 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2006; UNEP, 2011, p. 30), and the current projected population is over two million (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogoni_people).

The history of Ogoni is intricately intertwined with that of oil exploration and extraction and their attendant environmental, social, and economic impacts, including oil spillage and gas emissions and explosions, poverty and livelihood crises, health issues, an upsurge in violent crimes exacerbated by poverty, and social and political upheavals triggered directly or indirectly by the misgovernment of the extractive sector, among others. Ogoniland has been massively devastated, and, as the famous writer and environmental rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, rightly asserted,

The Ogoni’s great misfortune is that their homeland happens to lie above a significant portion of Nigeria’s oil reserves. Since the mid 1950s, Ogoniland has been devastated by the industrial pollution caused by the extraction of oil. What was once a placid rural community of prosperous farmers and fishermen (and women) is now an ecological waste land reeking of sulphur, its creeks and water holes poisoned by indiscriminate oil spillage and ghoulishly lit at night by the orange flames of gas flares (Saro-Wiwa 1995, p. x, parenthesis mine).

Oil was first struck and produced in Ogoniland, precisely in K. Dere community (Bomu oilfield), in 1958 (Saro-Wiwa 1995, 67). The discovery and production of oil in Ogoniland has been more of a “curse” than blessing. Saro-Wiwa, in his detention memoir, *A Month and a Day* (1995), spoke about “oil and the sorrows it had brought on those whose land it is found, of the social inequities in the country, of

oppression and all such.” (p. 5). The “sorrows” that oil brought to Ogoniland are multifaceted. Not only has it caused colossal environmental degradation and the other odds mentioned in the preceding paragraph, but it has also altered political culture, the economy, and social consciousness adversely. That can, however, be said to be a pervasive feature of virtually all states and societies that are either completely or nearly completely dependent on rents from extractive resources. As argued by Karl, “Commodity-led growth induces changes in prevailing notions of property rights, the relative power of interest groups and organizations, and the role and character of the state vis-à-vis the market (1997, p. 7).

Traditional Ogoni society was predominantly patriarchal in structure and organisation, and still remains largely so till date, although to a comparatively lesser degree. Patriarchy creates social, political, and economic disadvantages for women and girls, especially in terms of access to education, wealth and in political relevance. The majority of them are peasant farmers and fisherwomen. Their place in the occupational equation and power calculus tends to make them even more susceptible to the impacts of environmental degradation. This explains the deplorable social and economic conditions of women in Ogoniland as a result of the massive pollution and degradation of their environment.

With all the woes that oil has inflicted on the land and people of Ogoniland, without any benefits that could rightly be regarded as just and commensurate, Ogoni people resorted to non-violent direct action (NDA) against the duo of the international oil giant, Shell, and the Nigerian state. They organised themselves into a mass movement called the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni (MOSOP) in 1990 under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, (Saro-Wiwa, 1995, p. 26). MOSOP began as organ of KAGOTE, which was an umbrella organisation of Ogoni leaders across the four LGAs of Kana (Khana), Gokana, Tai and Eleme. While KAGOTE was conservative, MOSOP was ideologically leftist. On January 4, 1993, Ogoni people embarked on the mammoth protest march which signalled the commencement of their non-violent resistance to their denigration as a people by the Nigerian State and Shell (1995, p. 13). MOSOP also submitted the *Ogoni Bill of Rights* (OBR) to the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1990 (Saro-Wiwa 1995, 66). With regards to the environment, paragraphs 15 and 16 of the OBR state:

15. That the search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages in Ogoni, one of the most densely populated areas of Africa (average 1,500 per square miles, national average 300 per square mile).

16. The neglectful environmental pollution laws and substandard inspection techniques of the Federal authorities have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment, turning our homeland into an ecological disaster (Saro-Wiwa 1995, p. 68).

It is pertinent to note that the scale of environmental degradation and the population density in Ogoni have now quadrupled the scale in 1995. The *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (2011) revealed that "oil contamination in Ogoniland is widespread and severely impacting many components of the environment" (9) and that the members of Nsisioken Ogale community are drinking water from wells that are contaminated with benzene at levels that are over 900 times above the World Health Organization (WHO) guideline (11).

