

# Banished for Oil

The Untold Story of Environmental  
Exiles of Ogoniland



**SOCIALACTION**  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INTEGRATED CENTRE

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Published by Social Development Integrated Centre (Social Action), 2016

**ISBN: 978-37136-3-9**

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The report is based on monitoring activities carried out within the framework of the *Community Advocacy for Resource Justice in Nigeria* project, which is supported by The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace.

We thank Ford Foundation for supporting Social Action's *Community Centres for Natural Resources Accountability*.



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Fig. 1: Building seen at Bue-Leh, years after the community was abandoned

## Bue-leh and Busuu,

two Ogoni communities in Rivers State, in the oil-rich Delta region of Nigeria have become ghost lands. These communities which were inhabited by farmers and fishermen living off the lands, rivers, creeks and fishing ponds around them now lay waste and desolate. The only signs of human life or what is left of it are tombstones and dilapidated homes. Overgrown shrubs and trees have assumed occupancy in areas allowed by the destructive crude oil which seems to sniff the life off whatever it comes in contact with.

Oil pollution is the reason for the bareness. The fishermen could no longer fish. The farmers around the polluted areas had to abandon their crops when the land became toxic. Children too were not spared as they had to stop school abruptly out of sickness attributable to the pollution of the land, waters and air. Without any medical facility or alternative source of healthy living the prospect was gloomy. The choice was painful and uncertain. But abandoning their homes in an involuntary exodus was the only alternative to the hazardous conditions, and even death.

For Bue-Leh the exodus was as a result of oil spillage that occurred on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 2008 from one of the oil exploration facilities of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), the Nigerian arm of the Anglo-Dutch oil giant which has been involved in oil exploration and exploitation activities in Nigeria for over five decades. During the period, the company has been accused by

most communities in which it operates of negligence and complicity in oil spill cases. SPDC was even indicted by a Dutch court in 2013 for oil pollution elsewhere in Ogoniland. It is interesting to note that though Bue-Leh community itself does not have oil wells situated in it. However, they were not spared when the oil spills from elsewhere meandered through the creeks and streams to destroy their livelihoods and peace.

The sacking of the members of Busuu community was due to an earlier crude oil spillage on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of July 2007 from oil facilities located about 15 meters from the community. These facilities on the other hand were owned and operated by Nigerian Petroleum Development Commission (NPDC), which is a subsidiary of the Nigerian government owned by Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). The spill resulted in a conflagration which lasted for almost a year leaving behind a

signature of decimation, barrenness and maladies which caused the people to take refuge in neighbouring towns. One would have thought that this company which is not only indigenous but also owned by the government, whose duty it is to ensure the safety of lives and property of the people, would have shown more concerns for the wellbeing of its own people.

Despite several calls, petitions and pleas made to the companies and the government over the years, nothing has been done to ameliorate the plight of the communities.

This report examines the immediate and root causes of the migration of inhabitants of Bue-Leh and Busuu from their ancestral homes and the resultant effect of this movement on the people of the communities. The report calls attention to the environmental, economic and health impact of forced migration on the people, both old and young, as narrated by the witnesses to the devastation from oil spills and crude oil related fire outbreaks. The report sheds light on the roles of Shell Petroleum Development Company and Nigerian Petroleum Development Company in the environmental pollution which led to the exodus of these people. The report looks at the responses by the companies involved in the crisis, and the government, to distress call by the communities. Evidences produced by the communities points to the fact that the companies were intimated formally of these carnages. Unfortunately no cogent response was made by the companies beside unfulfilled promises, neither did the call to the Rivers State Government produce any fruitful outcome.

It is our recommendation that the Local, State and Federal Governments should, as a matter of urgency, work in partnership

with the oil companies and community members to put all measures in place to enable these natives return to their homes and livelihoods. Proper clean up should also be carried out and monitored to ensure it conforms to required standards. Social and medical facilities should be provided. Schools and residential houses should also be built for the people by the oil companies and government. However if the land and its environs are ascertained not to be conducive for human habitation, they should be resettled in a conducive place accoutered with the necessary infrastructure and where they can habituate freely, peacefully and productively.

“Despite several calls, petitions and pleas made to the companies and the government over the years, nothing has been done to ameliorate the plight of the communities.”

