

# Wellhead Woes

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Bayelsa State, Nigeria



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# Woes of the Wellhead

A special report on the wellhead blowout from Aiteo OML 29 Well 1 in Nembe, Bayelsa State.

Hundreds of well blowouts have been reported during the history of the oil and gas drilling activities globally.

These undesired events have led to loss of lives and utter destruction of environments. Oil or Gas well blowouts are not unexpected occurrences in this industry due to a number of factors, including the fact that the extraction and burning of fossil fuels constitute inherently volatile business.

## 1.0. Introduction



PHOTO : ALAGOA MORRIS

The oil well blowout at Aiteo's well 1 on its Oil Mining Lease (OML) 29 in the Santa Barbara River, Nembe Local Government, Bayelsa State, Nigeria, has attracted attention as its unending spewing has caused much harm and misery over the weeks since it ruptured on 1 November 2021.

A blowout occurs whenever there is the release of uncontrollable oil and gas from an oil well or gas well after all pressure control systems fail.<sup>1</sup> It can occur during the drilling phase, well testing, well completion, during production, or during work over activities.

Mounted pressures due to the presence of highly pressurized oil or gases in the well, either over time or within a short period of time on the wellhead, usually cause well blowouts. They can also happen due to defective equipment and structural failures.<sup>2</sup>

There are three types of well blowouts.<sup>3</sup> They are:

- Underground blowout: This type of blowout is very uncommon -it occurs where fluid from deep high -pressurized formations flow upwards to a shallow, low, -pressurized formation and can occur where casing has not been set.
- Subsea blowouts or underwater blowout: This type of blowout occurs offshore. An example is the BP Macondo Rig blowout in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico. There are two main causes of a subsea or underwater blowout- they are equipment failures and imbalances with encountered subsurface reservoir pressure. This type of blowout is extremely difficult to control.
- Surface blowouts: This is the most common type of blowout- the damage is visibly seen on the rig or well head- spilling gallons of oil into the environment and can cause grave damage. The force of the escaping fluid can be strong enough to damage the drilling rig. In addition to oil, the output of a well blowout might include natural gas, water, drilling fluid, mud, sand, rocks, and other substances

Occasionally blowouts can be so forceful that

it is difficult if not impossible to control them directly from the surface, particularly if there is so much energy in the flowing zone that it does not deplete significantly over time.

This appears to be the case of the OML29, Well 1 blowout in Nembe, Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

In such cases, if the well cannot be capped or contained, other wells (called relief wells) may be drilled to intersect the well or pocket, to allow kill-weight fluids to be introduced at depth. The incidences of pollution from well blowouts, oil spills and other oil exploration related activities have brought the Niger Delta region to the league of the most polluted places on the earth. .

Generally, oil companies have become adept at avoiding blame over oil spills and well blowouts in the Niger Delta.

“Their game has been to blame the victims, the poor community people whose livelihoods are tied to the quality of their environment and who have the least incentive to tamper with oil facilities.”

Their game has been to blame the victims, the poor community people whose livelihoods are tied to the quality of their environment and who have the least incentive to tamper with oil facilities.

Even though oil corporations regularly attempt to use the claim of sabotage as a means of escaping responsibility for operational failures, the widely held view that oil companies are completely excused from responsibility when pollution is caused by sabotage is not backed by law.

What has never been disputed is that no matter the cause of pollution in the oil fields the companies have a responsibility to effect a thorough clean-up of impacted areas. And they have routinely failed to do this.

In a report by News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), in July 6, 2021, then Minister of Environment, Mohammad Abubakar, disclosed in a town hall meeting that Nigeria recorded 4,919 oil spills between 2015 to March 2021 and that the nation has lost 4.5

trillion barrels of oil to theft in four years.<sup>5</sup>In his statement, he blamed majority of the spills on community sabotage while a meager portion of the blame was accorded the oil corporations. According to him, “the operational maintenance is 106, while sabotage is 3,628 and yet to be determined 70, giving the total volume of oil spilled into the environment as 235,206 barrels. His assertion overlooked the fact that every aspect of oil extraction and production contributes a significant level of pollution to the immediate environment. The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) also recorded a total of 1,300 oil spill incidents between 2018 and 2019, averaging 5 oil spills a day.<sup>6</sup>



There have been a couple of notorious well blowouts in Nigeria in recent decades. Below, we have referenced two and also bring up the globally famous case of the Gulf of Guinea well blowout of 2010.