Despite series of conspiratorial repressive actions by Shell and the Federal Government of Nigeria to clamp down on MOSOP's resistance and campaign against environmental degradation, economic strangulation and political marginalisation, the movement became all the more resilient and unyielding, so much so that they received widespread local solidarity (especially within the Niger Delta), national attention and international support from reputable organisations such as International PEN, Amnesty International, Green Peace, the United Nations (UN), among others.

A watershed in the Ogoni's struggle for environmental justice was the Nigerian government's commissioning of an environmental assessment of Ogoniland by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2010, which was concluded in 2011. The methodology, findings and recommendations of the study were published in the *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (2011), by the UNEP. Among the recommendations of the study for Federal Government were the establishment of an 'Ogoniland Environmental Restoration Authority,' a Centre of Excellence for Environmental Restoration in Ogoniland, and an 'Environmental Restoration Fund for Ogoniland' with initial capital of USD1 billion (224-

226). The Fund is supposed to be provided on counterpart funding basis between Shell and the Federal Government of Nigeria. In response to the recommendations of the UNEP Report, the Federal Government established HYPREP as a special intervention agency to address hydrocarbon pollution remediation and environmental restoration, livelihood and other related critical issues in Ogoniland and other impacted areas.

The cardinal aim of this study is to analyse the impact of gender dynamics on the clean-up and environmental management in Ogoniland by HYPREP. Specifically, this study sets out to:

1. examine the cultural and socio-economic status and role of women within the power equation and traditional occupation within the Ogoni society;
2. examines the socio-economic impact of ecological degradation on the local population, with particular focus on the women;
3. examine the core mandates of HYPREP with a view to determining their propriety or otherwise against the backdrop of the prevailing socio-economic condition of the people;
4. determine the adequacy and suitability or otherwise of the measures and approaches of HYPREP in the implementation of its core mandates; and,
5. draw relevant inferences and make appropriate recommendations for a more robust approach to productive and sustainable environmental management.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative and descriptive design involving an ethnographic survey in the four LGAs of Ogoni, namely Khana, Gokana, Tai and Eleme as a key source of data. The survey involved the use of interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) in obtaining relevant information from a purposively sampled population across the four LGAs. Individual interviews were conducted with women across different age brackets and social strata, including local farmers, civil servants and women leaders. Some staff and clients of HYPREP and various categories of community leaders from across the various communities in the LGAs were also interviewed.

The research team visited some oil-impacted communities across the four LGAs. Seven (7) communities were visited in Khana, namely Wiiyaakara, Okwale, Lueku, Kpean, Nyorkuru, Gwara

and Zaakpon and interviewed twelve (12) people, including nine (9) women who were within the ages of 25 – 65, a Youth Leader and two (2) men. The two men were elites who have been actively involved in community interfaces between the communities and HYPREP. One FGD was held in one of the communities. It was observed that some of those interviewed used probabilistic expressions such as “M daalu” (Khana expression which translates into English as “I am about”) to express their ages, which suggests that they were not very certain about their ages. The same observation was made about a few other interviewees and discussants from some communities in the other LGAs also. However, age is not a crucial demographic parameter in the study and has no implications for the analytical validity of the conclusions in the study. Although Khana is the largest LGA in Ogoni both in terms of land mass and population, the level of hydrocarbon pollution and related remediation activities in Khana are comparatively lower than the other three LGAs of Ogoni.

In Gokana, the research team also visited seven communities, namely Baranyonwa Dere (B-Dere), Kegbara Dere (K-Dere), Biara, Bodo, Mogho, Bomu, and Lewe, all of which were heavily impacted. A total of fourteen (14) people were interviewed in Gokana. Twelve (12) of them were women of varying ages from about 25 to 70, one a Community Development Committee (CDC) Chairman, and the other a community Youth Leader. Two FGDs were held. In Tai, visits were also made to eight communities, among which were Korokoro, Kpite, Botem, Nonwa, Gio, Kporghor, Norkpo and Sime. A total of nineteen (19) personal interviews and three FGDs were held across the communities visited. Two of those interviewed gave their ages as 70 and 72 respectively whereas the others were between 22 and 60. As has previously been stated in this section, age is not a relevant analytical parameter in this study and is, therefore, not seriously considered in the choice of interviewees and discussants.