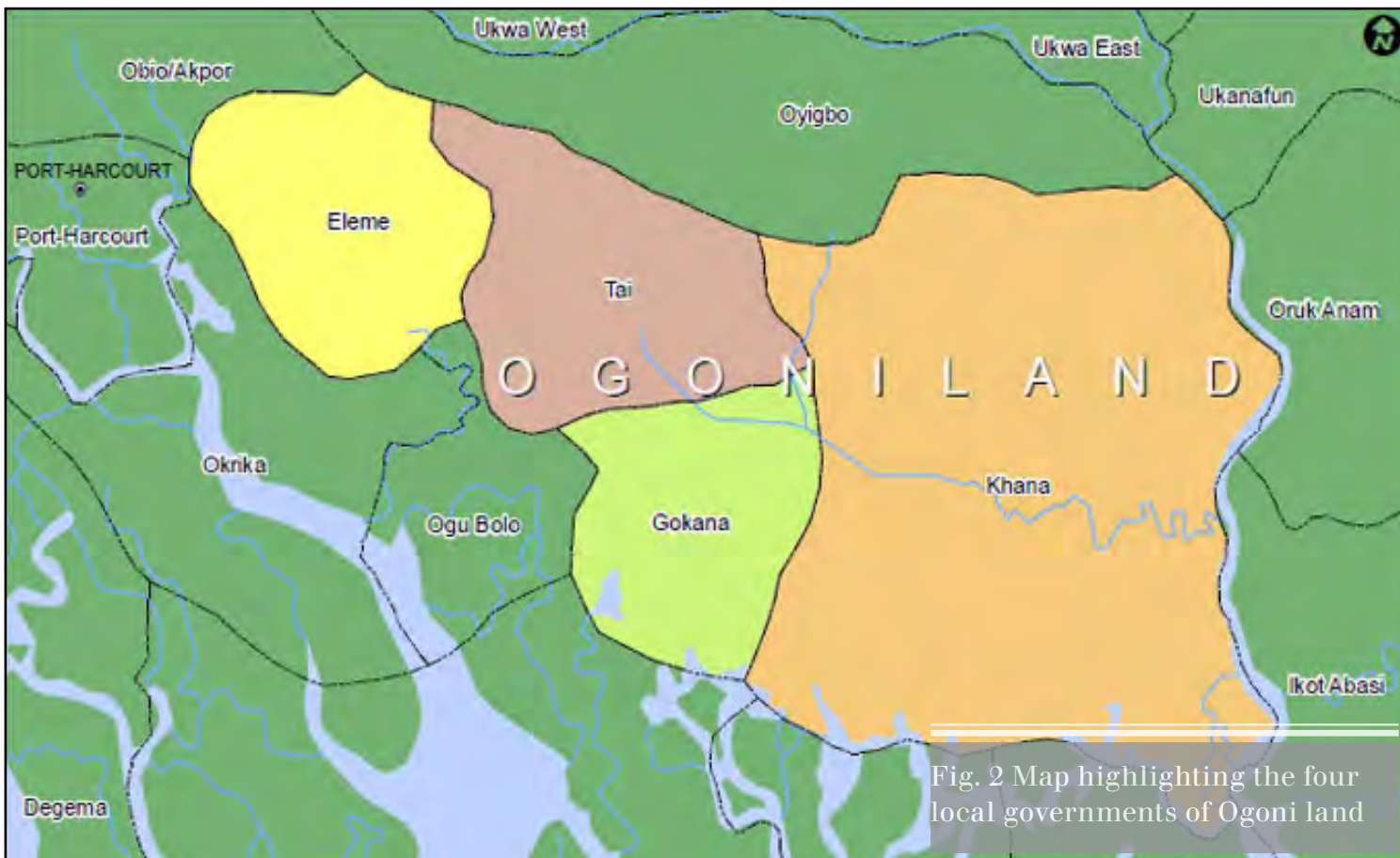


Fig. 2 Map highlighting the four local governments of Ogoni land

The Ogoni are an indigenous peoples in Rivers State in Niger Delta region, south-south of Nigeria. Because of the oil deposit in the area and the attendant oil exploration activities, they share common oil-related environmental problems with other ethnic communities and nationalities in the Niger Delta. The Ogoni are traditionally farmers and fishermen but also engage in other trade and commercial activities with their close and remote neighbours on land and along the coast notably in livestock herding, fishing, salt and palm oil produce. There are six traditional divisions in Ogoni land namely Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana, and Tai Districts, all located within four Local Government Areas- Khana, Gokana Eleme and Tai. Bue-Leh and Busuu are part of Ken-Khana division of Ogoniland. The communities are

surrounded by clusters of sixteen oil wells that collectively formed and are called Yorla Oil Field (OML 11). As at the time of this report neither of the two communities have inhabitants still residing in them. Everyone who lived in these communities abandoned their homes following the oil-related environmental disasters that occurred there. Bue-Leh community was deserted by its inhabitants in 2008 when a massive oil spill from an oil facility belonging to Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) led to an environmental disaster. With the streams and sources of drinking water polluted, and crops destroyed, the inhabitants had no way of surviving in their land, so they fled. Similarly Busuu community was deserted following a fire outbreak which occurred on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2007 at an oil well that is in close proximity to the community. The inferno at the oil well operated



by the Nigerian Petroleum Development Commission (NPDC) lasted for almost a year. By the end of 2008 all the inhabitants of Busuu had abandoned their homes and relocated to other communities.

Social Development Integrated Centre (Social Action) embarked on series of fact-finding field trips aimed at monitoring the response of government and the concerned oil companies to the impacts of oil pollution and its attendant problems, with the objective to unravel;

- the remote and immediate cause(s) of the evacuation of Bue-Leh and Busuu, with a view to acquiring concrete findings on the structure of the communities before they were evacuated,
- the population of people affected by the crises in both communities,
- the level of socio-economic development that existed in the communities prior to the period of devastation,
- the causes of the environmental pollution and the steps taken by the representatives of the communities to salvage their communities
- the resultant evacuation from the communities when all efforts made to reverse the crises failed, and
- the demands of the internal-

ly-displaced members for their communities to be rebuilt to pave way for their return.

This research was conducted against the backdrop of the Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the release of UNEP's report on August 4, 2011, in which several recommendations were made for the restoration of the oil-polluted Ogoni environment. Till date, not much has been done by the Nigerian government and the oil companies to commence the clean-up of Ogoniland as recommended in the UNEP report. Even the emergency measures such as the provision of alternative sources of drinking water which was also recommended in the UNEP report, was not implemented. As a result, much of Ogoniland remains severely polluted and the majority of its populace are left in abject poverty and precarious health conditions.

Social Action is publishing this story to raise awareness and build momentum around the worsening state of Ogoni environment and the need for an immediate clean-up of Ogoniland, as a starting point for the clean-up of all oil-polluted communities in Nigeria.



Fig 3. Social Action's team with several members of Bue-Leh,

**S**urrounded by water and only accessible through sea routes, Bue-Leh community depends on the water around it not only as a means of transportation but also as a means of livelihood. Bue-Leh community was home to about 3,000 people who gradually deserted the

place following the environmental devastation witnessed there. Historic and physical evidences show that the community is an old settlement, having the characteristics of a conventional community that had existed with natives for about a century.

