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Environmental Degradation and Women's Engagement in the Ogoni Clean-up Project

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ANNOTATION

This article examines the gendered impact of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta and efforts at remediation with a focus on the Ogoni Cleanup Project (HYPREP). Rural women in Ogoniland are primary users of the land. Their dependence on the environment for sustenance puts them at the forefront of those impacted by environmental pollution. In their daily household chores of cooking, fetching water/wood, and washing clothes in addition to farm work and fishing, women are more prone to dermal contact with contaminated soil/water. This study makes an argument for a gender-sensitive approach in the remediation and clean-up process in Ogoniland. In examining ways in which women are implicated in environmental concerns in Ogoniland, an ethnographic survey was carried out in the four local government areas of Ogoniland –Eleme, Gokana, Tai and Khana. Individual and focus-group interviews were conducted with women across different social strata. Extant literature on oil-related activities was reviewed. Of great importance were key documents on Ogoni's environmental condition, particularly UNEP's environmental assessment of Ogoniland, as well as several reports by Amnesty International on oil spills and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. The study puts women at the forefront of the research and this allows a nuanced discussion of the peculiar needs of women, their capacity and challenges in the ways they use, manage, make decisions and benefit from environmental resources. The Ogoni Clean-up Project has the potential to empower women and promote gender equality, but gender inclusivity must be adopted into all aspects of the project's design and implementation. The work contributes to the literature on women and environmental management and can be used by policymakers for developing more inclusive policies on natural resource management.

KEYWORDS: Ogoni, environmental degradation, gender inequality, women, HYPREP.

Introduction

The Ogoni people reside at the South-Eastern tip of the Niger Delta. Their history is intricately intertwined with that of oil exploration and production and the attendant environmental consequences including oil spills

and pollution. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the estimated population of the Ogoni people is around 1.5 million. However, it is noteworthy that there is no official census of the Ogoni population, and some estimates suggest that the actual number could be higher or lower than this figure (UNDP, 2011). The Royal Dutch Shell began the exploration of oil in Ogoni in 1958 until the 1990s. During this time, the company extracted 634 million barrels of oil worth US\$5.2 billion from Ogoni (Pegg and Zabbey, 2013:392). In 1993, the Ogoni people under the umbrella of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) mobilized against Shell. The contradiction of oil wealth amidst pandemic poverty, environmental degradation and State neglect led to a series of non-violent protests against Shell, which effectively stopped the multinational from further oil explorations (Osha, 2006). It has been over 6 decades since the region played host to Shell or any other oil company but the effects of oil exploration remain a constant threat to the people. This is a result of the widespread network of pipelines across the length and breadth of Ogoni. The main Shell trunk lines pass through Ogoniland to Bonny, from Bonny to Port Harcourt, and from Port Harcourt Refinery to Umu Nwa Nwa (UNEP, 2011).

The government-sponsored United Nations Environmental Programme's (UNEP) environmental assessment of Ogoni, conducted in 2011, refocused public attention on the debilitating effects of oil exploration and production in Ogoni and elsewhere in the Niger Delta. This seminal study provides profound insights into the nature and extent of damage to the ecosystem. Some activities that cause this damage include oil spills, gas flaring, pre-production projects such as land clearance for seismic lines, seismic and drilling camps, laying of pipelines; and artisanal refining. All the above-mentioned activities have adverse effects on the environment according to the report. In response to UNEP's report, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) otherwise known as the Ogoni-Clean Up Project, in 2016 with the task of (a) determining the extent and means of environmental remediation; (b) enhancing local capacity for better environmental management and ensure sustainable development; (c) ensuring human security and peacebuilding and (d) strengthening governance, transparency and accountability (HYPREP Gazette, 2016). However, this effort by the government-sponsored project has failed to adequately address issues of environmental degradation, especially concerning the experiences of women in Ogoniland.