The communities visited in Eleme include Ekporo, Onne, Eteo, Ebubu, Agboncia and Ogale. The UNEP (2011) reported Nsisioken Ogale as having the most serious case of underground water contamination (10). A total of seven (7) personal interviews, made up of six (6) women and one man who is a youth leader in Akpajo, were held, and one FGD was conducted in Eleme. At the time of the visit to Ekporo community in 2023, the community was deserted following a bloody

communal clash between the community and a neighbouring community in Ogu-Bolo LGA called Ogu. Hence, there was nobody to interview in the community, but there was glaring evidence of heavy oil spillage.

In all the four LGAs visited, there were scenes of monumental hydrocarbon pollution, mostly from oil spillage occasioned by equipment failure, gas flaring, oil vandalism and artisanal refining. There is also the presence of workers at remediation sites and various remediation and ancillary activities are going on across the four LGAs. Some livelihood support and training programmes have been carried out and others are currently running.

Personal interviews were also held with Community Development Officers (CDOs) of HYPREP and some senior members, including management staff, of the organisation in order to obtain more information and to get diverse perspectives on issues related to the research subject. The conversational interviewing method was used in both the personal interviews FGDs to obtain data for the study. The open-ended pattern of conversation was used, which allowed the interviewees and discussants to freely provide a wide range of answers. Although some of the interviewees and discussants tended to veer off track, which is a characteristic limitation of the open-ended conversational technique, limitation was mitigated by the knowledgeable lines of inquiry deployed in the study.

This study also utilised relevant literature on Ogoni's environmental condition, particularly UNEP's *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* (2011), relevant volumes of *HYPREP Herald*, which is a monthly news magazine of HYPREP, the HYPREP Gazette No. 176, Vol. 103 of December 12, 2016, as well as several reports by Amnesty International on oil spills and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. In addition to this, scholarly literatures on oil-related activities in Ogoni were reviewed and analysed.

This study is rooted in a combination of the political economy approaches of Karl Marx, Adams Smith and the new institutional economics (NIE) of Ronald H. Coase, Oliver E. Williamson and Douglas C. North, among others. Although the different variants of this approach tend to differ in terms of areas of emphasis, one of its characteristic commonalities derives from its methodology. Methodologically, it analyses the interaction between culture, politics and economics, how this interaction shapes the structure and character of the basic social institutions, and how

these in turn combine to determine the pace and trajectories of growth and development. It analyses the impact of globalisation, especially the determining forces of international capitalism, on change within and across states.

Borrowing from Terry Lyn Karl's (1997) approach, this study, in addition, also analyses the manner in which policy choices are structured. As Karl further rightly notes, "dependence on a particular export commodity shapes not only social classes and regime types, ... but also the very institutions of the state, the framework for decision-making, and the decision calculus of policymakers" (1997, p. 7). While this framework has more commonly been adopted in global, multinational and national macroeconomic studies, its logic is equally valid in the analysis of intra-national or intra-state macroeconomic phenomena.

3. PATRIARCHY, LAND TENURE SYSTEM AND GENDERED IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN Ogoniland

The Ogoni society is characteristically patriarchal. Historically, patriarchy is a pre-industrial capitalist socio-economic system characterised by the vesting of family authority in the father or eldest male in the family, and the reckoning of descent through the male line. Ogoni operates the individual and family land tenure system, which implies that lands are substantially owned by individuals and families, and not communally. Only a few lands, which are usually reserved for communal activities and purposes such as shrines, cemeteries, town squares, markets, playgrounds, *et cetera*, are held as community lands. This system has existed *vis-à-vis* the Land Use Act of 1978, which vests:

all land comprised in the territory of each State (except land vested in the Federal Government or its agencies) solely in the Governor of the State, who would hold such land in trust for the people... while similar powers with respect to non-urban areas are conferred on Local Government" (<http://faolex.fao.org>).

Despite the express provision of the Land Use Act which vests lands in rural areas in the Local Government authorities, the local authorities do not usually interfere with the rights of the rightful "owners" of lands in the rural communities to use and, in fact own, the lands comprised in their territories in

accordance with their customs and traditions. It is the state and the federal governments that usually interfere with the ownership and free use of lands by individuals and families.

