

Nigeria needs \$12bn to clean up Bayelsa oil spills - report

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Nigeria needs \$12bn to clean up decades-old oil spills in southern Bayelsa state over a 12-year period, a new report said on Tuesday, 16 May, and singled out Shell and Eni for being responsible for most of the pollution.



An oil slick on Santa Barbara Creek following an oil spill in Bayelsa, Nigeria. 2021. Source: Reuters/Temilade Adelaja

Bayelsa is one of the major oil-producing states in the Niger Delta, a region blighted by pollution, conflict and corruption related to the oil and gas industry.

Oil majors in Nigeria have long faced legal challenges over Niger Delta spills, which they mostly blame on sabotage and vandalism of pipelines and illegal refining.

The Bayelsa State Oil and Environmental Commission said in a report that it started an investigation in 2019 on the impact of spills and looked at evidence from forensic scientists, blood samples from people in affected areas and company data.

The investigation discovered, among other findings, that toxic pollutants from spills and gas flaring were many times higher

than the safe limits in samples of soil, water, air and in the blood of local residents, the commission said.

"The report finds failures of strategy, prevention, response and remediation by oil companies," it said.

A spokesperson for Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited said it was not privy to the final report and could not comment.



A fisherwoman shows her hands stained by oil following an oil spill in Santa Barbara Creek in Bayelsa, Nigeria. 2021. Source: Reuters/Terrilade Adelaja

Oil spills due to theft, says Eni

An Eni spokesperson said the oil spills were due to theft to feed illegal refineries as well as illegal exports and sabotage but the company undertook to remedy all spills.

Most of the gas produced from Eni's Nigerian unit was converted into LNG and fed local power plants, the spokesperson said, adding that "Eni conducts its activities according to the sector's international environmental best practices, without any distinction on a country basis."

Toxins that cause burns, lung problems and risk of cancer were widespread while oil company-led clean-ups were often poorly executed and could further contaminate soil and groundwater, the commission's report said.



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The commission adopted a United Nations model used to calculate the clean-up cost of spills in Niger Delta's Ogoniland more than a decade ago and found that "the clean-up will cost \$12bn over 12 years" in Bayelsa.

Pollution in Ogoniland, which was part of a landmark \$1bn clean-up effort involving a UN agency, could be worse than it previously estimated, a group monitoring the project said last year.

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