

NO OIL DRILLING IN THE KAVANGO

WHY WE SHOULD LEARN FROM HISTORY AND SAY NO!

Despite failing to conduct bona fide public consultations, the Canadian company ReconAfrica received environmental clearance permits to drill 3 exploration wells and conduct seismic tests in the Kavango regions. Oil and gas production holds great dangers to Namibia and runs contrary to worldwide attempts to move away from fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, which are major drivers of global warming.

Namibia is a signatory to the Paris Accord on Climate Change and has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 92% by 2030. This stands in complete contradiction with giving permission to ReconAfrica's oil and gas exploration. Experts predict that as the world shifts towards alternative renewable energy sources, investments made now into fossil fuel production will soon become "stranded assets", where promised oil and gas revenues never materialise and bankrupt oil and gas companies leave taxpayers to pay for the big clean-up.

A WARNING FROM THE NIGER DELTA

Namibia has just recently been targeted by foreign oil companies. There are many other cases from which we can learn. In 1956, for example, Shell Nigeria discovered the first commercial oil field at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta and started oil exports in 1958. Initially, there were high hopes of huge earnings and jobs but the people in the Niger Delta then realised that they were not benefiting at all. "Oil is a curse" is a constant refrain of the women farmers and fisherwomen in the Niger Delta, where decades of pollution from oil spills and gas flares have killed off fish stocks and destroyed the fertility of the soil. In addition, communities are also seeing their lives and livelihoods destroyed by increasingly frequent and severe flooding, fuelled by the climate crisis.



Oil spill in Ogoniland in 2020. Photo by: Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre (YEAC), Niger Delta, Nigeria

Protests by the people of the Niger Delta were repeatedly suppressed by the Nigerian government and army, who sided with Shell against the local population. One of the key opponents of the pollution of the Ogoni people's land and water, Ken Saro-Wiwa, was executed in 1995. Many more protesters have been killed over the past years.

Communities in the Niger Delta have used the courts in Nigeria and the United Kingdom to fight for compensation from Shell for the destruction of their environment and livelihoods. In 2015, the oil giant agreed to pay £55million to compensate the 15,600 people in the fishing town of Bodo after multiple oil spills devastated their community.

In other lawsuits brought against them in British and Dutch courts, the oil giant Royal Dutch Shell has argued that it was not responsible for the oil spills and other violations committed by its Nigerian subsidiary. This is an example of how parent companies use their subsidiaries as a shield against liability for human rights abuses occurring in their corporate group.

But while it's vital to make polluters pay for the damage they're causing; no amount of compensation will be enough to restore the environment and people's livelihoods, and cover the mitigation costs of catastrophic climate change.

Max Muyemburuku, chairperson of the Kavango East and West Regional Conservancy and Community Forest Association, recently visited the Niger Delta. He reported: "Oil companies in the Niger Delta promised electricity, roads and schools for the local communities but this never happened. Instead the water was polluted, the fish died, hardship increased, and people developed severe illnesses, including lung and liver failure. This is what we can expect from conventional oil production in the Kavango."



The Goi Community is still in court with Shell over the 2020 spill and recently got a favourable response from the UK court. Photo by: Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre (YEAC), Niger Delta, Nigeria

THE ILLUSION OF JOBS

Just like the oil companies in the Niger Delta and elsewhere, ReconAfrica promised jobs to communities in the Kavango regions. This will simply not happen, as the company will at best provide a few poorly paid and temporary jobs to local people while importing staff with technical skills from elsewhere.

Mining is by its very nature a capital-intensive industry that does not generate a large number of jobs. The entire mining industry in Namibia creates less than 2% of all jobs. There are other economic sectors that have far greater potential for job creation. Namibia's own national employment policy points to the huge potential of creating new jobs through the beneficiation of agricultural products. Such interventions must focus on food security as well as on agro-based industries for economic diversification and the creation of a large number of permanent jobs. Agriculture-driven industrialisation with forward and backward linkages to other economic sectors will generate far more sustainable jobs than oil production.

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Over 120 Namibian Civil Society Organisations are calling for a Moratorium and Full Public Enquiry into oil and gas exploration in the Kavango regions.

This call is now supported by over 18,000 organisations and individuals around the world!