According to the prevailing patriarchal system, family lands are vested in the husband/father as the patriarch or head of the family who controls and allocates or distributes the family lands. Within the family, lands are usually allocated only to the male members (sons). Typically, the man (husband), woman (wife) and children jointly provide the needed labour for family farms. With the advent of British colonial education, some members of the society embraced and acquired Western education and gained employment in the formal sector. Interestingly, or maybe, unfortunately, opportunities to Western education have been skewed in favour of the male folks while a large number of their female counterparts are confined to farming, with the addition of fishing for those in riverine and coastal communities, as their main occupations. Being predominantly farmers, land is a strategic resource, not only as a factor of production, but also as a source of both wealth and its appurtenances.

As oil emerged as the hallmark of Nigeria's economy and the major source of revenue to the state after its discovery and commercial production in the mid-twentieth century, oil politics at the national level, exacerbated by poor extractive resource governance, also began to affect the value and availability of land for agricultural activities. The adverse socio-economic and environmental impacts of oil production and other activities connected with it have been colossal. Although these impacts pervade the various social strata and households within the society, the majority of the women and girls seem to be worse hit because of their special attachment to the land and their peculiar place in the social relations of production within a predominantly agrarian society. Although a combination of forces, most notably modernisation and Westernization, have altered the cultural landscape of Ogoni society, patriarchy and the inevitable gender disparity associated with it are still largely prevalent in Ogoni till date.

Studies at different levels, ranging from local and national to global, have indicated that many environmental issues have gendered impacts. Theory is rooted in classical Marxist feminism and socialist feminism, both of which are analytically nuanced. As rightly noted by Tong (2009),

Although it is possible to distinguish between Marxist and socialist feminist thought, it is quite difficult to do so. Over the years, I have become convinced that the differences between these two schools of thought are more a matter of emphasis than of substance. Classical Marxist feminists work within the conceptual terrain laid out by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other nineteenth-century thinkers. They regard classism rather than sexism as the fundamental cause of women's oppression. In contrast, socialist feminists are not certain that classism is women's worst or only enemy (p. 96).

Attempting to show the subtlety of their difference, Tong goes further to state, citing Karl Marx's *Capital* in part, that the socialist feminists... write in view of Russia's twentieth-century failure to achieve socialism's ultimate goal—namely, the replacement of class oppression and antagonism with “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (96).

Countless fact-based studies have shown the gendered dimensions of environmental problems. According to a study by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Gender inequality coupled with climate and environment crises is the greatest sustainable development challenge of the present time. Climate change, environmental degradation and disasters affect the entire planet and all peoples, although not in the same way or to the same degree, while gender inequality results in the denial of full human rights to half of humanity. Climate change and environmental crises and disasters disproportionately affect women and girls, in particular those in vulnerable and marginalized situations. In turn, gender inequality and the unequal access of women to land and natural resources, finance, technology, knowledge, mobility and other assets constrain the ability of women to respond and cope in contexts of climate and environmental crises and disasters (E/CN.6/2022/3, p. 2, available at <https://www.unwomen.org>csw>).

To be sure, environmental degradation, climate change and disasters affect the entire planet, directly or indirectly, but women and girls tend to bear their brunt disproportionately. In some cases, such as

we observed in Ogoni, widespread poverty combines with patriarchy and other economic and social forces to exacerbate gender inequality. There is no gainsaying that patriarchy affects many facets of social, economic and political lives in ways that reinforce gender inequality. Ogoniland has been massively degraded and neglected by the Nigerian State and the major international oil company, Shell, that extracts oil from the area. The people complain of decades of marginalisation and oppression without any structured and impactful system and programmes that address infrastructural and economic underdevelopment as well as social welfare and environmental issues in the area prior to the establishment of HYPREP.

Massive environmental degradation has thrown households into poverty and its attendant malaises. The social condition of the people is further complicated by the anarchy of production. This refers to a “lack of planning, disorder, and chaos in the private-property commodity economy, marked by competition and haphazard operation of economic laws” (Ilyin & Motylev, 1986, p. 333). This anarchy triggers various anti-social and counter-developmental actions and conditions, including prostitution, drug and substance abuse, oil theft and vandalism, and pervasive anomie. Oil theft, vandalism and artisanal refining are also largely impacted by gender dynamics. Both the criminal and supposedly legitimate forms of these activities are dominated by boys and men, further pushing girls and women to the margins. This, in turn, exposes the girls and women to greater risks and marginalisation. As observed in a UNESCO study,

These trends reinforce and magnify existing gender inequalities, leading to even greater deficits of decent work among women. Entrenched discriminatory norms, unequal power relations, violence against women and girls and the gender division of labour in households and communities underlie women's relationship to natural resources in many contexts. The limited access of women to public services, social protection and infrastructure increases their vulnerability to climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risks (disasters (E/CN.6/2022/3, p. 5, available at <https://www.unwomen.org>csw>)). The disproportionate odds against girls and women due to environmental degradation and related factors are so deeply entrenched that they require structural as well as policy adjustments to address them.