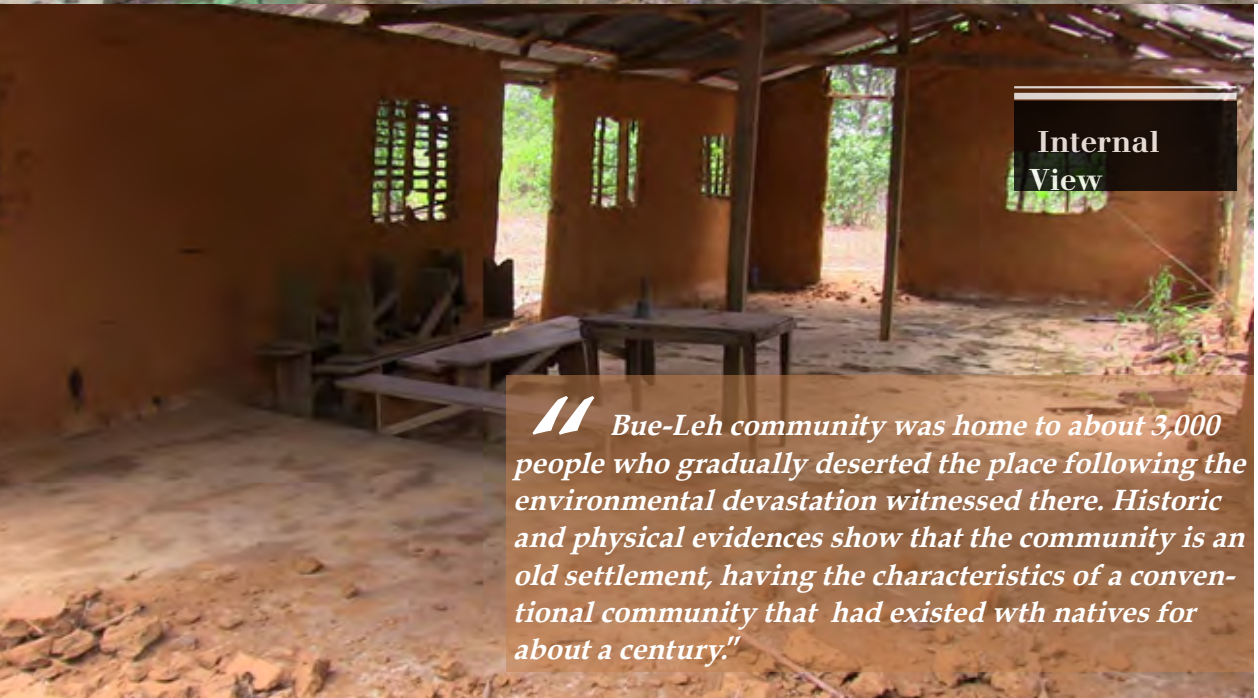


Fig. 4: Building seen at Bue-Leh, years after the community was abandoned




 External View

Fig. 5: The Ascension Apostolic Church now deserted


 Internal View

*“Bue-Leh community was home to about 3,000 people who gradually deserted the place following the environmental devastation witnessed there. Historic and physical evidences show that the community is an old settlement, having the characteristics of a conventional community that had existed with natives for about a century.”*

About 20 dilapidated buildings with corrugated iron sheets were seen in the community alongside the remains of several collapsed mud houses made with thatched roofing materials, which were overgrown with weeds. Also seen, was an open-hall structure described by several natives of Bue-Leh as “The Ascension Apostolic Church”, which served as a worship centre for many of them, before the evacuation. At a central area within the communi-

ty, lies a giant grave which is said to be that of the founder of the community. The man, late Chief Aparabiari William Nwibani, according to the epitaph, died on 14th July, 1947 by 5am. The epitaph on the grave read thus;

*“This to memorial dead of Mr. Aparabiari William Nwibani. He died on the 14th of July, 1947 at 5am. By according to his good actions he got this record from God Almighty”.*



*“This to memorial dead of Mr. Aparabiari William Nwibani. He died on the 14th of July, 1947 at 5am. By according to his good actions he got this record from God Almighty”.*



Fig. 6: The tomb of the founder of Bue-Leh Community visit to the community

The significance of the gravesite may be germane to the claim made by the community folks that the community was not a mere fishing settlement, but a real village which existed with natives before the commencement of oil exploration in Ogo-

niland in 1958, and definitely long before the occurrence of the oil spillage which sacked the community in 2008. A Town square, overgrown with weeds, was also conspicuously situated in the community.



Fig. 7. A cross section of participants at the Consultative Town Hall meeting organized by Social Action in Bue-Leh on the 8th of July 2015



## EVACUATION OF BUE-LEH COMMUNITY

The first major cause of the migration from Bue-Leh community was the oil spills that occurred on April 4th, 2008 at the “Yaa-Taa” Oil Wells near Kono and Buan communities which flowed to the creeks around Bue-Leh, contaminating and destroying the only source of drinking water. As a result, people started falling sick and dying following the consumption of polluted water. The absence of clean water made life unbearable in the community.

The second problem was the destruction of their means of livelihood by the oil spill. The river that served as the source of livelihoods for those who were fishermen, as well as the mangroves were destroyed. As the people could no longer fish, pick periwinkles and other seafood from the creeks to sustain themselves, they had to evacuate the community to live in other communities in search of an alternative and sustainable means of livelihood.

Natives of Bue-Leh community who were interviewed, informed Social Action that the spill flowed from SPDC’s oil facilities in Kono and Buan in Yorla Oil Field area. That oil field contains about 16 oil wells scattered around communities in the area. Like Goi Community in Gokana Local Government Area, there are no oil facilities inside the community.

Natives said the evacuation of the community was not spontaneous but gradual, and those who were left behind still thinking of where to migrate to and hoping that succor will come their way via intervention by SPDC or government, had their women raped, their domestic animals and foodstuff stolen, their houses burgled hoodlums who took advantage of the drifting population to invade the community periodically. Hence, the total desertion of the community.

## COMMUNITY TESTIMONIES



**Fig. 8: Chief Kpabari and his wife, Mrs. Baribeedum Kpabari at a Town Hall meeting in Gwawa**

**T**he paramount ruler of the community, Chief Sunday Kpabari, who had to relocate from Bue-Leh to Gwawa community owing to the oil spillage, narrated the incident as follows:

“In 2008, an oil spill started at the oil stations in Buan and Kono, which spoilt the only drinking water we had in that area. The stream is called Ebamaalee (which was the only source of drinking water in the community). Our farmlands were damaged by the pollution. All of us in the community tried as we could to survive and remain there, but there was no way. There was no drinking water, no farm, and our children were falling sick and dying, due to the polluted water we were drinking. So everybody left and we are scattered abroad. Some are here in Gwawa with me, while some others are in Teera-Ue, Bori and Port Harcourt. “I’m appealing to Shell and Federal Government of Nigeria to come to our aide, to clean the oil for us in order for us to have good drinking water and a good atmosphere and good air in that community. I’m pleading for them to come

for our assistance....I have evidences to prove that there was oil spill that pur-

sued us from our community and I made efforts to reach Shell. I have some documents with me here to prove this to anyone in doubt. I reported the issue to Shell and they did nothing about it till today.”

