

EMBEDDING ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION and HEALTH VALUES for SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT in GREATER PORT HARCOURT COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Rapid environmental degradation, oil pollution and resource erosion in the Niger Delta of Nigeria prompted Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited (SPDC) to sponsor a series of awareness campaigns and two-day workshops in rural communities on aspects of the new Sustainable Development Goals for 18 rural communities in Greater Port Harcourt and neighboring areas of Rivers State. About 1,200 participants (elders; women; youths) from 18 rural communities were trained on principles of sustainable development, benefits of protecting the environment, and in some of the communities this included healthy stress-free living lifestyle. Participants appreciated biodiversity conservation, dangers of illicit drug and alcohol use, prevention of and care for people living with HIV/AIDS, and the dangers associated with oil pipeline vandalism. More strategic partnerships and increased funding support from more governmental and nongovernmental partners are needed

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to conduct post-training impact assessment studies and for project scale-up via Train-the-Trainers workshops to new and the 18 communities already visited.

Introduction

The Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) Port Harcourt, formally, acknowledged on 24th June 2015 by the United Nations University - Institute of Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), Tokyo Japan. The RCE Port Harcourt was established *to be a Regional Centre of Expertise facilitating research for development collaborations and promoting Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship towards increased environmental consciousness, ecosystem integrity, economic viability, and social capital in Greater Port Harcourt City*. It was set up to address three key challenges of sustainable development namely: (1) Pollution Control and Environmental Remediation – *through technical and socio-political approach*; (2) Climate Change Resilience and Poverty Reduction – *through support for petrochemicals industries, agro-based industries, eco-tourism, and Human Capital Development – through formal, non-formal and informal education*.

It is in the light of this three-pronged framework that, RCE Port Harcourt Project Team on Pollution Control and Environmental Remediation led by Community Inter-Relations and Conciliation Initiative (CIRCI), Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria embarked on the SPDC sponsored projects to mitigate environmental pollution for sustainable ecosystem services. Thus, the CIRCI led the Project Team because, it is a nongovernmental organisation set up *to foster peaceful co-existence, promote team building among community members, create positive environmental consciousness and promote sustainable development principles among oil and gas hosts and impacted community members*. Having identified a key sustainable development issue in the Niger Delta, CIRCI with SPDC as partner was able to develop an education/awareness programme to build the capacities of community members on environmental protection and conservation.

The first set of education programmes was then organized and targeted at community members in 18 communities selected for town-hall awareness campaigns and their youth leaders among others were further trained in a series of 2-day workshops. The idea was to later expand the training to cover more communities and also reach out to primary and secondary schools, as it is important that future generations who will inherit the environment and its resources are better able to manage the environment and themselves sustainably. Therefore, community town-hall sensitisation campaigns and workshops were organized for youth leaders and other opinion leaders to build the capacities of community members for sustainable development.

About Greater Port Harcourt and The Niger Delta

The Niger Delta occupies between 70,000 and 75,000 km² (27,000 sq mi) and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. The region has a population of about 31 million distributed amongst over 40 ethnic nationalities (including: Bini; Efik; Esan; Ibibio; Igbo; Annang; Oron; Ijaw; Itsekiri; Isoko; Urhobo; Ukwuani; Kalabari; Ogoni) with about 250 dialects spoken in the area. Politically, the region (Figure 1) consists of 9 states (Abia-1; Akwa Ibom-2; Bayelsa-3, Cross River-4; Delta-5; Edo-6; Imo-7; Ondo-8; Rivers-9). Only recently, Lagos and Anambra States have been included on the list of the political Niger Delta states having joined in the oil-producing states list making it now 11 states comprising the new Niger Delta region. However, geographical, only four states (Akwa Ibom; Bayelsa; Delta; Rivers) fall within the actual deltaic area and are often referred to as the core Niger Delta states.