While the goals of the Ogoni-Clean-up Project are laudable, some of the activities connected with it have the potential to result in displacement of communities and families. This concern has been stated in a study of the social and environmental impacts of the Ogoni Clean-up Project on the Ogoni people by Adalikwu and Nweke (2020). In the next section, we shall explore and analyse the role of HYPREP as an intervention agency in addressing gender-related issues that affect environmental management in Ogoniland.

4. HYPREP, GENDER INEQUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN Ogoniland

In order to navigate out of the mutual mistrust and stalemate that followed decades of environmental and economic injustice, protests and failed negotiations between the Ogoni people and the duo of Shell and the Federal Government, the Federal Government commissioned the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2010 to undertake an independent scientific environmental assessment of Ogoniland. The fourteen-month assessment “covered contaminated land, groundwater, surface water, sediment, vegetation, air pollution, public health, industry practices and institutional issues” (UNEP, 2011, p. 7) and lasted from 2010 to 2011, at the end of which a report, entitled *Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland* was published. The study produced systematic and scientific evidence of the nature, extent and impacts of oil contamination in Ogoniland. Based on the findings of the study, broad recommendations, touching on operational, technical, institutional and governmental measures for addressing the legacy of environmental degradation and pollution were made in the Report.

Pursuant to the recommendations of the Report and in keeping with a key condition by the Ogoni for the study, that it “should be followed by a clean-up” (*UNEP in Ogoniland Newsletter*, December 2010 – January 2011, p. 2), the Federal Government of Nigeria set up the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) in 2012. However, the implementation process could not commence till 2016 when the Gazette, No. 176, Vol. 103 of 12th December 2016, was issued under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Environment to implement the UNEP Report on Ogoniland. The functions of the Project, as contained in the official gazette (HYPREP Gazette, 2016) are to:

- a. investigate, map and evaluate hydrocarbon polluted communities and sites in Nigeria referred to it by National Oil :Spill Detection Response Agency (NOSDRA) or the Federal Ministry of Environment in collaboration with the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) and make recommendations to the Federal Government;
- b. implement the recommendations of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Report, on Environmental Restoration of Ogoniland (UNEP Report) as directed by the HYPREP Governing Council;
- c. initiate and develop work programmes aimed at restoring all hydrocarbon impacted communities and sites referred to HYPREP;
- d. undertake a comprehensive assessment and mapping of all environmental issues associated with hydrocarbon pollution in collaboration with NOSDRA;
- e. provide guidance data to undertake remediation of contaminated soil and ground water in Ogoniland and such other impacted communities as may be referred to it;
- f. technically evaluate alternative technologies to be employed to undertake remediation of contaminated soil and ground water;
- g. make recommendations for responding to future contamination from hydrocarbons; and
- h. ensure full environmental recovery and restoration Ogoni ecosystem and ecosystem services for Ogoni people and other impacted communities.

As stated above, HYPREP’s mandate covers all parts of Nigeria. However, the Ogoni clean-up project is HYPREP’s first and, so far, only remediation and restoration project since its inception. The Ogoni Clean-up Project was flagged off by former Vice President Yemi Osinbajo who represented the President, Mohammadu Buhari, on June 2, 2016. The Project’s mandate for the Ogoniland Clean-up, as contained in the *Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) Staff Hand Book* (2022), is to:

- i. Remediate and restore hydrocarbon contaminated areas,
- ii. Provide potable water for impacted communities,
- iii. Provide sustainable alternative livelihood to impacted communities, and
- iv. Undertake health inventory of people living in impacted areas.

