Nigeria: Women of Idheze shut down Agip’s oil facilities

We had already shared (see WRM's bulletin Nº 111) what the ‘Operation Climate Change’ -- launched on January 1, 1999 -- did in the Niger Delta: activists shut down oil flow stations and gas flares. In response, many houses were destroyed, people were killed and women were raped. However, the struggle continued and mainly women started a joint campaign to protect life by putting a stop to the depredations of Big Oil. They won a fight: in January 2006 Nigerian courts ordered Shell to stop the flaring of natural gas in Ogoniland.

Now, they have gone for more. Women of Idheze community in Isoko South Local Council of Delta State have again shut down oil facilities of the Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) alleging failure to pay compensation for damages caused by chemical/waste fluid of the firm flushed into the community.

Recently, chemical/waste from the rig site was discharged into the swamp of Idheze leading to the death and destruction of aquatic life. Many dead aquatic animals were still afloat in the ponds during the following days.

The women had early in December 2006 seized oil facilities belonging to Agip, owing to the failure of the company to implement an earlier agreement signed with the community on their entrance into their land.

They revealed that a spill led to the death of seven adults and three children and also destroyed economic trees and crops in 1982.

The women carried placards, barricaded the main entrance of the company's facilities and turned back all workers. Some of the placards bore inscriptions such as: "We are tired of the inhuman treatment of NAOC", "We will continue to disrupt your activities until you meet our demands", "Pay compensation for the chemical/waste fluid you have used to pollute our land."

The women came to the premises with their utensils and food items, including bags of rice, yams, garri as well as canopies with which they erected makeshift tents. They vowed not to vacate the yard until their demands were met.

According to them, after all that the community suffered as a result of the spill, Agip has refused to heed the advice of the inspectorate body of the Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC) which ordered Agip to compensate the community.

Leader of the protesters, Mrs. Mercy Okunwa, who spoke on behalf of the community's President-General, Joel Ogbru, accused the company of insensitivity to the plight of the locals as well as reneging on agreement reached with the community in Port Harcourt last December.

She said the non-challant attitude of NAOC to the issues of their community, led to a protest by the community on December 19, 2006 to register their "vexation but until now none of the promises made

by NAOC when they invited the community people has been implemented".

She disclosed that many of the servicing companies operating in the rigs were "carrying out the job with the knowledge of Agip but detrimental to the community because none of them pays royalty to the community."

They accused servicing firms such as SERIC, IMPEANTI, and KCA Deutage for flouting outrightly, agreements reached with the community, saying that Agip conspired with some of the servicing firms to rob the community of their entitlements. She lamented that contracts that should have been given to the indigenes were executed by outsiders.

"We are peace-loving people and knowing that Agip has been deceiving us, we wouldn't want anything that will be detrimental this time to our people and so until the company's management responds to our demand, we will not vacate the premises," the aggrieved women declared.

Article based on: “Women protesters shut oil facility as toxic waste ravages community”, Chido Okafor, Warri, sent by Oilwatch, e-mail: info@oilwatch.org