

## ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION BY WOMEN IN SOME SELECTED OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines access to environmental information by rural women in some selected oil producing communities in Nigeria. Three oil producing communities constitute the population of this study; they are Ebedei, Uwheru and Bomadi in Delta State, South South Nigeria. These communities are hosts to oil exploration and drilling activities. Questionnaire was used to collect data from two hundred and ten (210) respondents. Data was analyzed using simple percentages. Findings revealed information needs of the respondents as well as sources of environmental information which was the town criers. Factors militating against access to these identified needs were revealed. Recommendations were therefore put orward to enhance access to environmental information by women in oil producing communities in Nigeria*

**Keyword:** Oil producing communities, Natural resources, environmental, rural women.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a blessed country with various natural resources, among which is crude oil. The activities of drilling and exploration of this oil has left many, oil producing communities in a very pitiable state. The environment has high rate of depletion and degradation due to the threat of continuous oil pollution, deforestation, loss of biodiversity and reduction of soil fertility (Kperegbeji, Oyefia and Ogboi,2005). The environmental problems in these areas are multidimensional in nature and have resulted in experts from every discipline trying to find ways of solving them. Hassan (1992 cited by Akporido 2005), stressed that environmental problem requires credible and dynamic environmental information system for proper understanding of the situation for the designing of appropriate environmental management system. This will go a long way to tackle various environmental problems that are gradually and indirectly affecting people living in and around oil producing communities in Nigeria.

- The people in the oil producing communities according to Etete (1997) are continuously exposed to pollution, contamination and hazard arising from activities of oil exploration. Before the exploration and exploitation of crude

oil in coastal region, agricultural productivity (fish, animals and plants.) was on optimal level. Since the discovery and exploration of oil, spillages and gas flare have become serious challenges. Akporido (2005) emphasized the deplorable state of the environment in the oil producing communities due to the exploration and drilling activities' of oil companies in these areas. To this end, information relating to the environment becomes inevitable. Afolabi (2003) stressed that information is an indispensable and essential ingredient for today's social, economic, industrial, political and technological development. There is no aspect of a man's life that does not require information. The rural women in these oil producing communities have great influence in the environment because they are involve in either farming or fishing within the environment for their livelihood. Gwagwa (1991) emphasized that women rely on natural system oil, water and forestry for survival and therefore have vested interest in environmental protection and restoration. It is therefore necessary to inform the women about some environmental problems that are caused by human deliberate act which are hazardous and harmful to health. Rodda (1991) noted that women have always had a close relationship with trees and forest during farming. Opeke and Ifukor (2000) noted that the rural women who constituted the majority of the poor, the underemployed and socially disadvantaged in African must be provided access to accurate, timely and relevant information. Bassey (1996) while discussing the constraints and challenges of rural women stressed that women should be well informed of issues about their environment for an enhance quality of life. It is in this light, that this study sets out to investigate access to environmental information by women in oil producing communities in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to determine access to environmental information by rural women in some selected oil producing communities in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- Determine the age difference of the rural women
- Identify their occupation
- Identify their environmental information need
- Identify the source of environmental information used
- Identify the hindrances to receiving environmental information

## Research Methods

Survey research design was adopted for this study. The population consist of oil communities in Delta state, an oil producing state, Nigeria. Three oil-producing communities were sampled for this study. They are Ebedei in Ukwani local government area, Uwheru in Ughelli North local government area and Esama in Bomadi local government area, representing the three senatorial zones of the state. These are oil-producing communities in Delta state, Nigeria. These communities were chosen because they are oil producing with a preponderance of women population. Two hundred and ten women (210) were randomly selected from the three oil producing communities. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection; the questions were translated to the local language with the aid of 3 research assistants for clarity to the women who could not fill the questionnaire. Data was analyzed using simple percentages.

## Findings and Discussion

**Table 1:** Age of Respondents

Age range	Frequency	Percentages
21-30	30	14.29
31-40	51	24.29
41-50	60	28.57
51-above	69	32.86
Total	210	100

Source: Field Work, 2010

The table I showed the age distribution of the respondents. The figures revealed that(14.29%) of the women involved are between the age range of 21- 30; (24.29%) were between the age range of 31- 40; (28.57%) were between the age range of 41-50; while (32.86%) were 51 years and above.

**Table 2:** Occupation of respondents

Age range	Frequency	Percentages
Farming/Fishing	110	52.38
Trading	45	21.43
Civil Servant	35	16.67
Craft work	20	9.52
Total	210	100

Source: Fieldwork 2010

Table 2 indicated that most of the women in the oil producing community are either farmers or fisherwomen by occupation (52.38%). 21.43% of the responses indicated that some are petty traders in the communities, while 16.67% of the women are civil servants.