While there are different causes of environmental degradation, HYPREP is mainly

concerned with hydrocarbon pollution remediation and issues relating to that, such as livelihood. HYPREP's Ogoni Clean-up Project commenced effectively a few years after it was flagged off, under the monitoring and supervision of UNEP, and it is ongoing. Available evidence from field survey indicates that some progress has been made, especially during the past two years. However, some of those interviewed are of the view that the project deviates radically from the recommendations of the UNEP Report and falls short of international best practices. We did not independently confirm or refute this allegation because that is not within the scope of this study; however, it should be taken seriously and addressed because it has far-reaching implications for restoration of the land and environment to boost agricultural and other activities that affect the people's livelihood, especially that of the rural women and households. It is pertinent to note, however, that the UNEP admits that the Ogoni Clean-up Project is the first of its kind in terms of scale and complexity; hence, it poses some peculiar challenges. That resonates with an explanation given by a top official of HYPREP for what appears to be a lull in the activities of the Project is that the project is highly technical in nature and monumental in scope; thus, the first phase of it required a lot of intangible but essential preliminary procedures.

Our present study is not concerned with an assessment of the technical integrity or an appraisal of the procedural compliance of the project with institutional regulations. It is, however, pertinent to note that the slow pace of the project has implication for prolonged restoration of degraded land and environment which, in turn, worsens land shortage and livelihood crisis. The destruction of the ecosystem, caused majorly by environmental degradation and climate change, has destroyed biodiversity and the people's occupation and livelihood. Given, as our study reveals, that girls and women dominate the agricultural sector where land is a critical factor, issues of land availability and soil fertility are bound to have huge implications for their livelihood and socio-economic status. More so, agriculture remains the most important employment sector for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries (International Labour Organisation, 2016). This conforms to the global trend according to which "indigenous peoples, local communities, the urban poor and women and girls disproportionately suffer the effects of biodiversity loss" (UNESCO,

E/CN.6/2020/3). Fishing, which is the second major occupation for the rural women in some parts of Ogoniland, has also been negatively impacted. In Bomu, Bodo, K-Dere, Gio, Kporghor, Ekporo and some other coastal communities, in Ogoni, the mangroves and most aquatic lives have been killed.

The involvement and participation of women and girls in the clean-up have been negligible, compared to those of their male counterparts. Less than 60 percent of the women and girls interviewed and interacted with were aware of the ongoing clean-up activities by HYPREP. Within this group, less than five percent of them were involved in the project. One major factor that accounts for the marginal inclusion of the female gender in the project is the deeply entrenched occupational division of labour which tends to almost completely exclude women and girls from certain professions and skills. Examples of these include engineering, building technology, excavation, carpentry, among others, which fall within the local content components of the clean-up contracts.

HYPREP has awarded contracts for water and some other projects in some communities across the four LGAs of Ogoni. In Tai, for example, there are seven ongoing reticulated water projects, one each in Koroma, Kpite, Botem, Borobara, Kporghor, Barayira and Bunu. Construction has commenced for the Ogoni Specialist Hospital at Kpite and remediation is on at three sites. In Khana LGA, construction of a Centre of Excellence for Environmental Restoration (CEER) at Wiiyaakara has commenced simultaneously with a cottage hospital at Buan. About 11 reticulated water projects that would provide water to 40 communities in Khana are at various stages of construction in Kaa, Gwara, Eeken, Guri, Uegwere, Baani, Beer, Nyorkuru, Kpong, Baa Lueku, Okwale, Bori and Kaani. Remediation is on at Kpean and Kwaawa (Personal Interview). Similar works are also going on in Gokana and Eleme LGAs. In Gokana, there is the Barako Water Station which is an addition to the earlier commissioned Alesa Water Station (*HYPREP Herald*, December 2023, p. 6; *Personal Interview*). Similarly, out of 500 civilian guards recently recruited by HYPREP from the four LGAs of Ogoni, the percentage of girls and women are only about twenty percent.

Although a reliable data on the demographics of Ogoni is not available, which is largely attributable to the failure of the federal government to conduct a reliable census for some decades now, the cumulative workforce at all the HYPREP sites in Ogoni is estimated to be less than one percent of the labour force

in Ogoni. Worse still, a common trend that cuts across all the projects is that women and girls constitute a worryingly marginal component of the workforce. Virtually all of the women interviewed stated that they had not been involved, directly or indirectly, in the clean-up activity. One of them said "In recent time, we have been seeing trucks bringing in some equipment and moving out topsoil removed from some parts of our polluted farmlands and we hear that a company called HYPREP is behind it. That's all I know about it" (*Personal Interview*). The women in some of the communities where remediation work has commenced complained that in the course of moving materials in and out of the remediation sites, some farmlands are further degraded without compensation (*Personal Interview*). We observed, however, that in many cases, compensations were paid, even though they might not have been adequate, but often times to the exclusion of the women.

