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## Okumu oil host communities protest marginalisation, water pollution

[2](#) Published: 31 Jan 2021

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Tribune | 31 January 2021

## Okumu oil host communities protest marginalisation, water pollution

By 'Suyi Ayodele, Benin-City

The host communities of Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc in Ovia South-West Local Government Area of Edo State, over the weekend held a peaceful protest against what they tagged marginalisation and ill-treatment and water pollution by the oil palm company.

The protesters, who were drawn from the host communities such as Gbelebu, Safargbo, Okomu, Oweike and Maikolo, carried placards bearing various inscriptions such as “Govt tell Okomu Oil Company to open our road”, “Okomu Oil Company give us our fishing traps that are with you”; “Stop polluting our stream with your agrochemical, it is our only source of drinking water”; “We are not terrorists, Stop harassing us with military, Okomu Oil,” accused the company of using military personnel to block the only road that links them to Udo.



They also accused the Edo State Government of enslaving them in their ancestral land by selling the whole land where they farm to the company, lamenting that they have nowhere to farm anymore in their land.

Addressing a press conference shortly after the protest, the Fiyewei (spokesperson) of Okomu clan, Chief Ajele Sunday, said it was unfortunate that the state government had joined in the enslavement of the people with continuous sales of the people’s land, leaving little or nothing for the farming communities.

Ajele lamented that while the people expected the government to call the oil palm company to order, ” unfortunately, the state government has joined them in the enslavement. The state government sells the land to multinational where this forest people farm and even trade. “Ordinarily, we expected the state government to come to the aide of these host communities and question this multinational why the ill-treatment.

“A country that has a constitution, it is unfortunate that the constitution is not working. A country with laws yet the law is not working. The law protects only the rich while the poor who are the forest people that feed the nation are suffering. Everything we buy in the market comes from the forest,” he lamented.

IJAWS IN EDO PROTEST AGAINST OKOMU OIL PALM COM...



On her part, Mrs Biobokogha Pena-ere from Okomu said the company had put the communities into bondage through their maltreatment and harassment, lamenting that they could no longer fish nor farm.

“Okomu Oil Palm is oppressing us, intimidating us, we don’t have good road, we don’t have good water. We cannot kill the fish we used to kill before because they have used their chemical to spoil our river, so no fish. The petty business we do to survive, they have blocked the road to access urban cities, so we can no longer do our businesses,” Pena-ere lamented.

Also speaking, Chief French Yabike decried the activities of Okomu Oil Palm Company, alleging that the company had marginalised the host communities in terms of employment opportunities.

“In terms of employment nothing; talking about a scholarship, nothing, everything they promised, nothing was done,” Yabike stressed.

According to him, Okomu land was initially divided into two areas: BC 9 and BC10, with the company occupying BC9 while the natives occupy BC10.

He, however, lamented that Okomu Oil Palm Company had crossed to BC10 part of the land, using the military to intimidate the people.

“We are tired of the activities of Okomu Oil Palm Company. The company has been evacuating our communities. Some times ago, they came with soldiers to evacuate Lemon camp. After that they proceeded to Agbede community politics and evacuated them, and later extended to Oweike, they evacuated it too,” he said.

Also speaking, a chief from Gbelebu community, Ejueyi Segun, said the only road linking the community and others had been blocked by the company, emphasising that the road belongs to the communities and not the company as being claimed.

“The company has locked up the existing road before the company was founded. Since 2019, the road has been under lock and today it been locked. They used COVID-19 as an excuse to finally lock up the road with lockdown excuse. The alternative road is bad,” he said.

“The road the company is claiming is not its road, that road was constructed by British West Africa Timber Contractors of those days before Okomu Oil Palm was set up there,” Ejueyi maintained.

Lawoni Dumofaye, from Agbede community, also corroborated the earlier speakers, adding that “our streams are being polluted with their agrochemicals. We are suffering. We are calling in the international community and the government to come to our aid. We have a lot of graduates in our communities but none is being employed.”

Efforts to reach Fidelis Olise, the Public Relations Officer to the company were abortive as all calls and WhatsApp messages sent to his mobile number were not replied, even after reading them.

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Punch | 1 February 2021

[Edo communities tackle oil firm over poor treatment](#)

by Adeyinka Adedipe, Benin

Host communities of Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc in the Ovia South West Local Government Area of Edo State have protested against alleged marginalisation and ill-treatment by the company.

The protesters, drawn from the host communities of Gbelebu, Safargbo, Okomu, Oweike and Maikolo, carried placards with different inscriptions, including, ‘Govt, tell Okomu oil company to open our road,’ ‘Okomu oil company, give us our fishing traps that are with you,’ ‘Stop polluting our stream with your agro chemical, it is our only source of drinking water,’ and ‘We are not terrorists, stop harassing us with military, Okomu oil.’

They accused the company of positioning fierce military men on the only road that linked them to Udo, a neighbouring community.

The protesters also accused the Edo State Government of selling their farmlands to the company, thereby enslaving them.

Speaking after the protest, the Fiyewei (spokesperson) of Okomu clan, Chief Ajele Sunday, said it was unfortunate that the state government joined in the enslavement of the people with continuous sales of land to foreign companies.

He said, “If you sell the land to multinationals, how do you want these people to survive? Ordinarily, we expect the state government to come to the aide of the host communities and question this multinationals, unfortunately, the government has joined them in the enslavement.

“A country that has a constitution; it is unfortunate that the constitution is not working. A country with laws, yet the law is not working. The law protects only the rich, while the poor, who are the forest people that feed the nation, are suffering. Everything we buy in the market comes from the forest.”

The Public Relations Officer the company, Fidelis Olise, urged the reporter to send him a text message on the matter.

**Original source:** [Tribune](#)

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1. Captain Jack  
03 Feb 2021

I have read this story and it's laughable that this people especially the convener of this Protest keep attributing their welfare to Okomu instead of the relevant govt agencies. A curious mind would want to ask if this outcry by Sunday Ajele and his cohorts are genuine why haven't the Local Govt, the State Govt

and Federal Govt attend to their plight, just an innocent question. Also they mentioned an alternative road, if Sunday Ajele really have the interest of his people why can't he use his influence to attract individuals, groups and even Govt to repair this alternative route, since the one under contention is directly inside Okomu's plantation. I was informed by a reliable source that the hall where the protest was held was built by Okomu Oil Palm Company PLC. and yet they claim Okomu has not done anything. I would advise Sunday Ajele and his cohorts to channel this youthful energy they are using to protest against Okomu to peacefully sort for individuals, groups and even Govt to attract development to their area.

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2. James Osagie  
02 Feb 2021

It is unfortunate that some people still believe the lies and dummy sold by Sunday Ajele. As an under cover journalist, I visited some of the communities mentioned by Ajele and found the great work that Okomu Oil has done in the area. For example the hall in which Ajele organised his protest was built by Okomu Oil . A look at Okomu's website will reveal what Okomu represent to the communities. Why can't Ajele sunday wait for the outcome of the investigative panel looking into the issues earlier raised by him?

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