



SEEDS OF HOPE

OGONI WOMEN SOWING SEEDS OF HOPE



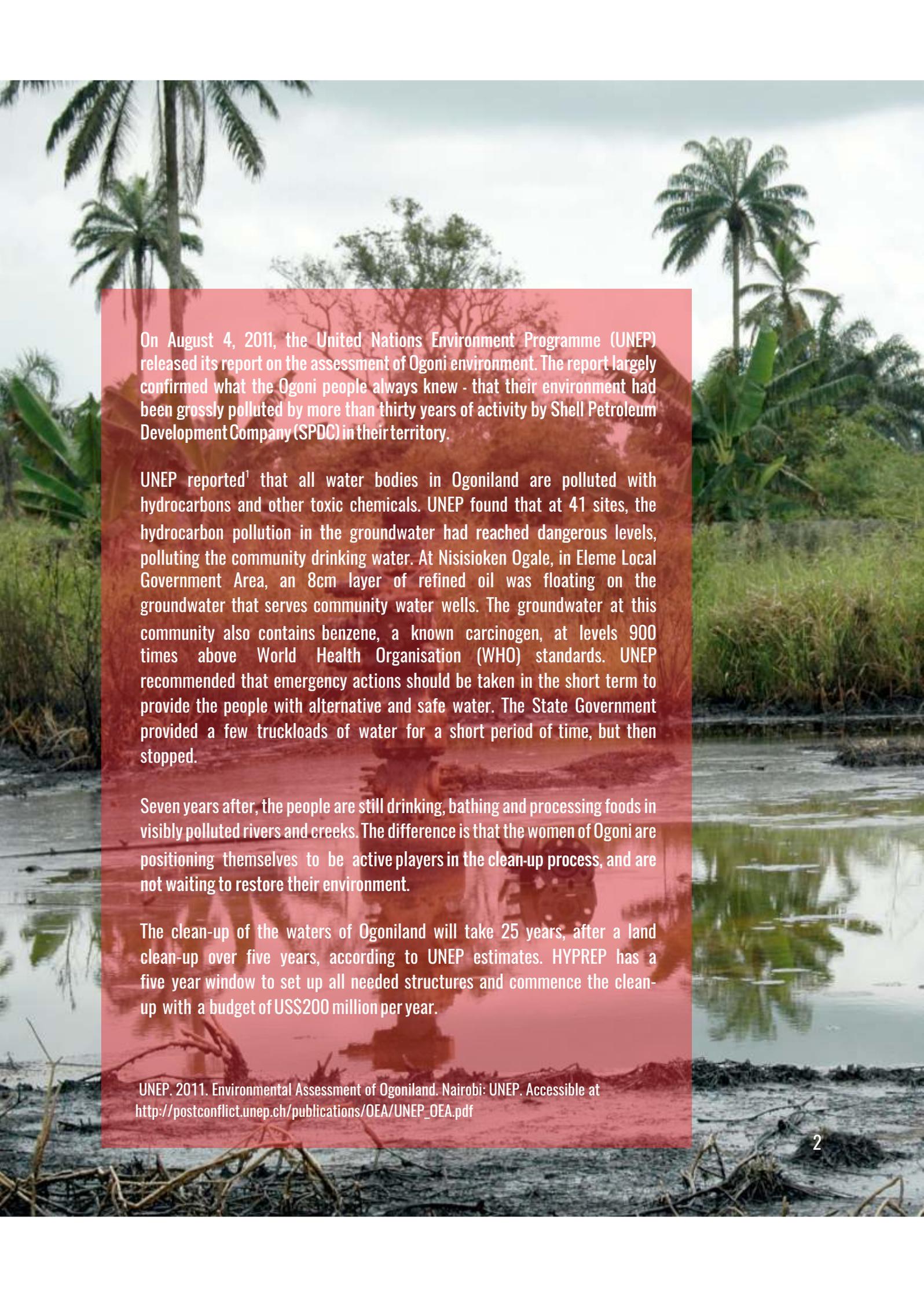
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Ogoni Women Sowing Seeds of Hope

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On August 4, 2011, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released its report on the assessment of Ogoni environment. The report largely confirmed what the Ogoni people always knew - that their environment had been grossly polluted by more than thirty years of activity by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in their territory.

UNEP reported¹ that all water bodies in Ogoniland are polluted with hydrocarbons and other toxic chemicals. UNEP found that at 41 sites, the hydrocarbon pollution in the groundwater had reached dangerous levels, polluting the community drinking water. At Nisisioken Ogale, in Eleme Local Government Area, an 8cm layer of refined oil was floating on the groundwater that serves community water wells. The groundwater at this community also contains benzene, a known carcinogen, at levels 900 times above World Health Organisation (WHO) standards. UNEP recommended that emergency actions should be taken in the short term to provide the people with alternative and safe water. The State Government provided a few truckloads of water for a short period of time, but then stopped.

Seven years after, the people are still drinking, bathing and processing foods in visibly polluted rivers and creeks. The difference is that the women of Ogoni are positioning themselves to be active players in the clean-up process, and are not waiting to restore their environment.

The clean-up of the waters of Ogoniland will take 25 years, after a land clean-up over five years, according to UNEP estimates. HYPREP has a five year window to set up all needed structures and commence the clean-up with a budget of US\$200 million per year.

