

Nigerian villagers ask Italian and Dutch governments to make oil giant Eni stop causing floods

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15 December 2017, ROME - In a formal complaint filed today, the residents of Aggah in Rivers State, Nigeria, petitioned the governments of Italy and the Netherlands to intervene with Italian energy giant Eni S.p.A. and its Dutch subsidiary, Eni International BV. For over four decades, Eni has been causing annual flooding in the village, violating international standards of corporate conduct and devastating people's health, property and livelihoods.



Women's leader Victoria Elechi standing in the flood waters
Photo: David Iheamachor

Through this complaint, residents hope to bring an end to the flooding and seek justice for the families of the village. Mrs. Vitoria Elechi, Aggah women's leader, observed, "Every year the flood takes over the community and we are suffering. The buildings are submerged in water and homes are damaged. The flooding is causing pneumonia in the community and pregnant women contract diseases in the flood. We really need help. We really need for the flooding to be stopped."

Since the 1960s, Eni has been drilling for oil in and around Aggah. The company has built elevated roadways and embankments that completely block natural streams that used to flow through Aggah, causing the streams to back up and violently flood large swathes of farmland and residential areas. According to a recent survey of over two thousand residents carried out in Aggah, the floods' impacts on health, livelihoods and property are widespread and severe. 90% of households have lost agricultural products while over 65% reported severe physical injuries as a result of the flooding. At least one person has drowned in the floodwaters.

Eni's actions force families into precarious situations. A resident displaced with her children, Mrs. Blessing Godwin, lamented, "the flooding affects my house and my shop. We have not been sleeping in our house. I sleep on top of a table in my shop. We are suffering seriously now because water has taken over everywhere. We hope that Eni can put in place proper drainage systems so that water will not flood the community."

Eni's actions violate the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, an internationally recognized code of conduct that Italy has officially endorsed. They state that companies are expected to avoid infringing on the human rights of others and fix the problem when they cause human rights violations. Today's complaint was addressed to the National Contact Points (NCPs) for the OECD

Guidelines in Italy and the Netherlands. NCPs may offer mediation services when communities believe that a company based in their country is violating the Guidelines in its global operations. The complaint was filed by a community association, Egbema Voice of Freedom (EVF), represented by Advocates for Alternatives (ACA) and Chima Williams & Associates (CWA).



“I call on the conscience of humanity to rise up and defend the human rights of the people of Aggah”: Pastor Evaristus Nicholas

Photo: David Iheamachor

Through the complaint, EVF, ACA, and CWA hope that Eni will take responsibility for building and maintaining an adequate drainage system to end the annual flooding, and compensate and assist Aggah residents whose rights have been violated.

Pastor Evaristus Nicholas, leader of EVF, explained, “The flooding destroys our homes, farmlands, educational and recreational centres and contaminates our sources of clean drinking waters. I am calling on Eni to immediately move into Aggah to investigate our claims and stop this carnage. I ask that Eni construct an adequate drainage system that will transverse around the Aggah community to save the soul of my people. I call on the conscience of humanity to rise up and defend the human rights of the people of Aggah.”

The full results of the community’s impact survey can be found at www.advocatesforalternatives.org.

Egbema Voice of Freedom is an association of residents made up of the members of the community of Aggah, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Chima Williams & Associates is an environmental law organisation founded in 2017 that works in Nigeria representing local communities affected by gas flaring, oil pollution and granite mining pollution.

Advocates for Community Alternatives a non-profit organization founded in 2016 to provide legal support to West African communities, in order to help them take control of their own futures as an alternative to the destructive impacts of extractives-led development.