[See Appendix D for a draft-copy of the letter sent to Shell]

Also, Mrs Baribeedum Kpabari, wife to Chief Kpabari, who lamented the devastation in Bue-Leh stated that,

“The oil (spill) also spoilt our fish ponds where we used to get fish; everything was spoilt. So we didn’t have any means to survive in that village. That’s why we are in Gwawa today. The oil pollution made my first son very sick. It gave him asthma. The chief (her husband) is still having serious cough because of the drinking of the bad water and the strong smell of the oil. I want Shell to come and build house, give us drinking water, clean the land for us and give us light so that we can live there”.

Several other community members concurred with the account of the oil pollution narrated by Chief Kpabari, as they informed Social Action that the oil spill started at an oil well around Kono community which shared a boundary with Bue-Leh.

Social Action interviewed one of the fishermen in the community who told his sad tale with tint of bitter nostalgia.



**Fig 9: Christian Jonathan a fisherman- victim of the oil pollution**

## Interview with Christian Jonathan

### Social Action: What do you know about Bue-Leh Community?

**Christian:** “Bue-Leh Community is an ancient day community. The community has been in existence before the colonial administration in West Africa. The Bue-Leh community has been there before the amalgamation of southern and northern protectorate in 1914. So, we migrated He sired many people and also my father. My father was the chief of that village when he lost his father. So, even myself, I was born in that village, schooled there, did everything humanly possible in that village. The same thing is applicable to my younger ones.”

### Social Action: What do you do for a living while you were in that village and why, did you leave?

**Christian:** When I was in that village I was a good fisherman. I was fishing with nets.

### Social Action: What then happened? Why did you stop?

**Christian:** It was oil explosion in 1993. That is when we experienced oil explosion but during that period we can get some fishes, even in 1995 we can get little fish, till 2000-2005 that

was when the oil explosion destroyed my net, destroyed my boat, destroyed a lot of things that am using for my fishing, destroyed all my fishing equipment generally even some of my brothers and sisters there who plant could not yield well, crops could not yield well, our fishing we cannot fish very well, so with these, it affected us a lot... I was into fish farming. I got some drums that I use to train fish. If I fetch some salt water and use it for my fish but before I know the fish would die. So, the oil did a lot of things that surprised me, even it brought the downfall of that village and the downfall of myself till date.

### Social Action: You mentioned Shell, what did Shell do?

**Christian:** Because Shell is involved in this oil explosion (becoming emotional and speaking with anger). They are the people who own this oil that destroyed my net, my fishing, everything that keep me stranded till date.

### Social Action: What did they do? Are they aware? What did they do when you complained? Did you complain to them?

**Christian:** I have not complained to them but there was a time ago on the media (referring to public awareness about the





Fig 10: Mrs. Patience Ubani laments the effect of the oil spillage on her health and family

incident) none of them listened to me.

**Social Action:** What do you want to be done now so that you can return to your fishing or return to your home?

**Christian:** I want compensation. At least for me to get all my equipment, fishing equipment-boat, net, paddle, etc. to enable me go back to the village.

**Social Action:** Now nobody lives in Bue-Leh again, where are you living, where is your family living now?

**Christian:** My mother has moved to another village where she is doing little farm for people to earn a living. This is a woman who was on her own, who was not depending on anybody else but now, she is depending on people. If she didn't go to farm for other

people to earn small money she can't eat.

**Social Action:** So, where do you live now?

**Christian:** I live in Port Harcourt. Am residing with someone with my wife and my children and I am not comfortable where I am residing.

### ----- Interview With Mrs. Patience Ubani -----

**Patience:** My name is Patience Ubani, this is my village, Bue-Leh but I and my children live in Bori since we were displaced by the oil pollution. I heard that people from Social Action are coming today, so I decided to come and see the people that want to help us come back home and to tell them thank you. So, please, help us come back home.





“ Children too were not spared as they had to stop school abruptly out of sickness attributable to the pollution of the land, waters and air. Without any medical facility or alternative source of healthy living the prospect was gloomy. The choice was painful and uncertain. ”

**Fig 11: Displaced children from Bue-Leh in their temporary land of refuge left to fate without access to education.**

**Social Action:** What happened? Which oil are you talking about and how did it affect you?

**Patience:** Oil explosion happened here in 2008 and polluted all our water and now we have no water to drink again. The oil spoilt many things. See my mouth, I lost these teeth in our river when crude oil in the water entered my eyes and nose. I lost control, fell and hit my face on a canoe that I was using and my teeth pulled out.

**Social Action:** How did the explosion happen?

**Patience:** That day, we saw huge smoke in this community. It entered our noses, eyes and made us sick. This is my house. I left it since 2008 that we left this community and when I heard that ‘Social Action’ people are now working with our community to bring us back home, I came and change the zinc (roofing sheets) on the house. Once in a while we come back here to feel our birthplace and we would be happy to return to our ancestral home again.



Fig. 12: Entrance to Busuu community

**B**usuu community is located between Kpean and Teera-ue communities in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. The community has a tarred road leading into it, alongside a gate, which gives an impression that there may be some infrastructural development in the community. But as revealed by Busuu community folks, the tarred road is a long stretch leading to the oil well and was constructed by the

Nigerian Petroleum Development Company (NPDC) for the sole purpose of enabling its agents have easy access to its oil well. NPDC is a subsidiary of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) with office in Benin City, Edo State. Several community folks told Social Action that the gate was not useful to them while they were living in the community, as they were sometimes shut out of their own community by the company.