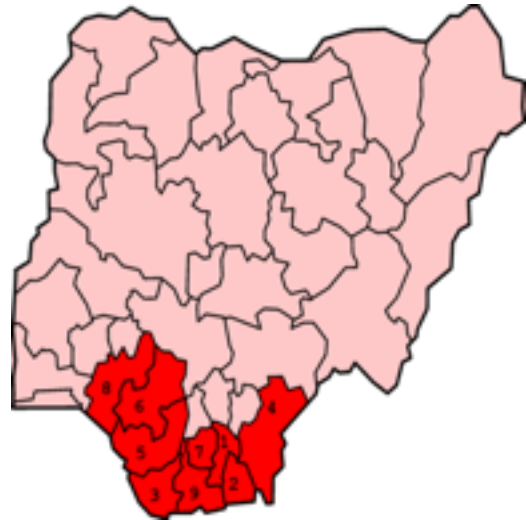


Figure 1:Map area in red shows Niger Delta region (*Source: Wikipedia*)

Project Context

The area designated Greater Port Harcourt area comprises eight, out of the 23, LGAs in Rivers State namely: Eleme; Etche; Ikwerre; Obio Akpor; Okrika; Omuma; Oyigbo, and Port Harcourt. In addition this project also covered Akuku-toru, Degema and Asari-toru LGA. According to the National Population Census of 2006², Rivers State has an estimated population of 5,198,716 (2,673,026 males; 2,525,690 females) and is located in the Niger Delta, which is now, popularly, referred to as the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The State is a major oil-producing hub of Nigeria with its capital located in Port Harcourt, which is one of the three top most commercial cities of Nigeria only next to Lagos and Kano cities. The project was conducted in seven LGAs with four (Eleme; Etche; Ikwerre; Obio Akpor) from the Greater Port Harcourt Area and the rest three (Akuku-Toru; Asari-Toru; Degema) LGAs from outside the area designated as Greater Port Harcourt. These LGAs also represent the key oil-producing LGAs that consist of the major host and oil pipeline impacted communities. Some major issues identified in the project area include over population, perceived government neglect, loss of livelihood and poverty, and rapid loss of the mangrove/rain forests. Some of the impacts of these identified issues on the people and then the environment are indicated in Table 1 and Figure 2.

² <http://www.population.gov.ng/index.php/state-population>

Table 1: Derived issues and impacts in project area

DERIVED ISSUE	IMPACT
OVER POPULATION	Unemployment, Over Exploitation of natural resources, resource conflicts etc.
PERCEIVED GOVERNMENT NEGLECT	Conflict, Oil facility vandalism, Sabotage induced oil pollution, Operational oil pollution etc.
LOSS OF LIVELIHOOD AND POVERTY	More conflicts, Crimes, Oil theft, More oil pollution, Drug addition, Disease Prevalence etc.
RAPID LOSS OF THE MANGROVE/ RAIN FORESTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fragile mangrove and rain forests support thriving eco-systems with many fishes and other sea foods in the swamp and plant and animal sources of food and raw materials in the rain forest. • The vegetations especially that of mangrove takes several years to re-vegetate if harvested or destroyed.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION - Issues