In this paper, we posit that environmental degradation in the Niger Delta has gendered impacts and any efforts at remediation must take into account the experiences of women. Societal groups are differently impacted by environmental change depending on their positioning on the societal ladder in terms of age, sex, education, and economic status. It is this placement that determines access to societal good and central to this is gender. Cultural norms and patriarchy are critical to the female gender's capacity to access natural resources even when they are the most dependent on the environment. And it is in acknowledgement of these gendered differences in natural resource management that the World Bank points to the need for gender-sensitive interventions, that "address the specific needs and opportunities of rural women and men, particularly the poorest, to reduce inequalities, stimulate growth and reverse environmental degradation" (cited in Samandari, 2017). Rural women in Ogoni are primary users of the land; hence, their dependence on the environment for sustenance puts them at the forefront of those impacted by environmental pollution. Women are more prone to dermal contact with contaminated soil and water in their daily household chores of cooking, fetching water, and washing clothes in addition to farming and fishing. Therefore, they deserve special consideration to ensure the effective design and implementation of the clean-up process.

This study makes a case for a gender-sensitive approach in Ogoni's remediation and clean-up process. In furtherance of this approach, it is important to identify and pay attention to gender needs and disparities. A

report by Amnesty International on the oil spill in the Niger Delta region observed that those involved in oil spill investigations are mostly male and oil companies and Nigerian oil regulars only deal with chiefs and other elite male members of spill-affected communities (Amnesty International, 2013). As asserted by Ulf Kristofferson, Humanitarian Coordinator of the Joint United Nations (UN) Program on HIV/AIDS, “Whether it is economic security, food security, health security, personal or political security, women and young girls are affected in a very specific way due to their physical, emotional and material differences and due to the important social, economic, and political inequalities existing between women and men” (Mckay, 2004:153-4).

The failure to recognize the peculiar needs of women and their input in the decision-making process will perpetuate inequalities and deepen grievances. This is in tandem with the fundamental ideas of Feminist Political Ecology which is the theoretical framework employed in this study. Feminist political ecology (FPE) provides a framework to examine ways in which women are implicated and affected by environmental concerns in Ogoni. It treats gender as a crucial variable - in relation to class, race, and other relevant dimensions of political ecological life – in constituting access to, control over, and knowledge of natural resources (Sunberg, 2014; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangeri, 1996).

Feminist political ecology allows the researcher to pay attention to everyday intimate and embodied practices. It is in this space that social reproductions occur, where subject identities and social orders are brought into being and contested that one can tease out the complexities in women’s engagement with the environment. In other words, FPE foregrounds every day as a significant scale of analysis (Sunberg, 2014) This framework is used in analysing the intricate link between gender and other paradigms of power including age and class in mediating Ogoni women’s access to and control over natural resources, risk assessment and decision making.

Methodology

An ethnographic survey was carried out in the four local government areas of Ogoni—Eleme, Gokana, Tai and Khana, with the use of purposive sampling to ascertain units of women to be interviewed. Individual interviews were conducted with women across different social strata including local farmers, civil servants and women leaders. HYPREP members and traditional leaders were interviewed from the selected communities. In Gokana, the research team visited impacted communities in Baranyonwa-Dere (B. Dere), Kegbara-Dere (K. Dere), Biara, Bodo and Mogho. A total number of 12 people were interviewed; 11 of these were women and one male community leader. In all the communities excluding Biara, there were signs of remediation. In Bodo and B-Dere, two focus group discussions with the women were conducted. Khana Local Government area would seem to be the least impacted of the four. It also has the least number of remediation Lots. HYPREP presence at the time of the field study is only in Yorla, and Kpean communities. Two women and a youth community leader were interviewed here. In Eleme, a total of 7 people were interviewed, with 6 women and one man who is a youth leader in Akpajo. Tai was the last LGA visited and here, 19 people were interviewed including a senior HYPREP staff. The women interviewed were mostly between the ages of 30 - 60 years. Six of the women were aged 61 and above, while 3 were below the age of 25 years.

The conversational interviewing method of data collection was used and its open-ended pattern of conversation allowed for a wide range of answers. The limitation here was that respondents sometimes veered off track, however, research questions were already prepared to help guide the interviews. These knowledgeable lines of inquiry helped mitigate limitations associated with conversational interviewing. The study also relied on key documents on Ogoni's environmental condition, particularly UNEP’s environmental assessment of Ogoni, as well as several reports by Amnesty International on oil spills and environmental

degradation in the Niger Delta. In addition to this, scholarly literature on oil-related activities in Ogoni was reviewed. The focus on every day as a scale of analysis enables a nuanced and holistic understanding of Ogoni women as they engage with the environment before and in the aftermaths of oil exploration and production. The study will provide a rich pool of data on the experiences, needs and capacity of Ogoni women to draw from for a more gender-sensitive policy on environmental management and regeneration in Ogoni. Inclusivity is essential to building bridges, creating shared understanding, and enabling environmental peace-building and sustainable development in Ogoniland.