UNEP. 2011. Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland. Nairobi: UNEP. Accessible at http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/OEA/UNEP_OEA.pdf

Restoration on Their Terms

While many community people are waiting on the sidelines to see how the clean-up of Ogoni will go, many women, including those involved in Lokiaka Women Community Development Centre, have been busy preparing to be active participants in the processes. “I know that the clean-up exercise is a highly technical process and the community women who are mostly subsistence farmers, fishers and traders will be excluded from the contracts that the men are angling for.” says Martha Agbani, the executive director of Lokiaka Community Development Centre.



Martha Agbani,
Executive Director of Lokiaka Community
Development Centre.

This was the genesis of the project called the “Cultivation of Ogoni Economic and Fruit Trees and Mangrove Cultivation,” to bring together women from Ogoni Coastal communities especially those whose sources of livelihoods have been highly impacted by crude oil pollution. The project involved women in a series of trainings on how to establish fruit and indigenous tree nurseries, garden and medicinal plants, and to market seedlings to the many people across the community working to restore the land and environment after decades of devastation. “The seed cash from the Global Greengrants Fund (GGF) empowered us to embark on the project and this has afforded the women the opportunity to display their talents, tenacity, creativity and productivity with just a little support,” Martha Agbani says. We can follow the results of this work through the eyes and stories of the women of Ogoni.



Mrs Beatrice Nlubu

Breaking the Power of Poverty

Beatrice Nlubu is a proud farmer of forest plants, fruit trees, vegetables and medicinal plants. Her nursery in Barabe Nukpo in Bori/Khana Local Government Area is a delight to behold. It brims with a wide variety of plants including: mangroves, avocado pear, monkey kola (*Cola Parchycarpa*), star apple (cherry or cola heterophylla), soghor (*gnetum Africanum*), star fruit (carambola), pepper fruit (*dennettia tripetala*) and scent leaf (*ocimum gratissimum*).

Some of the plants that Mrs Nlubu tends are in danger of extinction and her efforts at reviving them are bringing her brisk business. She makes NGN 10,000.00 (\$28) from the sales of soghor saplings alone on each market day.

In her words, “Since I began this nursery business, I am better able to take care of my family. We do not go to bed hungry anymore. By the time the clean-up begins I will have more economic trees in my nursery and the sales of mangroves will greatly boost my economy.”

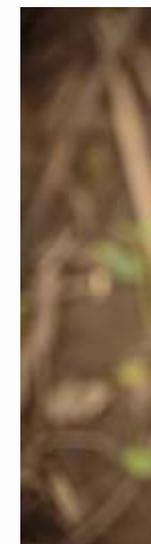
Planting What You Eat

Barisi Dumbor is from the ecologically devastated K-Dere community. She is a farmer and a widow with two children. She recently participated in two trainings organised by Lokiaka Community Development Centre where she learned how to cultivate mangroves and fruit trees.

The mangroves do well when planted in salt water. However, since the water close to the community is heavily polluted she has to canoe offshore to fetch the water for her nursery. Her aim is to develop nurseries that would produce saplings which would be required during the Ogoni environment restoration by HYPREP with the hope that this will provide sufficiently for her family.

“My major challenge is that I have to paddle my little canoe far into the sea to fetch salty water that is cleaner than what we have closer to our community. I prefer to use the natural salty water because I don't have the money to buy iodized salt in the market to mimic sea water,” worries Mrs Dumbor.

She has also nursed some fruit tree seeds which are indigenous to Ogoniland. These include black pear, avocado pear, native apple, ginger, oil palm and mangoes. She is happy to provide mangroves for restoration, but she is equally happy for women to have access to land to grow fruit and agriculture, and she will advocate for a restoration process that leaves aside land for women's agriculture so that she and other women will continue to benefit.





She has sourced good fruits, ate them and nursed their seeds. She looks forward to bumper harvests and sales in due season: “Raising a nursery of mangroves and fruit trees brings me more income than cultivating food staples such as cassava and yams and the initial capital invested is much less.

Some months ago, I bought an avocado pear for less than NGN 100.00 (\$0.27 USD), ate it, planted the seed and sold the sapling for NGN 700.00 (\$1.92 USD) in a short period of time. The fruit was expensive because that was not the avocado season. The training I received from Lokiaka opened my eyes to the fact that when I throw a seed away, I am actually throwing money away. Nowadays, the seeds of every fruit I eat go to my nursery. I am very thankful to GGF for supporting Lokiaka to support us.”

The women of Ogoni and Lokiaka Women Development Centre are driven by the Ogoni spirit of determination. Although the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Programme (HYPREP) has been inaccessible to communities' representatives, women have participated in public events to request that HYPREP holds direct consultation and opportunities to effectively engage with the agency or contractors. As Martha Agbani of Lokiaka puts it, "We are forward looking. We read the signs. We have fought against Shell's pollution. Now we are bracing for the clean-up. We will not be caught napping. No. We have waited for decades, buried several of our relatives and shed enough tears. Now we are ready to press forward. We will not only be part of restoring hope, we will oppose anyone bringing further pollution in our territory. Enough is truly enough."