## **2.0. Abbreviated History of Wellhead Blowouts and Oil Spills**



Crude oil everywhere- Photo credit: Alagoa Morris

The responses to the incidents offer starkly different pictures of corporate and political behaviour in the two settings.

- **Gulf of Mexico (April 2010)**

On the 10 April 2010, the BP's Macondo oil well, also known as the Deep water Horizon rig, blew out in the Gulf of Mexico, leading to what became one of the world's worst accidental oil spills. The United States government estimated the total discharge from the spill at 4.9 Mbbbl (210 million US gal; 780,000 m<sup>3</sup>). The rig which was located approximately 41 miles (66 km) off the coast of Louisiana—subsequently sank on April 22. The Deepwater Horizon rig, owned and operated by offshore-oil-drilling company Transocean and leased by oil company BP, was situated in the Macondo oil prospect in the Mississippi Canyon, a valley in the continental shelf.

The oil well over which it was positioned was located on the seabed 4,993 feet (1,522 metres) below the surface and extended approximately 18,000 feet (5,486 metres) into the rock.

On the night of April 20, a surge of natural gas blasted through a concrete core recently installed by contractor Halliburton in order to seal the well for later use. The aftermath of the explosion was that the economic and social prospects in the Gulf Coast States were in terrible condition, as the spill affected many of the industries upon which residents depended, especially tourism and the fishing sector. More than a third of federal waters in the gulf were closed to fishing at the peak of the spill, due to fears of contamination.<sup>7</sup>

The petroleum that had leaked from the well before it was sealed formed a slick extending over more than 57,500 square miles (149,000 square km) of the Gulf of Mexico. To clean oil from the open water, 1.8 million gallons of dispersants—substances that emulsified the oil, thus allowing for easier metabolism by bacteria—were pumped directly into the leak and applied aeriaily to the slick. Booms to corral portions of the slick were deployed,

and the contained oil was then siphoned off or burned.<sup>8</sup>

The spill was stopped through a combination of top kill and the use of a relief well to cut off the well. Government response to the spill may have been affected by the under reporting of the volume of oil that was being dumped into the Gulf of Mexico. However, soon after the incident, the government sent a search a rescue mission and set up a command centre to address potential environmental impacts. The president of the USA was equally involved in monitoring the efforts to stop the disaster.<sup>9</sup> It is said that the spill resulted in the largest mobilization of resources addressing an environmental emergency in the history of the United States.<sup>10</sup>

- **Chevron Funiwa Well Blowout (January 2012)**

- On January 16, 2012, there was a fire outbreak on the K.S. Endeavor jackup drill rig operated for Chevron at its Funiwa gas field (covered OML 86) offshore, about 5 miles off the coast of Bayelsa State, the Niger Delta.<sup>11</sup>

The cause of the fire was attributed to a buildup of gas pressure from drilling that may have resulted in an explosion. An alternate theory is that the Blowout Preventer (BOP) failed to stop gas from leaking into a dangerous area.<sup>12</sup>

A shocking detail from the K.S. Endeavor story was that the crew anticipated an explosion three days before the explosion. The crew's request for evacuation was denied by Chevron—Chevron asked the workers to continue working as if nothing was wrong. But as the workers had predicted, gas pressure continued to build and eventually exploded, igniting a fire that lasted for 46 days.<sup>13</sup>

As with many of such incidents in the Niger Delta region, the K.S. Endeavor explosion was hugely under-reported in the national press partly because of the inadequate resources of the media organizations.



There was also minimum reporting of the incident by Chevron, NNPC and the rig contractor.

The massive explosion from the blowout 'shook the foundations of the houses at Koluama 1, Koluama 2. Kalaweiamama, Opuama, Tamazo, Kiriseighegbene, Abiakiawei, and Olobia among other communities in the Koluama clan.'<sup>14</sup>

Vanguard's South-South Regional Editor Emma Amaize & Sam Oyadongha, who visited Koluama clan on Tuesday, March 6, stated in a Special Report that over a month after the incident, communities were yet to receive relief materials. Community peoples were quoted to have told the newsmen that,

*"We have suffered enough; even the fish we eat because we have no food to eat is smelling gas. Our elders and children frequently stool after eating fish and Chevron did not send relief materials to us".*

One elderly man at Kaleweiamama community, Mavel Sapere, was also quoted to have said:

*"The gas explosion affected us seriously. We are fishermen; we cannot get fish to eat because of the incident. We cried to the Oil Company and government but nobody has come to our rescue since then. There is no food supply to us, no medical team and we don't know why they are treating us like an outcast."*<sup>15</sup>

On February 17, 2012 Chevron commenced the drilling of a relief well through a contractor Transocean Baltic. On March 2, 2012, the relief well intersected the incident well at approximately 9,100 feet (2,774 m). Cement was pumped and the well was successfully killed.<sup>16</sup>

#### • **Ororo-1 Blow Out (May 2020)**

The operations on Ororo-1, a highly pressured well located in Oil Mining Lease (OML) 95, in shallow water offshore Western Niger Delta, experienced a sudden rush of hydrocarbon fluids speeding up from over pressured reservoirs at depths deeper than 8,500 feet and forcing a blowout in May 2020. The Department of Petroleum Resources

(DPR) reported the incident on 18 May 2020. The Blow Out Preventer (BOP) for the main well bore and the BOP for the annulus (the space between the pipe and the skin of the well), both failed. The reservoir pressure was 8,000 pounds per square inch (psi) and above, surface pressure was about 4,600psi as of the time of incident, according to field data.

The public was earlier made to believe that the fire outbreak had been stopped after some months. DPR promised in May 2020 that they would do all what it takes to extinguish the fire including the drilling of a relief well and also engaging the services Boots and Coots, a Halliburton owned firm of well control specialists to help put out the fire.

However, community contacts and a report by Africa Oil + Gas Report affirmed that the fire was still burning as at August 2021. The blowout in the oilrig, followed by a fire, already had huge impacts on the environment generally, the aquatic ecosystem particularly and the livelihoods of community members, especially fishers.

Director of HOMEFF, Nnimmo Bassey, said in a statement responding to the situation said, “

*Considering the enormity of the incident and its impacts, the pall of silence over it is rather dreadful. It is sad to note that oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are rapidly setting a pattern of totally ignoring oil spills for weeks and months in the same way, they have ignored gas flares for decades. This impunity must stop. Our people deserve better. The Niger Delta must not continue to be a sacrifice zone,"*<sup>17</sup>

Shockingly, controversies over the ownership of the well have contributed largely to the abandonment of the well allowing the fire to keep raging unabated for over a year.

# 3.0

## The Nembe Oil/Gas Oil Well Blowout

On 1st November 2021 the people of Worikuma-kiri, a coastal community off the Santa Barbara River in Nembe (Bassambiri) in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa state, a community which plays host to the Aiteo operated OML 29, Well 1, was shaken by the well blowout and the massive spraying of an oil and gas mixture into the air and into the Santa Barbara River.

The incident report gathered from the site of the spill by our independent monitors revealed that the spill had been ongoing for the past weeks and had totally ravaged the coastal communities. So far, according to reports, no fewer than 40 communities have been impacted in the area while the escaping crude has spread beyond the Kula axis in the neighbouring Rivers State.<sup>18</sup>

A report by Nairametrics,<sup>19</sup> on November 11, 2021 states,

*“Upon receipt of the report of the incidence, a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) comprising the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) and Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) was set up.*

### 3.1. Brief History of OML29

The Federal Government of Nigeria granted the initial lease to Shell Petroleum Development Company in 1964 and the license was renewed after twenty-five (25) years in July 1989, for a term of thirty (30) years expiring in June 2019. SPDC is the operator of a Joint Venture Agreement involving the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Shell, Total Exploration and Production Nigeria Limited (TEPNG) and Nigerian Agip Oil Company limited (NAOC).. However in September 2015 the assets were sold to a Nigerian company, Aiteo who acquired the facility from Shell Petroleum Development Company at a total cost of \$1.7 billion.<sup>20</sup>



- **Description of the Facility OML29**

The Oil Mining License 29 (OML29) stretches over an area of 983 square kilometers. It consists of 9 fields including the Oloibiri Oilfield (1st Commercial Oil Discovery in Nigeria), Nembe Oil Field, Santa Barbara Oil Field and Okoroba Oil Fields. It also includes related facilities like the Nembe Creek Trunk Line (NCTL), a 100 kilometers long pipeline with a capacity of 600 thousand barrels per day.