Environmental Degradation in Ogoni

Environmental degradation has been a major source of concern in Ogoni and other parts of the Niger Delta since oil was first found in commercial quantities in Oloibiri in 1957. Oil exploration in Ogoni began in 1958 and lasted till the 1990s. In 1993, the Ogoni people under the umbrella of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) staged a non-violent protest against Shell that successfully drove Shell from the region and stopped oil exploration. However, within this time as noted earlier, Shell had amassed over \$5m from Ogoni oil wells and the vestiges of its oil exploration can still be felt in the community. There are more than 100 oil wells in Ogoni from five major oil fields, and several flow lines and flow stations (Ojide, 2016:7) and these oilfields as observed by UNEP are interwoven with the Ogoni community (UNEP, 2011:11).

Oil spills, fires from oil spills, and air pollution from gas flares are found to destroy farmlands and crops as well as aquatic life and other biotic components of the ecosystem. Public health is affected as dermal contact with contaminated water and polluted air lead to health problems of varying degrees and forms. In the Nisisioken Ogale community in Eleme, high levels of benzene at levels 900 times above levels recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) were found (UNEP, 2011). Environmental clean-up of Ogoni is expected to take upwards of 25 to 30 years, with the application of multiple techniques. This would range from active intervention in the cleaning of topsoil and replanting mangroves to passive monitoring of natural regeneration. Recommendations proffered include emergency measures: among these is the provision of drinking water especially in highly contaminated areas; public signs put in place to alert community members to dangerous sites; and provision of medical care. The HYPREP project was set up in response to the above.

In 2018 HYPREP commenced preliminary remediation activities. In January 2019, 21 remediation sites were awarded to contractors to start the remediation process and in February 2020, more sites were awarded to 29 contractors (This Day, 2020). HYPREP's activities have been criticized for being non-inclusive, politically motivated and gender biased against women. In a virtual press conference, the Coalition of Ogoni Women Development Initiative of Rivers State condemned the low participation of women in the employment process. According to Patience Osaroejiji of Strong Advocate for Ogoni Women Initiates, on almost all the remediation sites, a maximum of two women are employed (*Daily Trust*, 2020).

Environmental degradation accentuates women's vulnerability concerning sources of livelihood and thus affects their right to human security (Turner *et al*, 2003). In a predominantly rural area like Ogoni, community dependence on the land is heightened as a source of income as well as subsistence. This dependence on land has been observed by the United Nations to create an intricate link between the people's survival and the health and productivity of the land (Samandari, 2017). What this implies is a symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment. The ability to engage proactively in this coupled human-environment system is mediated by gender and unequal relations of power. Traditional patriarchal norms of granting ownership over society's productive resources place women at a disadvantage in accessing societal goods (Samandari, 2017:3). For instance, lack of rights over land, and poor education, perpetuates gendered poverty and has

implications for compensations for oil spills. Turner and Co in their study of vulnerability analysis in sustainability science, argue that social units have different coping capacities which determine how they respond to harm and avoid potential ones. The ability to cope or not is influenced by the unit's possession of 'societal safety nets' (Turner et al, 2003). For Ogoni women, the majority of whom belong to the dispossessed social strata, their socio-economic marginalization makes the more vulnerable to environmental shocks and diminishes their ability to overcome them. Amnesty International in its report on oil spills in the Niger Delta has drawn attention to the male-only membership of oil spill investigations noting that oil companies and Nigerian oil regulators only deal with Chiefs and other elite male members of host communities (Amnesty International, 2013:6).

The Impact of Environmental Pollution on Women in Ogoni

Women's experiences of pollution and environmental degradation have received renewed interest in the wake of global attention on climate change. In their study on Zimbabwe, Chitindingu and Makusha (2019), observe that women in Zimbabwe who live in areas affected by environmental degradation and pollution are more likely to experience health problems such as respiratory illness, skin irritation, and waterborne diseases. The study found that women are also more likely to experience psychological distress, as environmental degradation can have a profound impact on their quality of life and sense of well-being. Bob, Perry and Potgieter (2010) point out the importance of environmental resources to women's productive and reproductive lives in Africa. They note that "environmental resources diversify livelihoods and are key to survival strategies women adopt" In Ogoni, the impact of environmental pollution on women remains a significant topic of discussion in the public and academic domains. Environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and attendant activities has led to increased levels of air and water pollution, which have serious health consequences for the local population, particularly women. According to a study by Kponee, *et al* (2018), women in Ogoni are disproportionately affected by pollution due to their traditional roles in food production, water collection, and household management. In addition, their role as caregivers and mothers means that those that rely on them are also indirectly affected by environmental degradation and pollution.