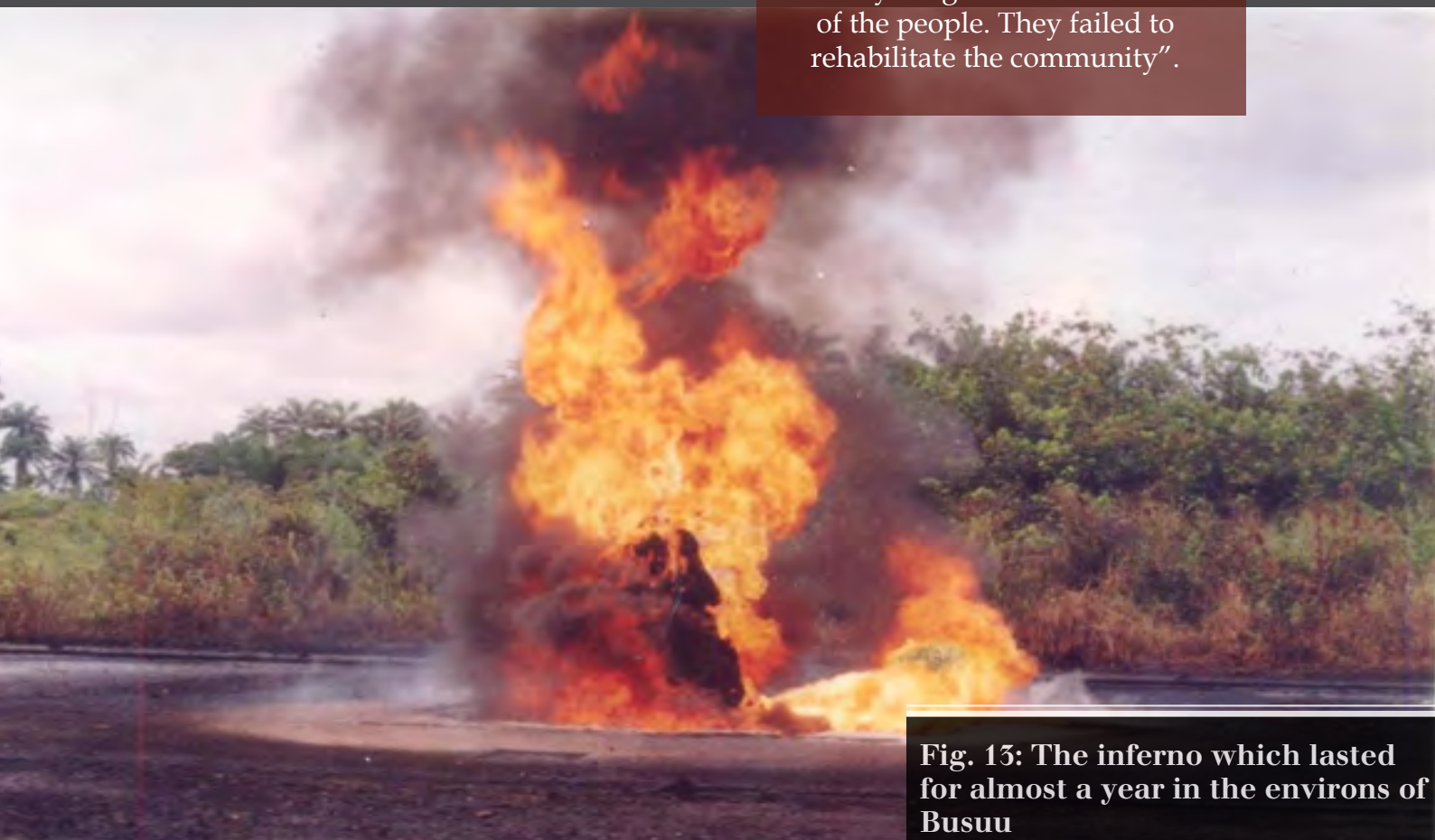
**B**usuu community was reportedly deserted in 2008 following a fire outbreak which occurred at an oil well located within 50 metres to the community. The resultant fire from the explosion which took place on July 23, 2007, continued burning until April 2008 when it was eventually extinguished. This negatively affected the environment, making it absolutely unfit for human life to be sustained in Busuu, and also in Teera-Ue community which was a neighbouring community to Busuu. According to former residents of the community who were interviewed, the fire gutted some of their houses and the heat and noise generated by the 'big' fire from the oil well was so much that

the people had to desert the community.

A recent visit to Busuu community clearly revealed that no structure was in place any longer as every building erected there eventually collapsed as a result of the impact of the heat from the fire which lasted for almost a year.

According to Chief Steven Koko, the caretaker chief of Busuu and chief of Teera-Ue, the fire outbreak originated from an NPDC facility very close to the community. The fire lasted over a year, according to the community leader.

“The fire was something that was unbearable for the community and then people started packing out of the community. The community had over 170 people. The company did not do anything about the welfare of the people. They failed to rehabilitate the community”.



**Fig. 13: The inferno which lasted for almost a year in the environs of Busuu**



Fig. 14: Mrs. Evelyn William and her daughter, Florence. Their family fled Busuu to Teera-Ue. Both women maintained no sufficient compensation was given to them by NPDC, for the loss of their homes and their community.

“ Their family fled Busuu to Teera-Ue. Both women maintained no sufficient compensation was given to them by NPDC, for the loss of their homes and their community.”

Benjamin Kpikah - a member of Teera-ue community [currently accommodating some of the displaced indigenes of Busuu] who witnessed the oil spillage and the associated incidents.

Social Action: What happened there and here?

Benjamin: When these incidents happened, I was among the local securities that worked there. It was oil explosion and heavy fire that burn for many months that make people run from Busuu, the same happen in the oil well around here but there was no fire and people ran away from the communities. I was present and saw what happened in Bue-Leh and Busuu and I can bear witness to it even in court or anywhere because, I follow up everything that happened from start to finish.



Fig 15: In a reflective mood, Mr. Benjamin Kpikah, a youth leader of Teera-Ue community narrates his account on the incidents in Bue-Leh



## TO BUE-LEH COMMUNITY

According to the paramount ruler of the derelict community, Chief Sunday KpaBari, the community members sent letters to Shell, intimating the oil giant about the gigantic scale of the oil pollution in the community and its environs. Consequent upon the receipt of those letters, Shell sent representatives to the community who came with video cameras and successfully recorded the flow of the oil spill, after which they promised to return another day to commence a process of compensating the people. Shell never came back to the community.

Another community member, Mr. Abra-

ham Nwibani, when asked if the Rivers State government was made aware of the oil spillage, confirmed that the government heard about the disaster and some government officials came in their numbers to assess the monumental environmental disaster. But the visit yielded no result, as the inhabitants of Bue-Leh were neither compensated nor were they given alternative shelters by the government or Shell.

Social Action communicated its findings in Bue-Leh community to Shell, but all efforts made to get Shell's response to the disaster in Bue-Leh proved abortive as Shell did not respond to the correspondences.

“ When the oil spill occurred, there were some agents from the oil company and the government who came around to witness what happened. Many of us met with them. We analyzed the situation on ground and gave them information. But up till now, nothing has been done about it. We are still left roaming from one area to the other. We're crying out to the world for assistance ”

**Fig.16: Abraham Nwibani narrates the ordeal of his Community**

## TO BUSUU COMMUNITY

Faced with the challenge of living in very close proximity to a massive inferno, some chiefs of Busuu and the neighbouring Teera-Ue communities wrote series of letters to several key government officials and other stakeholders in a frantic effort to get help as quickly

as possible.

