

Nigeria: A gulf spill every year

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Multinational oil companies in Nigeria spill more oil every year than has been spilled by BP in the Gulf of Mexico. Unlike the gulf disaster, most people are unaware of this ecological crime.

There have been major spills in Nigeria since BP's Deepwater Horizon rig exploded on April 20, but they have received hardly any attention from the international media.

A May 12 explosion at a Shell installation turned 39 hectares of the Niger Delta into an oil slick, BBC News said on June 15.

Two weeks earlier, an Exxon Mobil oil pipeline ruptured. It spewed a million litres a day for a week.

A 2009 Amnesty report said the oil-rich Niger Delta is considered "one of the world's 10 most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems". But much of the poverty-stricken area, home to 31 million people, has been devastated by pollution.

The Nigerian government estimates about 7000 spills occurred from 1970 to 2000, BBC said.

The government's oil company admits that up to 300 spills still occur a year, but the real figure is likely to be far higher, the New Statesman said on June 14.

A 2006 report by the World Wildlife Fund UK, the World Conservation Union, the Nigeria Conservation Foundation and government representatives said about 50 times the oil lost in the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster had been spilled in the Niger Delta in the past 50 years.

The May 30 *Guardian* said this record makes Nigeria "the world capital of oil pollution".

Nigerian writer Ben Ikari told the *Guardian*: "If this gulf accident had happened in Nigeria, neither the government nor the company would have paid much attention ... This kind of spill happens all the time in the delta." Nnimmo Bassey, Nigerian climate activist and head of Friends of the Earth International said: "In Nigeria, oil companies largely ignore their spills, cover them up and destroy people's livelihood and environments. The gulf spill can be seen as a metaphor for what is happening daily in the oilfields of Nigeria and other parts of Africa." "This has gone on for 50 years in Nigeria", he said. "People depend completely on the environment for their drinking water and farming and fishing. They are amazed that the president of the US can be making speeches daily, because in Nigeria people there would not hear a whimper."

Simon Butler

P.S.

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