Women in Ogoni are often responsible for collecting water from polluted sources, which can lead to health problems such as skin irritation, respiratory illness, and gastrointestinal diseases (Kponee *et al.*, 2018). Engagement in agricultural activities also exposes women and girls to contaminated soil and water with a risk to human health (Ite *et al.*, 2019). However, the impact of environmental pollution on women in Ogoni is not restricted to health consequences. In the Niger Delta, the impact of environmental degradation is often discussed in terms of its effects on human health, often overlooking the social and cultural dimensions. However, when women are unable to perform their traditional roles due to pollution-related illnesses they may experience social isolation and economic hardship (Kponee *et al.*, 2018). The loss of livelihood as a result of farmlands and creeks soaked with oil from Shell's oil spills is a debilitating outcome of environmental degradation in Ogoniland and accounted for the most response by the women to the question of how the environmental pollution affected them. Forty women were interviewed for this work and only three were engaged in non-agricultural activities. As rural dwellers, the land is central to women's livelihood and sustainability in Ogoni. As some of them pointed out, the environmental pollution and the destruction of their livelihood led to emigration to other communities less affected by oil spillage. A common area of emigration is Eleme because of its proximity to Port Harcourt city and more labour opportunities. Two of the women not engaged in farming are small-scale business practitioners; one a hairdresser and the other a retail trader, both residing in Eleme. For a lot of these women, lack of education and age provides them with a lack of choice.

Some of the women combine farming with retail trade. In Tai Local Government Area, six of the women interviewed engaged in agricultural activity as well as petty trading. For all the women, the major complaint is the low yield of crops.

Women's experiences of environmental degradation and pollution are shaped by their social and cultural roles. The most adversely affected are the aged women whose dependence on the land is all they know. The burden of managing the household on a daily basis is made worse by the low yields from the soil and the lack of aquatic life. In her report in *The Guardian* on toxic mud swamps in Ogoni, Ruth Maclean observes how "women search the oily creek for fish, edible snails, or kindling – but they find nothing they can use. Everything is coated in oil" (*The Guardian*, 2018). Long household labour hours are also associated with environmental degradation. Indeed, as some of the respondents said, "Life is hard." Kozo, a fishing settlement in Bodo has been deserted because of the utter depletion of aquatic life. One of the women interviewed was a former Chief of Kozo village and she stated that the women had to abandon fishing and relocate to other communities in search of alternative sources of livelihood. She herself has moved to Bodo.

Women's Engagement in the Ogoni Clean-up Project and its Effectiveness

Efforts to address the impact of pollution in Ogoni gave birth to the Ogoni Clean-up Project, which aims to remediate the environmental damage caused by oil exploration and exploitation activities. The project represents an important effort to address environmental degradation, a perennial scourge in Ogoniland. The HYPREP project has been criticised for its 'snail pace.' In 2020 four years after the HYPREP Project was launched, the Nigerian government handed over 7 remediated lots in Ogoniland to the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) for certification. The lots comprised 2, 5, 6, and 8 in Eleme LGA; lots 17 and 18 in Tai; and lot 10 in Gokana (HYPREP Report)

Women's engagement in the Ogoni clean-up remains problematic. According to Okoro and Ohia (2021), women in Ogoniland are generally supportive of the project and its objectives, as they recognize the importance of addressing the environmental degradation that has affected their communities. However, they also express concerns about the effectiveness of the project and its ability to address the root causes of pollution in the region. Women in the region are concerned about the lack of community involvement in the project, as well as the limited transparency and accountability of the clean-up process. They also express concerns about the slow pace of the clean-up efforts and the long-term sustainability of the project (Igbokwe *et al.*, 2020). In addition to the lack of community involvement, women are also not part of the design and implementation of the remediation process.