The table below shows some of the letters written and the recipients. A few (the ones in thick black borders) can be found in the Appendix Section of this report

APPENDIX	LETTER CAPTION	RECIPIENTS	DATE
Appendix A	AN APPEAL TO SAVE OUR ENVIRONMENT	The Caretaker Chairman Khana Local Government Area Bori, KHALGA	6th March 2008
		His Majesty King (Dr.) M. S. H. Eguru Gbenemene Ken-Khana, KHALGA	6th March 2008
		The Director, State Security Service, Bori, KHALGA	1st March 2009
		Hon. Befii C. Nwile, Deputy Speaker, Rivers State House of Assembly, Port Harcourt.	15th Jan 2008
Appendix B	AN APPEAL TO SAVE OUR SOUL	Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, The Executive Governor of Rivers State, Government House, Port Harcourt.	23rd Jan 2008
		The President, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Port Harcourt, Rivers State.	23rd Jan 2008
		The Permanent Secretary, Rivers State Ministry of Environment, Port Harcourt,	23rd Jan 2008
		Rt. Hon. Tonye Harry, Speaker Rivers State House of Assembly, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.	23rd Jan 2008
Appendix C	EMISSION OF TOXIC AND HAZARDOUS FUMES FROM FIRE OUTBREAK AT YORLA SOUTH WELL	The Managing Director, Nigerian Petroleum Development Company 22/23, Benin City.	30th Jan 2009
Appendix D	BUE-LEH REPORT FOR OIL SPILLAGE AND DAMAGES	The General Manager, Shell Petroleum Development Company, Port Harcourt	20th April 2008



In response to these letters, some government officials and agents of NPDC visited the site of the fire outbreak and pledged to duly compensate the people of Busuu, but the much-awaited relief never came. According to Chief Koko,

“The company (NPDC) is aware of what happened. Like the PRO of the company one Mr. Okafor and some others of them they are aware and they promised us that in less than no time they’ll rehabilitate the community, give us some facility, hospital but to no avail. They did not do anything. Even the local government is aware, the chief and everybody within there are aware. They keep on deceiving us and by today, nobody, no single person is living in the community because of the fire.”

Social Action contacted the said Mr. Okafor who is no more an employee of NPDC. Mr Okafor was of the opinion that NPDC compensated the people of Busuu because it constructed a road to the community, fixed a gate at the entrance to the community, employed the natives, distributed medicines to them, etc.

But Chief Koko and other community members debunked the claims. He said NPDC never gave employment to any native of Busuu, adding that the road constructed, was an access-route to their oil facility and was not constructed for the community because the gate was in no way a priority neither was it in the demand list of the community. Other community members who were witnesses also countered the claims of Mr. Okafor, as they maintained that what they were given fell far below what can be described as “compensation”.

Mr. Benjamin Kpikah, a security officer at the

time of the fire incident in Busuu, told Social Action that

“On the issue of compensation and foodstuff that Mr Okafor said were distributed, I was there when he (Mr. Okafor) drove in one afternoon and brought three bags of garri, one bag of beans, five bags of rice and he parceled N10,000 in 8 envelopes and asked me to share it to Busuu people. But that is not adequate compensation for our losses and suffering”.

The people of Busuu had to evacuate their community when they realized no one was coming to put off the fire. They relocated to Teera-Ue, Opobo, Kpean and other neighbouring communities. The fire which kept burning for almost a year and was eventually put out in April 2008 when every inhabitant of Busuu had fled the community and every structure in the community had been affected by the fire. It was said that NPDC finally sent a team from its office in Benin City, to Busuu to extinguish the flames. In a series of letter written by the Teera-ue chief, a neighbouring community, to several concerned bodies and stakeholders, they decried the nature by which the fire was put off. They affirmed that no environmental impact assessment was carried out prior to the operation and it hardly conformed to any known environmental safety standard. As a result leakages from the dredge hose caused further damages to farmlands, recreational facilities and a distortion to the natural aquatic and terrestrial habitat.

Social Action communicated its findings in Busuu to the NPDC, but there was no response from the company, confirming or denying the findings.



**T**he evacuation of Busuu and Bue-Leh communities are a clear manifestation of the impact of oil exploration or oil extractive activities in driving once thriving communities into desolation. These two communities were inhabited by people many years ago but the communities became deserted because of the incident of oil spill that continues to affect many Ogoni communities.

The negative impacts of the oil-related problems consequently forced the members of both communities to desert their communities because their lives could not be sustained there anymore. Some of the attendant chain effect from the oil spill on these communities could be summarized viz:

✗ The fishermen lost their means of support. It was bad enough that the fishes in the creeks had been depleted drastically by the pollutant, the plight of the fisherman was further compounded by the damages to their fishing equipment by the corrosive effect of the crude in the water, causing accelerated wear and tear.

✗ The farmland was also polluted as the floating oil from the creek was washed ashore, contaminating the land along the coastline. The portions that were spared from the coastline pollution did not escape toxic fumes gaseous chemical by-product from the burning oil well which affected their crops, causing stunted growth and poor yield.

✗ With the purchasing power of the farmers and fisherman attenuated, the resultant effect was massed upon the traders who could not sell their wares and had to suffer monumental loss as a consequence. So the chain effect continued.

✗ The combined effect of air and land pollution is enough to cause respiratory tract diseases, lung cancer and other

harmful effects. The people of Bue-Leh had their fair share of infections. Complaints of cough, chest pain, swelling in the neck and other maladies are evident with both the old and young in the community. Several years later, some of them still suffer from the protracted illnesses because of lack of medical attention.

✗ The education of children in these communities was cut short due to sicknesses, hunger and the eventual migration out of these communities. The lives of some of these children may never be the same again because some of them have not had another chance to go back to school.

The claim by NPDC through its former representative Mr. Okafor that compensation was made to the community is ludicrous as a few bags of food and drugs can hardly compensate for the degree of devastation that has occurred in the immediate and remote environment. This may account for the company's refusal to respond to the letters written to them by Social Action for confirmation or repudiation of the claims by the community. The company's apathy towards matters of environmental degradation as a result of their oil exploration (as is common with other oil companies operating in the Niger Delta) is worrisome but even more troublesome is the continued nonchalance of Nigerian Government and their agents as they feign ignorance every time cases of oil spillage are reported. In an era where other serious governments are slamming heavy fines on culpable companies for pollutions that occur and covering a smaller geographical area than what happens in the Niger Delta and with lesser environmental impact, the various arms of the Nigerian State seem to be having cocktail with the com-

panies while the communities pay with their lives and the destiny of their children.

