Ogoni people struggle with Shell Oil, Nigeria, 1990-1995

- (mainly or initiated by) indigenous participants [1]
- (mainly or initiated by) people of color [2]
- an example of paradox of repression [3]
- included participation by more than one social class [4]

Timing
1990 to: 1995

Location and Goals
Country: Nigeria
Location City/State/Province: Rivers State
Location Description: Ogoniland

Goals:
The Ogoni Bill of Rights demanded, "Self-determination for Ogoni people, the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development, adequate and direct representation as of right in all Nigerian institions, and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation." -Ken Saro-Wiwa's statement at the World Conference on Human Rights.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions creation of the Ogoni Bill of Rights

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention declared intent to organize mass protest if oil companies fail to meet demands.
- 015. Group lobbying

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 034. Vigils
• 038. Marches
• 039. Parades
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 124. Boycott of elections

Methods in 4th segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 038. Marches
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 038. Marches
• 039. Parades
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 038. Marches
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 089. Severance of funds and credit
• 156. Refusal of membership in international bodies

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 037. Singing

Notes on Methods:
During and after the campaign, the Ogoni struggle drew considerable international attention. Much of the group's support was rallied outside of Nigeria.

Segment Length:
Approximately 10 months

Classifications
Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Economic Justice
Environment
Human Rights
National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:
• Ogoni people

Leaders, partners, allies, elites
Leaders:
Ken Saro-Wiwa, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)
Partners:
Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF), Federation of Ogoni Women Association (FOWA), National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Ogoni Council of Churches (OCC), Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA), Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP), National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS), Crisis Management Committee (CMC)
External allies:
Unrepresented Nations and People Organization (UNPO), Greenpeace International, Amnesty International
Involvement of social elites:
Nelson Mandela encouraged the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations

Joining/exiting order of social groups
Groups in 1st Segment:

• CMC
• COP
• COTRA
• FOWA
• NUOS
• NYCOP
• OCC
• Unrepresented Nations and People Organization

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

• Amnesty International
• EMIROAF
• Greenpeace

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

• Commonwealth of Nations

Segment Length:
Approximately 10 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence
Opponents:
Shell Oil, Nigerian Government
Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Not Known

Campaigner violence:
One Shell employee was killed during a period of otherwise nonviolent protest.

Repressive Violence:
Repressive violence was used by the Nigerian government as multiple points during the campaign: entire villages were massacred and protesters were killed.

Success Outcome
Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
3 points out of 6 points
Survival:
1 point out of 1 points
Growth:
3 points out of 3 points
Total points:
7 out of 10 points
Notes on outcomes:
Although the Ogoni community did not gain independence from Nigeria nor access to much needed social services, it was able to remove the Shell oil company from the region. They also were given a settlement of $15.5 million from Shell Oil several years later.

Although many leaders of the MOSOP were killed or arrested during the campaign, the MOSOP group itself is still very active today.

The campaign grew to incorporate many allies and partners, especially international ones. Budget also increased with the organization of the One Naira Ogoni Survival Fund, and by 1993, 3/5 of the Ogoni population participated in a single action.

The Ogoni region is a highly oil-rich area in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, populated by approximately 500,000 members of the Ogoni People. Since the Shell Petroleum Development Company discovered oil in Ogoniland in 1958, the region has been plagued with serious environmental degradation resulting from the over 100 oil wells in the area.

Since 1990 the Ogoni have been engaged in a struggle with the government of Nigeria and the Shell Company to maintain their rights as the original inhabitants of the land. The nonviolent Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) has been met with violence on the part of the government as well as the assassination or imprisonment of many Ogoni leaders. Yet the Ogoni people have managed to force Shell Oil to withdraw from the area and have raised substantial international awareness of their situation.

MOSOP, led by its president Ken Saro-Wiwa—a well known environmental activist, author, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee—published the Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990. This symbolically began the nonviolent struggle against the Nigerian government and the oil companies. The bill highlighted the Ogoni people's lack of social services, their political marginalization, and the maltreatment they faced from the Shell Oil Company. The bill demanded environmental protection for the Ogoni region, self-determination for the Ogoni nation, cultural
rights for the Ogoni people, representation in Nigerian institutions, and a fair proportion of the revenue from the sale of the region's oil.

In the years leading up to the escalation of the nonviolent conflict in 1992 and 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP attempted to gain the support of international nongovernmental organizations. Early on MOSOP joined with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), which helped MOSOP gain increased international attention, both through the media and through meetings with the United Nations. As the UN’s Year of Indigenous People in 1993 approached, MOSOP planned protest actions to continue to push for the demands that had been laid out in the Ogoni Bill of Rights.

In 1992, the conflict escalated after two years of little progress targeting an unresponsive national government. MOSOP decided instead to focus its energy on the three oil companies operating within the region: Shell, Chevron, and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company. Of the three, Shell easily had the largest share in the area and as such was MOSOP’s primary target. The group (supported by and comprised of many smaller Ogoni organizations) presented the companies with an ultimatum demanding 10 billion dollars in damages and royalties to the Ogoni people, as well as an immediate end to all three companies’ violence against the Ogoni region’s environment. MOSOP threatened that if its demands were not met it would rally the Ogoni people in widespread popular resistance to the companies’ presence.