The well was commissioned in 2010 and it evacuates crude to the Bonny Crude Oil Terminal (BCOT). But the BCOT is not part of the transaction and will remain owned & operated by the SPDC JV. The divested infrastructure includes flow stations together with associated gas infrastructure plus oil and gas pipelines within the OML. The divested fields produced on average around 43,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (100%) during 2014. Total E&P Nigeria Limited and Nigerian Agip Oil Company Limited have also assigned their interests of 10% and 5% respectively in the lease, ultimately giving Aiteo Eastern E&P Company Limited a 45% interest in OML29 and the Nembe Creek Trunk Line.<sup>21</sup>

OML29 holds 2.2 billion barrels of oil equivalent (BOE), while its hydrocarbon fields could deliver as much as 160,000 barrels of oil per day, and 300 million cubic feet (8.5 million cubic metres) per day at standard conditions at peak output.<sup>22</sup> OML29 is currently producing from three fields (Nembe, Santa Barbara and Odeama Creeks) with over 120 thousand barrels (19,000 cubic metres) of oil per day production potential. Aiteo Group announced that the company's production levels at OML 29 had peaked at 90,000 barrels (14,000 m<sup>3</sup>) per day, tripling existing production records for the onshore block.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2. Reactions on the OML29 Oil Spill

- **Ijaw Diaspora Council (IDC)**

In reaction to the spill incidence, the Ijaw Diaspora Council (IDC) sent a letter to Aiteo Group requesting that an immediate action should be carried out to ensure that the spill is contained and the communities affected are adequately compensated. The Council has also asked Aiteo Exploration and Production Ltd to provide immediate interim response funding of at least \$500,000 for the affected Ijaw people, to be used to support their initial sustenance in response to the spill.<sup>24</sup>

- **Prof. Rick Steiner**

Prof. Rick Steiner, an international oil spill adviser (who was appointed as adviser by the IDC) in response to a letter sent to Aiteo Oil Company by the Ijaw Diaspora Council (IDC) demands for an urgent clamping of the spewing pipe and also for proper attention and compensation to be given to the affected community people.

Prof. Steiner **calculated the spilt oil to be about 4,320,000 gallons which is over 100,000 barrels.**

He said

*"observing the video provided, it can be estimated that the outflow rate is at least 5 gallons of hydrocarbon fluids per second and likely much higher. With 86,400 seconds/day  $\times$  5 gallons/second  $\times$  10 days, this equals 4,320,000 gallons (over 100,000 barrels) of toxic hydrocarbons already released into the coastal mangrove ecosystem. At 30 days, the amount spilled would already have topped 300,000 barrels of crude oil. By world standards, this is a major spill, and its effects are likely catastrophic ecologically, economically, and socially to local communities and the Nigerian law requires that the Responsible Party in this case, Aiteo – should immediately stop the outflow, deploy sufficient cleanup equipment and personnel to contain and remove spilled pollutants, and initiate a damage assessment."*<sup>25</sup>

In his urgent recommendations regarding the spill, Steiner demanded that:

1. Aiteo/NNPC must immediately kill the blowout (either fitting a capping stack to the failed wellhead, drilling a relief well nearby to conduct a bottom kill of the well, or other kill technique), as required by Nigerian law, and retain the failed wellhead ("Christmas Tree") structure for future independent analysis to ascertain the cause of the failure.
2. Aiteo/NNPC must immediately deploy sufficient oil spill containment and cleanup equipment and personnel to collect as much of the spilled hydrocarbon pollutant as possible, hiring local community members as possible. This is clearly a Tier III oil spill (the largest category), well beyond the capability of local cleanup assets such as Clean Nigeria Associates, and Aiteo/NNPC should contract Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL) in Southampton UK to conduct a large-scale Tier III spill response.
3. Aiteo/NNPC must provide immediate, interim financing to the affected communities of at least \$500,000, to be used by the communities in their initial response to the spill. It should be made clear that this initial funding will in no way prejudice future community claims for compensation for the spill. This initial compensation will allow the community to purchase alternative food resources during the spill (as fish from the spill area are contaminated and must not be caught and consumed); purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); and conduct its overall response to this emergency.
4. Aiteo/NNPC, Bayelsa State, and the federal government must agree to support a technical advisor for the Ijaw communities to join the official Joint Investigation Team (JIT).
5. Aiteo/NNPC must immediately commission an independent, scientific environmental damage assessment by a credible, independent scientific institution.