It is therefore recommended that the Nigerian government in conjunction with the Rivers State government look into the plight of the people of Busuu and Bue-Leh by considering the options of resettlement, payment of adequate compensation and provision of alternative homes.


A medical team should be sent to these communities as a matter of urgency to diagnose and treat those affected by the environmental pollution, and thereafter establish a medical centre to continually take care of their medical needs.

There has to be a concerted effort on the part of the government, Shell, NPDC and other stakeholders to ensure that the peo-

ple who are currently dispersed in several communities, are provided with a place of their own to stay. The government needs to ascertain the extent of the damage that has been done to the communities and determine whether the environment still has the carrying capacity to sustain life in these communities; in which case, the government must ensure the communities are cleaned up and provided with electricity, water, public health care centres, schools, good roads and other basic infrastructures and amenities. On the contrary, if the extent of the damage is such that it may not be possible to restore the people back to those communities, then other options should be considered to resettle them in a new environment that suits their type of lifestyle and in which their communal heritage can be restored.



## Appendix A



Plot 1, Teera-ue Town, Ken-Khana Dist., Kjalga, Rivers State, Nigeria.  
E-mail: teetop@yahoo.com., Phone: 08064758055, 08002233347

Your Ref:.....  
Our Ref:.....

6<sup>th</sup> March, 2008  
Date:.....

Caretaker chairman  
Khana local government area  
Bori khalga

**AN APPEAL TO SAVE OUR ENVIRONMENT**

The indigenes of Teera-ue Community of Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. Write to complain the following:-

1. That there was Oil spillage and fire outbreak on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2007 consequent to it at **YORLA SOUTH WELTWO** in **Yorla Oil Field**, a facility belonging to the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company based in Benin, Edo State.
2. That (NPDC), without any prior information and without seeking for and obtaining the community consent and authority, forcefully with the aim of force and Area Boy dug big pit and trenches at our creek and pump out about 700,000,000 litres daily of water from our creek.
3. The company destroy, damages and pollute our creek with their machine forcefully mend at our creek.
4. The company forcefully destroy Teera-ue market shad through the process of passing their Big machine.
5. The said company did not seek the consent of the community before any of the operation.



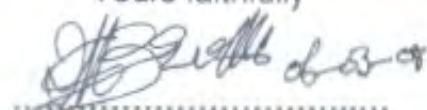
6. The said company or agents did not and have not visit the community for homage.
7. The said company uses sand from the pit to block our water ways and cause some unnatural character of sea food and block our fishing channel.
8. The said company forcefully destroy the character of our aquatic and pollute the habitants of the creek.
9. The said company have uses their pipeline to block the community <sup>and</sup> ~~A~~ individual right of ways, they have cause damage to individual and community at large. And also block the way to our daily market.
10. The creek that is one of the community source of income during December 30<sup>th</sup> every year for beach party have been turn by NPDC into a death trap by dipping pit at the venue of our Beach party.
11. The alter of the character of the aquatic life have cause hardship to the habitant of Teera-ue community.
12. The community have stop work at the creek for the demanded of

13. The community have been seen some unknown, threaten face within Teera-ue imported by NPDC for their forcefully operation within Teera-ue.

The community claim against the NPDC compensation for being damages for trespass, destruction and alteration of the aquatic natural character, polluting and forcefully dug to our creek without any environmental impact assessment (EIA) in its attempt to put out the fire at Yorla south well two. (2)


It is premised on the above that we have decided and write you to complain of our pathetic plight believing strongly that you can help us out.

Yours faithfully



.....  
**CHIEF STEPHEN M. KOKO**  
*Paramount Ruler*  
*Teera-ue Town*  
*For the community*

## Appendix B



**TEERA-UE RULING COUNCIL (TRC)**  
 Plot 1, Teera-ue Town, Ken-Khana Dist., Khsalga, Rivers State, Nigeria.  
 E-mail: teetop@yahoo.com., Phone: 08064758055

Your Ref:.....  
 Our Ref:.....

Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2008  
 Date:.....

**Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi,**  
 The Executive Governor of  
 Rivers State,  
 Government House,  
 Port Harcourt.

Sir,

**AN APPEAL TO SAVE OUR SOUL**

We the undersigned are indigenes of Teera-ue and Busuu Communities in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. We write to inform you as follows:-

1. That there was an Oil Spillage and fire outbreak consequent to it at **YORLA SOUTH WELL 2** in **Yorla Oil Field**, a facility belonging to the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company based in Benin, Edo State.
2. That the fire outbreak occurred on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2007 and has been burning for the past Seven months now leading to emission of very toxic and hazardous fumes; a development that has impacted very seriously on the health of the people of Teera-ue and Busuu Communities respectively.
3. That the distance from Busuu to the location is about 50 metres while Teera-ue is 200 metres. The inhabitants of the said communities have been subjected to serious health problems ranging from coughs, Catarrh, Chest Pains, irritation in the throat and in most cases severe breathing difficulties that has led to expending of their very lean and limited resources in hospital. Again the inhabitants of these communities have even started relocating to other nearby communities.
4. That the very harsh temperature variation consequent upon the uncontrolled fire, toxic fumes and substances emitted into the environment for upward of seven months and the flares from the Oil Spillage fire outbreak has also led to very rapid destruction of the few corrugated roofing sheet covered houses in the community.
5. That the only Primary School in the Community has been deserted by our children as it is too close to the location and is risky for parents to allow children to attend schools. So right now, the school is not functioning.



6. That the only daily market in the community which is the only source of livelihood for the people has been deserted and is no longer functioning thereby throwing the people into economic hardship.
7. That we have also lost a lot of our domestic animals following the emission of the toxic fumes; most of them coughing and dying before our very eyes.
8. That the only source of drinking water, which is a well dug by the community which is also located somewhere very close to the location is now acidic as a result of the sediments coming from the fumes. So the inhabitants of the communities are now forced to buy water from nearby communities.
9. That we have caused our lawyer to write to the company requesting for some compensation, relief and putting off of the said fire but to no avail. We have even threatened them with a court action but the Company is not bothered.

