



# Have you been \$hell \$hocked?

MURDER WELL GO SHELL  
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**Despite all the talk of “values” and human rights you’ll find on their website, Shell’s recent oil spill in Sydney Harbour is small change compared to the destruction they wreak on a global scale.**

Royal Dutch Shell began mining for petroleum in the delta region of the Niger River in Nigeria in 1958. This area is the land of the Ogoni people. According to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development the Niger Delta, once the home of coastal rainforest and mangrove habitats, has become the most endangered river delta in the world. This is as a direct result of nearly four decades of oil extraction by Shell.

Shell has extracted \$30 billion in oil from the lands of the Ogoni people, yet they have never consulted with or compensated them. The royalties from oil sales stops at the Nigerian Government, while the Ogoni people lack running water, electricity, adequate schools and health care. The once rich farmland of Ogoniland has also continually been poisoned by oil spills and the venting of toxic gases.

Around 40% of Shell's recorded oil spills have occurred in Nigeria even though only 14% of their oil comes from the region. Shell has constructed its pipelines above ground, crossing through villages (within metres from homes) and lands once used for agriculture, making them almost useless. Shell has never re-routed any of these pipelines, even though they have claimed to have done so. An environmental impact assessment has never been carried out and when Shell finally pulled out of Ogoniland in 1993 they refused to clean up the mess they had left behind

The more than 100 oil wells within Ogoni territory have caused severe environmental damage. Between 1976 and 1991 there were officially 2976 oil spills in the Niger delta; each of these spills averaging 700 barrels. This correlates to an oil spill every four weeks. The response taken to these oil spills was often very slow, causing severe environmental devastation. A major spill occurred at Ebubu in 1970 and was set alight, causing irreparable damage to the surrounding area, which it is still unusable today. Shell claims to have cleaned this site twice, but oil is still finding its way into surrounding water supplies.

The environmental impact of Shell's presence in Nigeria extends further than its oil spills. Shell releases gas by-products through huge open gas flares. These burn for 24 hours a day, with some burning for the last 30 years, and are often located adjacent to Ogoni villages. The villages have had to live with these flares, and the thick soot they emit, which has covered the area and contaminated water supplies. According to Ken Saro-Wiwa, the leader of the Ogoni people's [peaceful] resistance movement, the gas-flaring, sometimes in the middle of villages, has destroyed wildlife, plant life, poisoned the air and water, and left residents half-deaf and prone to respiratory diseases. "Whenever it rains in Ogoniland, all we have is acid rain which further poisons water courses, streams, creeks, and agricultural land" he said.

Shell Nigeria's 1995 publication *The Ogoni Issue* states: "allegations of environmental devastation in Ogoni, and elsewhere in our operating area, are simply not true. We do have environmental problems but these do not add up to anything like devastation." Yet, in the same pamphlet, Shell admits to the existence of 3000 sites affected by drilling operations, spread across the Delta, the flaring of 1100 million standard cubic feet of gas a day, and the occurrence of acid rain for one month

a year in the Delta. Shell also admits to flaring 1.1 billion cubic feet of natural gas each day for 35 years. According to calculations undertaken by the World Wide Fund for Nature, this flaring is a major contributor to global warming

In response to growing pressure for reform in Ogoniland in 1993, Shell ceased oil production there, but retained its network of pipelines carrying oil produced elsewhere in Nigeria. The World Council of Churches has found evidence that Shell has not in fact ceased oil production in Ogoniland. Shell insists its production wells are idle but admits that 24 oil spills have occurred in Ogoniland since they ceased production. Shell has plans to return to Ogoniland by the turn of the century

*Colin Salter*