6. Aiteo must preserve all evidence, including documents, video and photographs, and actual equipment (e.g. the failed Christmas Tree structure) that may be relevant to determining the cause of the wellhead failure and spill.
7. Aiteo must provide the community with all records pertaining to this well, including its design and installation date, any/all inspection and maintenance the company has performed on the well, any deficiencies the company has noted, all corrective/remedial actions the company has taken on the well, etc.
8. The Nigerian federal government should convene an independent inquiry as to the cause, response, and impact of this major oil spill.

He added that the Nembe OML 29 blowout is a major spill, that is seriously impacting the local environment and communities, and the government and industry must respond accordingly.

- **King Bubaraye Dakolo, the Ibenanaowei of Ekpetiama Kingdom in Bayelsa State**

Also King Bubaraye Dakolo, the Ibenanaowei of Ekpetiama Kingdom in Bayelsa State while discussing the oil spill and its devastating impact on Bassambiri and neighbouring communities said,

*"it is a shame for such a thing to be happening in 2021. As we know, there are 159 oil fields and 1481 wells that are producing and over 1000 wells that are not operational lying low like land mines waiting to explode anytime from now and this one has erupted for 22days none-stop. With a combination of crude oil and gas from a wellhead with high velocity, the area cannot be contained with booms. The wellhead is not protected, not fenced and there is no security".*

"The painful thing is that the company is now talking about sabotage instead of showing empathy and saving lives -they are instead accusing the people. I am happy because we now have the social media which

is now showing the shame of the oil industries and how the Niger Delta people are being treated. The response of the company (Aiteo) is too slow, but I am not surprised, it has been the attitude of all oil companies in this part of the world- they do not care about the welfare and livelihoods of the people as revealed in their lack of preparations for times like this and their willful abandonment of the wellhead."

So far, the evidence before us shows that the company has brought in some bags of rice and Indomie noodles. There has not yet been any mention of compensation. As a business concern, they must take responsibilities and they are supposed to be ready for this type of eventualities.

### **Government Officials Visits**

On the 24th November, 19 days after, the Nigerian Federal Government sent the Minister of State for Petroleum, Chief Timipre Sylva, in company of the member representing Nembe/Brass federal constituency, Israel Sunny- Goli and CEO, Upstream Regulatory Commission, to assess the situation.

The Minister and his team sympathized with the community and explained that the Federal Government is feeling the pains of the people of the impacted communities and local government council.

In the same vein, the Bayelsa state governor, Douye Diri represented by his deputy, Senator Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo, at the State Executive Council meeting in Yenagoa expressed concern over the spillage of crude oil and its attendant degradation of the environment; and called on Aiteo to take urgent steps at initiating remediation efforts towards ensuring that the spill at its facility is brought under control.<sup>26</sup>

On Wednesday December 1, 2021- Governor Douye Diri of Bayelsa State, visited the site of the ongoing oil spill in Nembe, 30 days after the incident occurred.

He described the spill as the worst he had seen in his lifetime. The state governor visited the site 7 days after the Minister of State for Petroleum, Chief Timipre Sylva. While Sylva expressed satisfaction with the response plan to the leak incident which involved intensified recovery of spilled crude, deployment of booms to keep the spill from spreading further, Diri claimed that an estimated two million barrels of crude had reportedly been spilled into the river, polluting the flora and fauna of the area.

The Governor expressed shock over the quantity of crude that has been spilled into the environment, and called on the Federal Government and operators of the oil field to immediately take action to stop it.

While assuring the people that appropriate measures would be taken to seek redress, he noted that the quest by oil firms to make money would not be at the expense of the lives of the people. "I therefore call on the Federal Government, the operators of the oil field, NNPC and Aiteo to immediately look for a superior technical know-how to contain and stop the spread of the oil. For Bayelsa, the only thing we know how to do best is fishing.

*Today, our own fishing route is endangered. I equally call on the Federal Government to immediately react and ensure that our fishing route is safe."* Diri said.

Diri directed the State Emergency Management Agency and Ministry of Health to immediately provide relief materials and healthcare services to the people.<sup>27</sup>

#### • HOMEF's Concerns

It is not enough for the Federal Government of Nigeria to send the Minister of State for Petroleum Chief Timipre Sylva to Nembe.

The President, who doubles as the Nigerian Minister of Petroleum, should at least also visit the site of the well blowout to physically ascertain the extent of damages the spill has caused on the lives and livelihoods of the poor community people who depend solely

on the proceeds from their coastal environment for sustenance.