The low level of awareness of the HYPREP Project among Ogoni women could be discerned in the communities visited. Some of the women in Eleme LGA seemed to have an idea of the remediation process and this is because of the heaps of sand seen in the community. One of the women from Ogale says "I am only aware of a heap of sand in our farmland. I learnt it is a lot (site) for HYPREP clean-up." Several of the answers towed similar lines: awareness derived from seeing heaps of sand. For a 32-year-old farmer in Kegbara Dere in Gokana, she has seen heaps of "sand at the entrance to our community." She is made aware of the importance of that site because "the uniform men attached to the site now punish us each time we pass asking us to alight from the motorcycle we boarded" (motorcycles are the predominant means of transportation in many of the rural communities). In Bodo, women are a bit more aware of remediation activities in the community; however, this could also be influenced by the existence of a local remediation company in Bodo – Bodo Mediation Initiative (BMI) formed in 2013, in partnership with the Dutch Ambassador to Nigeria. Many

of those interviewed stated they knew of Bodo clean-up, but only a few of them, those working, could distinguish between the two.

Heaps of sand as the only visible sign of remediation is also alluded to by Fegalo Nsuke, the President of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). He states that “where some work appears to be going on, what they do is covering sites with heaps of sand” (*Vanguard*, 2022). In the same vein, the President of the Ogoni Liberation Initiative, OLI, Douglas Fabeke questions “So where is the clean-up going on? Is it to go somewhere, dig up a hole and put sand inside and say you are doing clean-up? Ogoni people are not feeling the impact of the clean-up. A lack of sensitization by the Federal Ministry of Environment and HYPREP staff on the remediation process is implicated in these varied viewpoints. Many rural dwellers, particularly women, remain primarily in the dark about the project. The effect of this is a lack of knowledge of strategies for environmental management.

The mandate of HYPREP as recommended by the UNEP report includes the provision of safe and alternative drinking water to the impacted communities, medical services and a health audit of residents as well as the provision of alternative livelihood. The first medical outreach was conducted in Bori in Khana LGA in 2017, and the second phase the next year in Nyokana district in Khana. Despite this much-publicised project, rural women in Ogoni continue to drink polluted water. In Ogale, a community with high levels of benzene, the women could only recall a water tanker that provided water for the community but this lasted for a week. In Akpajo, water was not provided. The provision of medical services would seem to have followed the same unregulated pattern. Where medical outreach was carried out as done in Baranyonwa-Dere (B-Dere), and in Gokana and Ogale in Eleme, it was usually a one-time activity.

Unlike the high level of consciousness that is evident among youth groups and their activism for inclusion, the collective gathering of women in Ogoni is more focused on domestic issues and lacks representation in the remediation process. Women groups as attested to by all the women interviewed, were more of social clubs and cooperatives. Questions of representation in HYPREP were not discussed. The lack of agitation by the rural dwellers did not mean an erasure of women’s voices. Some women’s organizations based in Port Harcourt have been quite vocal in drawing attention to the gender gap in the remediation process. One of these is the Kebetkache Women’s Development and Resource Centre. The organization is geared towards capacity building in communities and so it has tried to draw attention to the gender gap in the Ogoni clean-up process and build support for the inclusion of women in the implementation and decision-making processes. To this Kebetkache conducted a survey of women’s livelihood needs in Ogoni and the report was publicly presented in Ogoni (Daily Trust, 2020). The report indicates the debilitating effects of oil spillage on the livelihood of women, noting that the lack of economic structures was a hindrance to alternative means of livelihood.

Research has also shown that women are critical to community-based efforts to address environmental degradation and pollution. A study by Sambo and Adaji (2020) found that women in Nigeria who were involved in community-based organizations were more likely to be aware of the impacts of environmental degradation and pollution on their communities and were more likely to advocate for change. Gender inclusivity remains important to the success of Ogoni clean-up and sustained development. The experiences and perspectives of women regarding pollution and environmental degradation are important for understanding the social and cultural dimensions of this problem. Addressing environmental degradation requires not only technological solutions but also a deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors that shape women's experiences and perspectives.

In conclusion, women in Ogoniland are concerned about the social and economic impacts of environmental degradation on their communities. Environmental pollution has impacted their ability to engage in subsistence agriculture and has affected their health and well-being. As a result, there have been calls for a more holistic approach to addressing environmental degradation that takes into account the social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to pollution (Onyinye *et al.*, 2021). The views of women on the Ogoni Clean-up Project are an important area of research that can help to inform policies and programs aimed at addressing environmental degradation and its effects on the communities in the region. Addressing these concerns will require greater community involvement, transparency, and accountability, as well as a more holistic approach to addressing environmental degradation. This participation of women is vital because they are most affected by environmental degradation.