It is premised on the above that we have decided to write you as our representative in the House of Assembly to complain of our pathetic plight believing strongly that you can help us out.

Yours faithfully,

We are:

1. Chief Stephen Nj Koko  
Paramount Ruler  
Teera-ue Town
2. Chief John Nwikonee  
Member
3. Elder Muele Tee-yor  
Member
4. Mene Barinua  
C.D.C. Chairman  
Teera-ue
5. Mrs. Pricilla Ubani  
Busuu Community
6. Mr. Kagbara Taakwe
7. Mrs. Elizabeth Ojoro
8. Mr. Dee-ee-bu Nwibari  
Youth Leader

*Stephen Nj Koko*

*John Nwikonee*

*Muele Tee-yor*


*Mene Barinua*

*Kagbara Taakwe*

*Elizabeth Ojoro*

*Dee-ee-bu Nwibari*

## Appendix C


**B.N.L. DEEMUA & CO.**  
 LEGAL PRACTITIONERS & CORPORATE CONSULTANTS

OFFICE: 22/23, Benin-Sapele Road, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Tel: 0182 234 1234. Fax: 0182 234 5678.

62/44  
 The Managing Director,  
 Nigerian Petroleum Development Company,  
 22/23, Benin-Sapele Road,  
 Benin City.

Sir,

**RE: EMISSION OF TOXIC AND HARZARDOUS FUMES FROM FIRE OUTBREAK AT YORLA SOUTH WELL 2**

We are solicitors to Teera-ue and Busuu Community respectively @ Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State herein referred to as "Our Client" and it is on their brief and instruction that we hereby write to you and state as follows:

1. That there was an Oil Spillage and fire outbreak consequent to it at **YORLA SOUTH WELL 2** in Yorla Oil Field, a facility belonging to your Company (Nigerian Petroleum Development Company) based in Benin, Edo State
2. That the fire outbreak occurred on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2007 and has been burning for the past Seven months now leading to emission of very toxic and hazardous fumes, a development that has impacted very seriously on the health of the people of Teera-ue and Busuu Communities respectively.
3. That the distance from Busuu to the location is about 50 metres while Teera-ue is 200 metres. The inhabitants of the said communities have been subjected to serious health problems ranging from coughs, Catarrh, Chest Pains, irritation in the throat and in most cases severe breathing difficulties that has led to expending of their very lean and limited resources in hospital. Again the inhabitants of these communities have even started relocating to other nearby communities.
4. That the uncontrolled fire, toxic fumes and substances emitted into the environment for upward of seven months and the flares from the Oil Spillage fire outbreak has also led to very rapid destruction of the few corrugated roofing sheet covered houses in the community.
5. That the only Primary School in the Community has been deserted by our Client's children as it is too close to the location and is risky for parents to allow children to attend schools. So right now, the school is not functioning.

DRAFT BY: [Name] DATE: 24/08/07  
 U.S. MOSES ESQ. LL.M (HONS)  
 DOMINION CHAMBERS

- i. That the only daily market in the community which is the only source of livelihood for the people has been deserted and is no longer functioning thereby throwing the people into economic hardship.
- j. That Our Client have also lost a lot of their domestic animals following the emission of the toxic fumes, most of them coughing and dying before their very eyes.
- k. That the only source of drinking water, which is a well dug by the community which is also located somewhere very close to the location is now acidic as a result of the sediments coming from the fumes. So the inhabitants of the communities are now forced to buy water from nearby communities.
- l. That since the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 2007, when we wrote to your Company, you have not found it expedient to reach us and you have blatantly refused, fail and neglected to provide any relief or compensation to the communities which you have negligently subjected to very serious hardship and health hazard. Your Company is also not making any attempt to put off the raging fire that has been burning for over seven months now. What a callous act?

We make bold to say that the right to good health is a basic human right recognized universally. The violation of the right to health and healthy environment is a violation of basic human right. It is in view of this that we hereby demand pursuant to our brief, adequate compensation in the sum of **N200,000,000.00 (Two Hundred Million Naira)** only as compensation due both communities as a way of alleviating the injuries caused them from the harmful effect of this emission of toxic fumes.

**TAKE NOTICE**, that if after 14 days from the date hereof, your company fails, neglects and or refuses to pay the said amount to this chamber for our Client's benefit, we shall pursuant to their brief and instruction institute, legal proceedings against your company in respect thereof and this will be without any further correspondence. Attach herewith is the photograph of the raging fire, the subject matter of our complaint.

  
**N. A. DUSON ESQ.**  
PP. B. N. L. Deemua & Co.  
Tel: 08035525300




## Appendix D

**BUE LEH COMMUNITY**

**Ken Khana  
Khana Local Government Area  
Ogoni  
Rivers state**

Your Ref:.....  
Our Ref:.....



Date:.....

BUE-LEH COMMUNITY  
KEN-KHANA L.G.A.  
OGONI  
RIVERS STATE.

SHELL DEVELOPMENT COMPANY  
NIGERIA LTD  
RIVERS STATE

Sir,

**APPLICATION FOR THE ALLUVIATION OF OUR PLIGHT**

We are using this medium to draw your attention to the devastating condition caused by the oil spillage from your oil wells and flow stations all around my community.

The spillage which escalated from the said flow station found its channel through the erosion and irrigation track on the nearby farmlands and thereby flooded the only stream water, which serves as the only source of driving water to our community. This stream has its source from kono. Via Buan and cut across our community and links to the salt water in the creek from where we carry our domestic and commercial fishing and riviline occupations, such as gravel and digging of sand etc.

The oil spillage that escalated from the flow station rushed into the stream also passed through all the available erosion and irrigation path that divided the farm and caused damage to the rops on our farms, destroy all the economic trees around the surrounding

Damage and Demands

- (1) Portable drinking water
- (2) Support for cleaning of our swarms
- (3) Support for the rehabilitation of our fish ponds
- (4) Compensation on our farm lands
- (5) Relief materials to the community

Your quick and suit response will pluge our community into a new era and share of ecstasy.  
Anticipating your usual co-operation.



**SOCIALACTION**  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INTEGRATED CENTRE

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INTEGRATED CENTRE  
(SOCIAL ACTION)  
is a Nigerian organization that collaborates with  
community groups and other segments of civil  
society to promote platforms with the aim of  
encouraging change