

UNEP In Ogoniland Newsletter

March 2011

Partner Profile

Interview with the Vice Chancellor of Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Professor B. B. Fakae



The Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST) has been a major partner in the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) environmental survey of Ogoniland.

What has the university's involvement in UNEP's

assessment meant to the RSUST, both to the academic staff and students? The university was set up with a vision to involve research that produces better livelihood conditions for the nation. The UNEP project is a dream of the founding fathers of RSUST. It's the first time in history that the environment has been scientifically assessed using international standards.

What motivated the university to provide strong support for this project? Personally, when UNEP came and canvassed the level of support for the environmental impact assessment of Ogoniland, I was the Rector of the Rivers State Polytechnic. I had to broker peace and initiate several consultations and also spoke on behalf of the academic community, advocating that it was going to be better to follow through with the scientific processes.

I also encouraged the sons and daughters of Ogoniland and indeed the Niger Delta region to be involved. However, when I became the Vice Chancellor of RSUST, I had to give every support regarding the institutional collaboration that would integrate the scientific processes with the professors of the university.

What do you see as the significance of UNEP's environmental assessment of Ogoniland? As an Ogoni son, the results that will be produced by UNEP will serve as a "certificate" that will allow Ogonis to

make a real demand. In the past, it was predominantly guesswork for assessments. Now [the Ogonis] will be in a position to engage all stakeholders concerned from the scientific and social point of view.

What do you and university colleagues hope will be the ultimate outcomes of the assessment? Because we are a scientific institution and proper methods were utilized, the outcome will be that the report meets the internationally-certified scientific guidelines, and the facts of contamination in the respective disciplines covered will be standardized.

In what ways have the university's staff and students benefited from being involved in the project? The university team made friends with the international team of scientists. We engaged in scientific research, learned new methodologies. For instance, advanced mapping methods, the use of modern sampling instruments and chain of custody.

How has UNEP benefited from its partnership with RSUST? Well in a nutshell, I would quote UNEP's Project Coordinator, Mike Cowing, as a summary of the benefits when he said that "the facilities, personnel and service of RSUST during the scientific training were excellent". Furthermore, the expertise was domesticated [or localized] in some measure and has saved valuable resources by the use of local expertise.

Finally, any other comments or advice to Ogoniland about the report and the next line of action? So far so good. The assessment is one aspect and the report is been eagerly awaited. My advice to the Ogoni people is to be patient for the report to be published. There are four stages to get our environment back: 1) the assessment and its report; 2) remediation; 3) post assessment how far the environment has been remediated; and 4) continuous monitoring of the environment.

We need to know that it shall not happen overnight. We must establish a "full culture" that will keep our environment healthy.

I must conclude by thanking those involved in the project. We must thank the international staff of UNEP that despite all the threats and security issues in the Delta region, they decided to work through to get to this stage.



At the request of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is conducting a comprehensive, independent assessment of the environmental and public health impacts of oil contamination in Ogoniland, Rivers State, Nigeria, and options for remediation. The fieldwork and laboratory analysis are now completed. The report is being finalised.

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Remaining project timeline

Ongoing: Liaison with government officials, traditional rulers, Ogoniland communities
 April: Green Frontiers schools programme activities
 Early 2011: Release of UNEP's environmental assessment of Ogoniland report

Schools programme update

In March the Green Frontiers Schools Programme focused on promoting a safe and healthy environment. Among the activities, students at Community Secondary School Kpean embarked on a sanitation activity tagged "a litter free environment" to encourage the collection of all litter in the school compound.

The Green Frontiers Club members were divided into groups as a strategy to ensure every nook and cranny of the school premises was reached and also to maximize time allotted by the school authority for the activity.

UNEP Community Liaison Assistants, Josephine Nzidee and John Jerry Abie, supported this activity with a demonstration on the use of Personal Protective Equipment, as used by UNEP's scientists. Students were shown the correct procedures for using gloves, nose and mouth masks, disposable waste bags and other equipment.

Interacting with club members, Sylvanus Zoryii Abel, a J.S.S 3 student, said he had benefited a lot from the club meetings which had increased his awareness of the need to keep his environment clean and promised to help make it a responsibility to keep the school compound clean.



Club members from Community Secondary School, Kpean, Khana LGA in action

The new Principal of the Junior Secondary School section, Mr Dum Nicholas Korkor, pledged his support for Green Frontiers.

"The sanitation activity is a practical aspect of the curriculum and I would want the activity to involve not just club members but every student of the Junior Secondary School section," Mr Korkor said.

Did you know?

Over 140 groundwater monitoring wells were installed across Ogoniland as part of the method for assessing contaminated water, soil and sediment, and to improve understanding of the region's shallow geology. The local landowners involved were consulted about the locations, and the wells were then installed by Fugro International in conjunction with UNEP and local youths who were employed to assist.

The wells can be considered a legacy of UNEP's project as they can be used for regular, ongoing monitoring and provide early warning data about the migration of pollution. It is therefore in the community's interest to protect them.

Get involved



World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) was initiated in 2006 and is an annual awareness-raising campaign highlighting the need for the protection of migratory birds and their habitats. On the second weekend each

May, people around the world take action and organise public events such as bird festivals, education programmes and bird watching excursions to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day. Visit www.worldmigratorybirdday.org to participate.

For more information on UNEP's Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland Project

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