HYPREP has also embarked on some livelihood support measures. In 2019, for example, 15 youths were trained in the fabrication and use of garri processing machine through a tripartite collaboration between HYPREP, Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) which is a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA). Factories were established for the 15 beneficiaries, who were also predominantly males, and registered as cooperatives, but they virtually all failed. In 2020, 400 women from the four LGAs (100 per LGA) were trained in agro-business and entrepreneurial skills under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UNITA at the end of which they were grouped into clusters, registered as cooperatives and given supported with some items for the take off of their business. In 2023, 60 Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Ogoni were supported in business management with the sum of ₦300,000 each while 29 interns were trained in cabin crew by the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCCA). Also in 2023, 500 youths were selected from across the four LGAs (1,250 per LGA) for skills acquisition training in twenty skill areas. Out of the 5,000 people selected for the training, females were 1,498 accounting for 29.96 percent. That is the highest percentage of females that have been engaged by HYPREP in activities related to the clean-up project. The rise in the percentage of females is as a result of the recent shift in the policy of HYPREP towards widening the space for the involvement of girls and women in the clean-up project and in their access to other

opportunities that accompany the project. This is reflected in the current Project Coordinator's deliberate policy of 40% affirmation action in favour of girls and women which, if sustained, would significantly mitigate the social structures and cultural norms that engender gender inequality.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

From our foregoing analysis and discussion, the following recommendations are considered to be appropriate and valid in addressing the problems associated with gender inequality and environmental management in Ogoniland.

1. Review of property and inheritance rights so as to entitle girls and women to inherit family property, including land, where appropriate and to own lands in their own rights. They would, in this vein, be also entitled to compensations for any land that belongs to them as a personal property and to any benefits that accompany their ownership. Female members of a family should also be allowed to have voice in decisions regarding land use and distribution.

2. Greater education of the girl-child in order to close gender inequality gap. There is no denying that the gap is progressively narrowing; however, there is a need to step up the game. Occupational division of labour and other encumbrances to gender parity should be eliminated in order to broaden the scope for the participation of girls and women in various economic, commercial and other activities that would enhance their livelihoods.

3. Proper and comprehensive remediation and restoration of degraded and polluted environment (land, water, and air). By remedying and restoring depleted land and water bodies, more land would not only be available for agricultural and other productive activities but there would be improvement in crop yield and aquatic lives would be revived.

4. Comprehensive socio-economic study and comprehensive needs assessment of Ogoni in order to develop a roadmap for the sustainable development of the area. This should also include well-developed and properly coordinated sets of livelihood support programmes that would broaden the skills and strengthen their socio-economic adaptations. This would significantly reduce involvement in anti-social and counter-productive activities and tendencies such as drug and substance abuse, prostitution, robbery and pipeline vandalism, among others.

5. Improvement in the security of the area. Insecurity of lives and property has proven to be a

major challenge to social and economic progress in the area.

6. A comprehensive socio-economic study of Ogoni and the establishment of a robust demographics for fact-based policies on the development of Ogoniland. this would augment the dearth of demographic data occasioned by failure of the National Population Commission (NPC) of Nigeria to conduct a accurate and reliable census for many decades now. Apart from being fraught with inadequacies and controversies, the available statistics on population in Nigeria based on the last population census

7. CONCLUSION

Ogoniland has suffered colossal ecological devastation caused majorly by many decades of hydrocarbon pollution without proper environmental management. HYPREP was established as an interventionist agency to be jointly funded by the oil companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria to, among other goals, remediate and restore the devastated environment and provide livelihood support to the affected communities. Gender dynamics manifests in the basic social structures and economic relations in Ogoni society, Political and economic systems and dynamics as well as social structures define and influence the approaches to environmental management. Consequently, girls and women have been marginalised in the Ogoni Clean-up Project.

Considering the strategic place of women in the development of rural communities, their relative alienation from the clean-up project has colossal negative impact not only on the livelihood of households but also, and perhaps more critically, on sustainable environmental management; hence, the need for deliberate and well-articulated measures to integrate them into mainstream of the clean-up activities and processes.

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