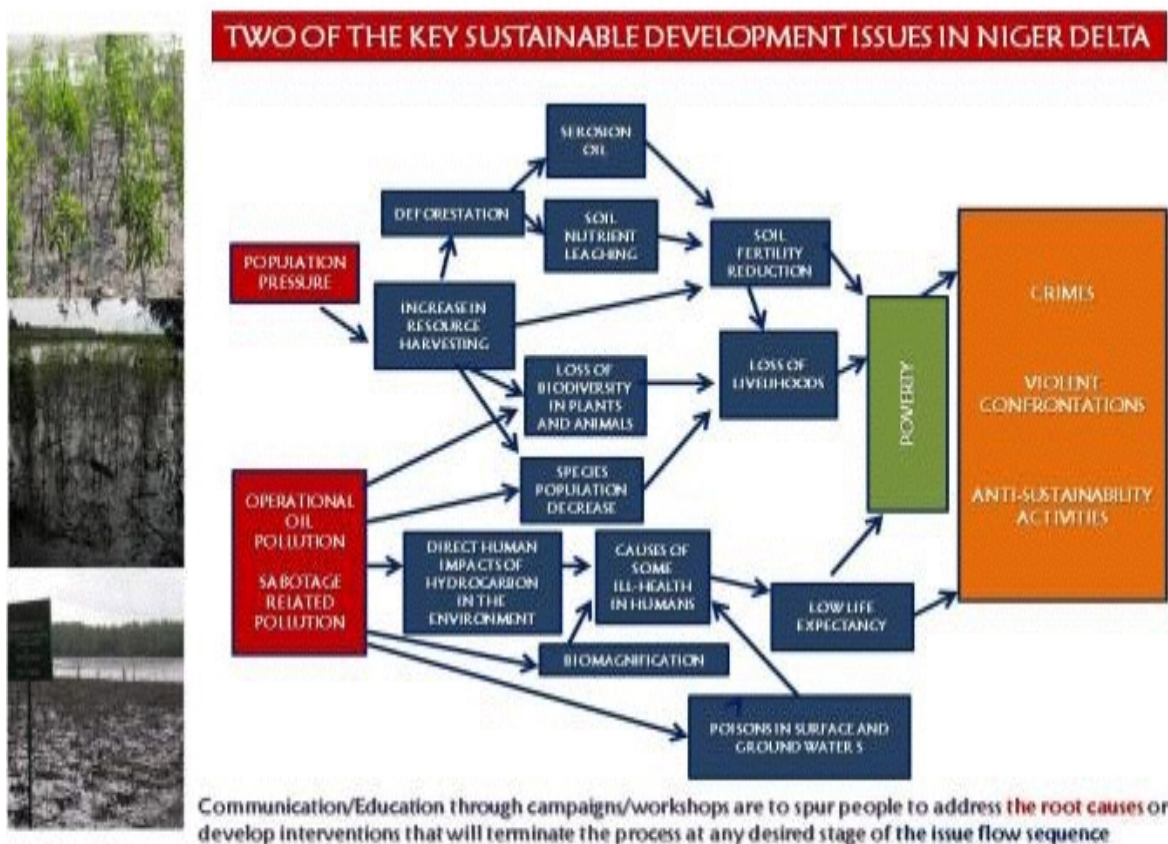


Figure 2: Issues and impacts mapping in project area

Methodology

The CIRCI-led Project Team convened a number of Community town-hall sensitization campaigns followed by 2-day participatory and interactive workshops to build community capacities in sustainable development, environmental protection and health awareness campaigns. The workshops were, mostly, for youth leaders and other opinion leaders including elders and women in the communities.



Minors Awareness

Avama Awareness

The workshops, which were organized as a two-way communication feedback process involved modules in the following areas for holistic approach to address the identified issues that, are usually complex in nature. They include training modules on two major areas within the Mandate of RCE Port Harcourt namely:

1. **Environmental Protection and Conservation:** Sustainable development and how to manage waste and other pollutants; Nature of the biodiversity and the need for conservation; Dangers associated with oil pipeline vandalism and oil production related crimes to enable them appreciate the impacts of sabotage-related oil pollution and other issues, concerns and challenges, and Secure cooperation from host communities to support efforts at eradicating oil production related crimes in their environs.
2. **Healthy Living:** Mode of transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS; Health implications of drugs and alcohol abuse, unprotected sex and the need to sustain good cultural values; Importance of exercising, good

nutrition and regular monitoring of vital health statistics such as blood pressure, blood sugar level, and so on.