**Table 3:** Information needs of respondents

<b>Information needs</b>	<b>Ebedei N =60</b>	<b>Uwheru N = 80</b>	<b>Esama N = 70</b>	<b>Total</b>
Land related information	60 (100%)	80 (100%)	70 (100%)	210
Water Related Information	60 (100%)	80 (100%)	70 (100%)	210
Gas flaring information	54 (90%)	72 (90%)	63 (90%)	210
Storage and preservation of fish information	54 (90%)	72 (90%)	70 (90%)	210
Health information	60 (100%)	80 (100%)	70 (100%)	210
How to obtain loan/credit facilities	60 (100%)	80 (100%)	70 (100%)	210
Control prevention of pollution information	54 (90%)	72 (90%)	63 (90%)	210

Source: Field Work 2010

When the respondents were asked about their information needs, they all indicated that they need information on land related issues as rated 210 (100%), these issues includes; improved farming methods high productive seedlings and species to improve and preserve their farm yields. The respondents also indicated (100%) response in need of water related information, storage and preservation of fish information accounted for 100%. This finding corroborate Otolu (2010) who reported that women engage in many types of agricultural production such as fishing from deep sea, community fishing to reef gleaning and fresh water trapping activities. In this era when government provides micro-loans to cooperative societies, especially women societies the women indicated (100%) need for information on how to obtain credit facilities. This finding also corroborate Njoku (2004) who revealed that fisherman need information on where and how to obtain credit facilities.

**Table IV:** Source/Channels of environmental information used by the respondents

<b>Information source/channel</b>	<b>Ebedei N = 60</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Uwheru N = 80</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Esama N = 70</b>	<b>%</b>
Personal contact/visit e.g. Extension officers	60	100	70	70 100	70	100
Town criers	60	100	80	100	70	100
Radio television	37 29	61.67 48.33	42 33	52.50 41.25	51 48	72.86 68.57
Newspaper/Magazine, posters and handbills etc.		41.67	30	37.50	57	81.43
Mobile phone	32	53.33	39	48.75	4.31	44.29

Source: Fieldwork 2010

Table IV indicated the various Sources/Channels of environmental information used by women in oil producing communities. Personal Contact/Visit accounts for 100% comprising visit made by Extension/liaison officers from oil companies. association, friends and colleagues during women’s meeting in the town halls. churches or market places. The use of town criers to disseminate environmental information also rated (100%) of the responses. The town criers go round the community usually in the evenings when people are back from their various occupations. Radio and Television Newspapers/Magazines, Posters etc. are various Source/Channel of environmental information used, most of them get information from radio and Television Jingles, discouraging people from indiscriminate bush burning and vandalization of pipe line. This finding is in line with Akporido (2005) and Ugboma (2002) who reported that Radio and Television use Jingles to disseminates useful information to discourage people from bush burning, farming on top of pipe line and guide against vandalization of pipelines by saboteurs.

**Table V:** Factors militating against access to environmental information

<b>Factors</b>	<b>N = 20 Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Lack of visitation and personal contact with extension/liason officers	210	100
Lack of radio, television, newspaper and magazine due to cost	140	66.67
Lack of social amenities, such as electricity and potable water	192	91.43
Lack of information centers in the communities literacy	210 187	100 89.04
High cost of calls	198	94.29

Source: Fieldwork 2010

Table V outlined the various hindrances in accessing environmental information in the oil producing communities. Lack of visitation and personal contact with extension/liason officers (100%) and lack of information centers in the communities (100%) were the highest factors that hinder the rural women from having access to environmental information. Otolu (2010) identified absence of library and lack of visitation by agricultural extension officers as the highest factors that hinder women who are involve in fish farming from having access to agricultural information. Cost of calls (94.29%) and lack of social amenities, (91.43%) such as electricity and potable water, were identified as constraints, will no doubt cushion the negative effects of pollution in the environment. Illiteracy recorded (89.04%) of response.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study reveal different sources of environmental information at the women's disposal. The use of town crier as a source of information was the most reliable source of disseminating environmental information among other sources. Despite the degree of degradation these communities have suffered as a result of oil drilling and exploration carried out in the environment, the women struggle to farm and fish in the polluted lands, rivers and streams. It is necessary to know the information needs and information sources used by the rural women in the oil producing communities as a guide to solving the environmental problems

associated with these communities. Based on the findings of this study, the following are therefore recommended: there is the need to establish information centres in these oil producing communities to disseminate environmental information to the rural dwellers. Environmental awareness programmes should be included in the school curriculum to teach the children how to avoid and prevent environmental hazards caused by deliberate acts such as pipeline vandalization. Finally Government and oil companies operating in these oil producing communities should provide social amenities that would make life more meaningful and comfortable to the people.

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