It should be recalled that when a blowout occurred in the BP's Macondo rig in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, launching what become the world's worst accidental oil spill, destroying almost the whole coastal environment of the Gulf of Mexico, the then President of America, President Barack Obama, visited the site to address the people and on 30 April 2010, ten days after his visit to spill site ordered an immediate hold on the issuing of new offshore drilling leases and authorized the investigation of 29 oil rigs in the Gulf in an effort to determine the cause of the disaster. Six-month later a moratorium on offshore drilling (below 500 ft (150 m) of water) was enforced by the United States Department of the Interior.<sup>28</sup>

We are hereby calling on the Federal Government of Nigeria to take the bold step of visiting the wellhead blowout site as well as stopping all forms of divestments by multinational oil companies until they replace all decrepit facilities, clean up all spills, and also make hefty security deposits against accidents of this nature.

#### Aiteo's Defense

Reacting to the assertion by the Bayelsa state Government that over 2 million barrels of crude oil had spilled into the Santa Barbara River, Aiteo's Global Group Director/Coordinator, Mr Andrew Oru, said during a tour of the facility with reporters on Thursday 2 December 2021; *that the spill was of a special type – a gas blowout – which involved 80 per cent gas and 20 per cent oil. According to him, this is contrary to the impression that the entire environment has been seriously polluted.*



He described the previous testimonies as “spurious” claims that the leak spilled two million barrels of oil into the creeks, explaining that the well's production capacity, including its total reserves, was nowhere near two million barrels.

*“The talk of two million barrels of oil spilling from the well is spurious. Two million barrels is about two super tankers. The oil would have spread over the entire country. The reserve of the well itself is nowhere near two million barrels.”<sup>29</sup>*

From the report by Environews –the company started that the incidence began on the 3rd of November while in some other reports they stated 5th November 2021. It was also strange to hear Aiteo through its official claim that 2 million barrels of crude oil would flood the entire Nigerian nation. Aiteo has made promises about when they would kill the spill, giving two days and during the Governor's visit saying they would stop the spill in a “few” days. Those few days have become rather elastic to the detriment of the people and the environment.



Spread of the spill on Santa Barbara River. Photo credit: Alagoa Morris

## 4.0. Consequences of the Oil Spill

Oil spillages have major impacts on the ecosystems. Immense tracts of the mangrove forests, which are especially susceptible to damage from oil, have been destroyed. The spills also impact the socio economic wellbeing of the people as their sources of livelihood which is mostly fishing and small scale farming are largely destroyed by the crude oil. They also have direct impacts on human health due to the heavy metals in the oil. Elements such as lead, cadmium, arsenic and mercury pose special health impacts, causing cancers, kidney failures, reproductive problems, birth defects and many others.



Spread of the spill on Santa Barbara River. Photo credit: Alagoa Morris

## 5.0. Field Investigation report

During the field visit by monitors, it was observed that booms deployed by the company to contain and prevent further spread of the crude were not completely effective as large volume of the crude oil was flowing out to the Santa Barbara River and spreading towards the Ocean. The direction of flow was facilitated by the ebbing tide/current.



Incalculable damage: Santa Barbara River. Photo credit: Morris Alagoa

However, because the Santa Barbara River ebbs and return to full tide, portions of the river away from the spill point environment are also affected. At ebb tide, the heavily crude oil-soiled banks of the Santa Barbara River and fibrous mangrove roots become conspicuous. Without going into the mangrove swamps, one can imagine the heavy presence of the polluting crude oil all over considering how water spreads easily in mangrove swamps.

This is the second time a crude oil spill is occurring in the same oil field site of OML 29, Well 1 within the past five years. The previous spill was recorded on October 2, 2019. After that spill, a Joint Investigation Visit (JIV) was conducted on that environment on October 10, 2019 but the JIV was inconclusive due to disagreement between the company and the community people on the cause of the spill. It is on record that till date the site was not revisited for proper investigation.

The presence of crude oil in the mangrove swamps means that aquatic lives like periwinkle, crayfish, crabs, oysters and even fish would be wiped out.

As a matter of urgency, there is need for proper cleanup and remediation of the impacted environment. While the people await JIV, it is a known industry demand that no matter the cause of spill, the operator has the responsibility to clean up the environment.

- **Testimonies Gathered from Community People**

During the visit, some affected community persons shared their experiences and the impacts of the spill on their lives and livelihoods. According to our community contact person, Sunny-kiri fishing community is being occupied by fishers from Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom states.