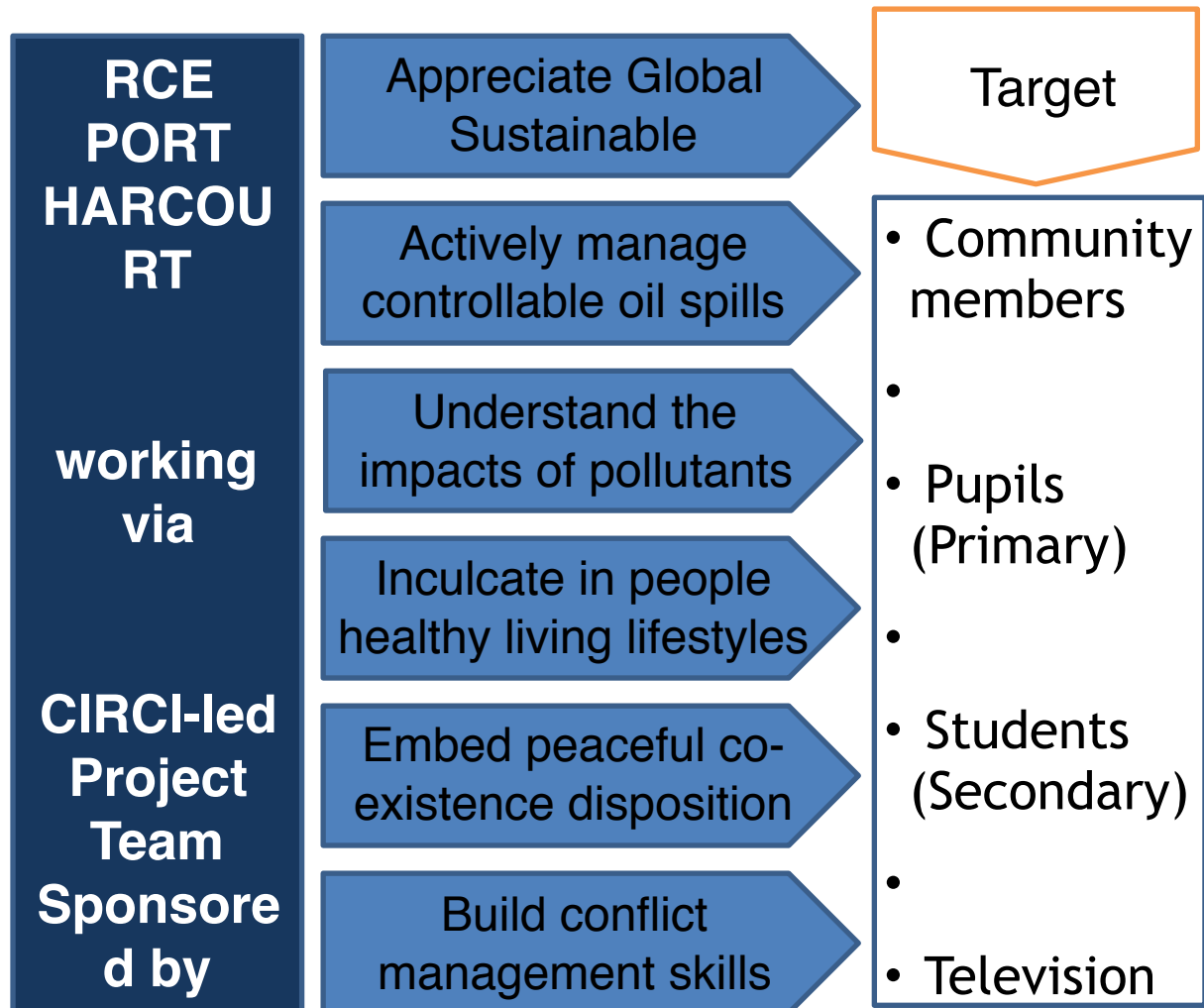


Figure 3: Issues and impacts mapping in project area

In addition to the above issues that were addressed, the 2-day workshops further embedded exposing participants to appreciating the importance of good and effective communication and how to manage and resolve conflicts without always allowing it deteriorate into crises (Figure 3). In all, a total of 18 communities and over 1,000 community members along the entire social strata of the communities in the Greater Port Harcourt area and other local government areas in Rivers State were visited and campaigns well received and welcomed by participants.

Major Outputs and Outcomes

- About 1,200 participants from 18 communities were trained.
- Awareness of the impacts local actions have on global climate change
- Appreciated effective waste management for ecosystem integrity
- Understood importance of biodiversity conservation for sustainable livelihood
- Acknowledged the dangers of unprotected and multi-partner sex lifestyle for STIs transmission
- Identified health implications of drugs and alcohol abuse
- Better understanding of exercising, good nutrition and regular monitoring of vital health statistics for healthy living
- Appreciated the importance of good communication and how to manage conflicts effectively

Next Project Action Plan

- More enlightenment campaigns and workshops for community members, women and youths
- Churches and school children shall be, specially, incorporated in the programmes
- Create more local trainers via Train-the-Trainers programmes
- Conduct post-training impact assessment in the trained 18 communities
- Hopefully, seek and secure partners/funds to support action plan
- Develop audio/visual materials for airing on local television stations

Conclusion

Based on the community acceptance level of completed awareness campaigns, we conclude that:

- Project scale-up workshops are now needed to develop more:
 - ✓ Community-based trainers
 - ✓ Rural social engineers
 - ✓ Indigenous change agents
- The 1,200 participants from just 18 communities is a far cry from expected since this represents only five LGAs out of the 23 LGAs of Rivers State and just two LGAs of the eight LGAs in the Greater Port Harcourt area
- It is imperative to conduct community-level post-training impacts assessment in communities trained.

Acknowledgements

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