Recommendations

Inclusivity is critical to creating shared understanding and thus effective Clean-up of Ogoni. Ignoring the effects of environmental degradation on Ogoni women is tantamount to erasing their existence and their role in the household and community. Not taking into account the painful impact of environmental pollution and degradation on the women of Ogoniland will negatively impact sustainable development efforts in the Niger Delta. Hence, the following recommendations:

Increase women's participation in decision-making processes: To ensure that women's perspectives are taken into account in the Ogoni Clean-up Project, there needs to be increased representation of women in the decision-making bodies. This can be achieved by actively recruiting women to serve on project committees and providing them with adequate training and resources to participate effectively (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

Promote women's access to information: Women in the Ogoni community often lack access to information about environmental degradation and the Clean-up project. Therefore, it is essential to provide them with information about the project, including its objectives, timelines, and the roles that women can play in its implementation. This can be achieved through community meetings, workshops, and public awareness campaigns (Okoh & Emenike, 2020).

Address gender-specific environmental concerns: Women in the Ogoni community face specific environmental challenges, such as the pollution of water sources, which have a significant impact on their health and livelihoods. The Ogoni Clean-up Project should take these concerns into account and implement measures to address them. This can include providing women with access to clean water sources and supporting their efforts to promote sustainable livelihoods (Onwuka *et al.*, 2021).

Ensure equitable distribution of benefits: The Ogoni Clean-up Project should ensure that the benefits of the Clean-up are distributed equitably, including to women. This can be achieved by providing women with opportunities to participate in the project and by ensuring that they have access to the resources and infrastructure needed to benefit from the project (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

Summary and Conclusion

The Ogoni Clean-up Project is an environmental remediation project aimed at cleaning up and restoring the Ogoniland area of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which has been heavily polluted due to decades of oil exploration and exploitation. The project was initiated in 2016 by the Nigerian government, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), to address the environmental degradation in the

region and improve the health and livelihoods of the Ogoni people. A study by Onuoha, Emezi and Nwoye (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of the Ogoni Clean-up Project by assessing the level of remediation achieved and the impact of the project on the health and livelihoods of the Ogoni people. The study found that while the project has made some progress in cleaning up the polluted sites, there are still significant challenges in achieving the project's goals. The study identified a lack of funding, inadequate equipment and technical capacity, and the slow pace of implementation as major obstacles to the project's effectiveness.

The lack or low level of community involvement in the Ogoni clean-up has been a source of concern and an obstacle to its effectiveness. In a study of the social and environmental impacts of the Ogoni Clean-up Project on the Ogoni people, the potential to improve the life and livelihood of the people of Ogoni was noted, but at the same time, there was the potential displacement of communities due to the project's activities. (Adalikwu and Nweke, 2020). There are still significant challenges in achieving the project's goals, including a lack of funding and inadequate technical capacity. In addition, there is a need for greater community involvement in the project to ensure that the project is sustainable and meets the needs of the local people.

In this paper, we examined the impact of environmental degradation on women in the Ogoni region of Nigeria and their involvement in the Ogoni Cleanup Project. We also explored environmental pollution and how it affects women in the region, such as contaminated water and air, and the disproportionate burden of environmental degradation on women due to their cultural and social roles. The study used a qualitative research design with purposive sampling to collect data from women in the Ogoni region. The findings indicate that women in the region face significant health risks and remain marginalised in the remediation process. From the level of planning, design, decision-making and implementation, the voices of women are muddled. This is in contrast to the burden they bear when environmental degradation and pollution occur. Women organizations outside Ogoniland such as the Kebetkache Women's Development and Resource Centre have played an important role in drawing attention to the livelihood needs of the Ogoni women. The importance of engaging women in the Ogoni Clean-up Project has been underscored in this paper. Women have a unique perspective and knowledge of the environmental issues in the region. We argue that women's participation is essential for the success of the project, and their perspectives and experiences should be integrated into the project design and implementation. Finally, the paper provides insight into the intersection of environmental degradation, gender, and social and cultural factors in the Ogoni region, and emphasizes the need for a gender-sensitive approach to environmental management and policy.

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