1. Esther Marcus, a woman from the impacted community expressed displeasure about the incident, In her

words, "I am from Azuzuama in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Fishing is my major occupation and this net [pointing at the fishing net] is my tool of fishing, but since crude oil from the wellhead flooded the river we have not been getting fish anymore. This has been the situation for three weeks now, since the wellhead ruptured. The relief materials they shared are not enough; even though we normally contribute for whatever we are asked to contribute as members of the Sunny-Kiri fishing settlement, I have been in Sunny-Kiri for five years now. As you can see, I am pregnant and will give birth soon and I am yet to buy the complete baby things. Now this crude oil on the river has dashed my hope from the only source I was relying to get money to buy baby things and also take care of my children's school fees."

2. Helen Nathaniel informed us that she has been here engaging in fishing activities for twenty-one (21) years. She lamented, "Since the crude oil from the oil well flooded the river and swamps around us we no longer catch fish and crayfish. Even if we go out to fish, besides not catching fish our nets get soiled with crude oil and that renders the fishing nets useless. The Company should compensate us to enable us make ends meet in terms of feeding and replacement of our fishing gears that have been affected by this crude oil. Since I have been in this place, I have not experienced such magnitude of pollution; it is everywhere in our environment. The water has spread the crude oil everywhere."



3. Worikuma Ivory Pegi [Elect] is the landlord of the OML 29 Well 1, the immediate polluted environment; according to him, "I named the location where the incident happened by my name, Worikuma-kiri [literally, Worikuma's land/settlement]. I have been there for almost 26 years going about my fishing activities. The incident happened on the 1st of November, 2021. I cannot evaluate the total damage there as a fisherman and a farmer. We have been denied of our source of income; we are now starving, even as all our fishing gears have been destroyed. So far, some other nearby fishing settlements have also been affected as well. Communities such as Aro-kiri, Atamata-kiri and Tweni 1 and 2, Waekite-kiri, Amgba-kiri, Barampagamo, etc have all been impacted. The spill affected about 50 fishing settlements and so if the oil company does not come to our aid; the government should come and do something meaningful.

### Conclusion/ Demands

Presently there has been no officially determined cause of the raging high pressure oil spill at OML 29 Well 1. Yet, the operator, Aiteo Eastern Exploration and Production Company [AEEPCO] alleged sabotage when in fact, it could be as a result of failure of the ancient wellhead. We call for a proper joint investigation team to be set up to unravel the cause of this disaster.

#### • Demands

In view of the above, the following demands are hereby made;

1. The Federal Government should declare a state of environmental emergency in Bayelsa State and deploy all resources to stop oil spills and gas flares across the state and commence an environmental assessment of the State in a similar way UNEP assessed the Ogoni



Worikuma-Kiri - Photo by Alagoa Morris

- environment.
2. The Nigerian President who is also the Minister of Petroleum should, as a matter of urgency, visit the environment of interest and show commitments to the protection of lives and property of community people, just as former president Shehu Shagari did during the Funiwa blowout off Koluama and Fishtown in 1980/81. It is not enough to send the Minister of State for Petroleum to visit the people.
3. The Minister of Environment should immediately visit the communities and take steps to ensure that there is a day-to-day monitoring of the quality of air and environment that the people are exposed to.
4. NEMA should take urgent steps to evacuate the communities exposed to the toxic pollutants to a safe location pending when the spill is stopped and the environment is cleaned up.
5. A comprehensive cleanup and remediation plan should be immediately drawn up; fashioned in line with the UNEP recommendations for Ogoni in the interest of environmental justice and in line with Article 24 of the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights.

6. Adequate compensation should be paid to victims; for general and specific damages ensuring that no victim is left out.
7. An immediate health audit should be set up, the community people should be given access to proper health care facilities, and basic amenities such as pipe borne water and sanitation facilities should be provided for the fishing settlements.
8. The Federal Government should stop all moves by international oil companies to divests without first ensuring that their facilities are in top

condition. They should also be required to clean up all existing or residual pollution in their oil fields, stop gas flares and make adequate financial deposits to cover the clean up costs of oil spills that may occur from those facilities within the next one decade.



A dead fish picked up from the River , photo by Alagoa Morris





## **Postscript**

As this report was concluded, it was reported that the Aiteo OML Well 01 on Santa Barbara River was “top killed” on 8 December 2021. All recommendations and points raised in the report remain valid.

# End Notes

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