Apparently in response to this threat, the Nigerian government—which had recently undergone a series of military takeovers and tumultuous elections that the Ogoni had boycotted—announced that all disturbances of oil production were punishable as treason and banned all public meetings and assemblies.

Despite the ban on public assemblies, on January 4, 1993, at the beginning of the Year of Indigenous People, MOSOP organized a massive peaceful protest that over 300,000 Ogonis participated in. As part of the January 4 march and several rallies throughout Ogoniland, the Ogoni protesters and Greenpeace observers held green twigs as a symbol of the environment. With over three-fifths of the Ogonis in Ogoniland assembled together, protest leaders and the protesters demanded their basic rights to the environment and to self-determination. This event has since been referred to as the First Ogoni Day.

Soon after the First Ogoni Day, MOSOP set up the One Naira Ogoni Survival Fund, to which men, women, and children contributed money in order to support the Ogoni Bill of Rights and the future struggle against Shell Oil. MOSOP continued its actions by holding candle-lit vigils and further assemblies of protest.

All MOSOP activities were nonviolent, although angry protesters beat one Shell employee in January 1993. After the January 4 actions and further protests throughout the month, Shell Oil pulled out of the region. This drastically lowered the amount of petroleum being extracted from the region and cut profits to the oil companies operating in the area by 200 million dollars in 1993.

In response to the First Ogoni Day’s success and Shell’s withdrawal, the unstable national government stepped to forcefully suppress Ogoni activities. In April 1993, soldiers firing live ammunition met a protest that 10,000 Ogonis participated in. Ten protesters were killed. The government also sealed all roads to or from Ogoni territory, and began to wipe out entire villages. In December, the government massacred Ogoni people living in Port Harcourt, and on Easter Sunday in 1994 Ogoni villages around Afam were raided and their inhabitants killed. Later investigation revealed that mortar bombs and NATO bullets were used in the massacre. By mid-June of 1994, 30 villages had been destroyed.

On July 30 the Nigerian government removed all Ogoni police from the region, and five days later (in what the government describes as an ethnic clash between the Ogoni and Adoni people, although first-hand accounts
imply that the conflict was fabricated and “Adoni” warriors were speaking a language other than Adoni) the
town of Kaa was attacked and its inhabitants were massacred. An estimated 750 people were killed in the series
of attacks on Ogoni villages, and 30,000 were left homeless. Despite this, widespread protest continued
unabated throughout the region.

Also in 1994, UNPO organized World Ogoni Week. As repression within the country increased, international
support and knowledge of the Ogoni struggle continued to grow. In response to repeated arrests of Ken Saro-
Wiwa in 1993 and 1994, Greenpeace and Amnesty International led international campaigns for his release.

However, dissent within the MOSOP movement had created a divide between its president Ken Saro-Wiwa and
other movement leaders. On May 21, 1994, while Saro-Wiwa was out of the country, four Ogoni chiefs who
had disagreed with Saro-Wiwa were murdered. Saro-Wiwa was arrested at 1am the next day along with eight
other activists and was held without charges, legal representation, or medical care for a number of months. He
was eventually allowed legal representation. Although the government did not produce any evidence against
Saro-Wiwa, he and his eight co-defendants were sentenced to death on October 31, 1995.

Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight other activists were hanged on November 10, with riot police and tanks
overseeing the execution. In response to the killings and ongoing oppression of the Ogoni people, that same day
Nigeria was suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations. This suspension was encouraged by Nelson
Mandela, who represented South Africa in the Commonwealth. Supporters of the Ogoni people held protest
marches at Nigerian embassies and Shell offices around the world. Many world leaders called for an oil
embargo, economic sanctions, and bans on arms sales. Groups such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace
held protest actions as well. The International Finance Corporation, which had proposed a $100 million loan and
$80 million equity deal to produce a gas plant and pipeline in the Niger delta, cancelled its proposal following
the executions.

The execution of Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni leaders was the last major event in the fight for Ogoni power,
although since 1995 there have continued to be annual protests on the anniversary of the First Ogoni Day, which
still elicit large-scale support from the Ogoni people. In 2009 Shell also agreed to pay 15.5 million dollars to the
families of those executed in November, including the family of Ken Saro Wiwa. While Shell still owns the
operating license for extracting oil in the Ogoni region, its plants stand unused and in 2008 the Nigerian
government stated that a new company must be found if drilling is to recommence. Although the Ogoni suffered
heavy losses during the course of the campaign, they were able to remove the Shell Oil Company from the
region and to greatly decrease the extent of oil drilling on their land.

Research Notes
Influences:

One source claims that the MOSOP campaign was inspired by the Irish Republican struggle. (1)

Sources:


Additional Notes:
This case was originally researched by Elowyn Corby (11/03/2011). Some information was added from a case previously written by Gavin Musynske (04/12/2009). This information and some from other sources was added by Max Rennebohm (28/05/2011).
Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Elowyn Corby, 11/03/2011

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