

Nigerian communities file damages claim against Shell in London court

By [MacDonald Dzirutwe](#)

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More than 11,000 Nigerians from the oil-producing Niger Delta have filed a compensation claim against Shell at the London High Court, the latest step in a case that will test whether multinationals can be held to account for the actions of overseas subsidiaries.



An overview of the Niger delta where signs of oil spills can be seen in the water in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, 1 August 2018. Reuters/Ron Bousso/File Photo

In 2021, the UK Supreme Court allowed a group of 42,500 Nigerian farmers and fishermen to sue Shell in the English courts after years of oil spills had contaminated land and groundwater.

The judges said at the time there was an arguable case that Shell, one of the world's biggest energy companies, was responsible because it exercised significant control over its Nigeria subsidiary SPDC.

On Thursday, UK law firm Leigh Day said it had filed claims on behalf of 11,317 people and 17 institutions including churches and schools from Ogale community in Niger Delta for compensation for loss of livelihoods and damage against Shell.

Leigh Day said the claim from Ogale adds to one brought by members of the Bille community in 2015. That brings the total number of villagers seeking compensation from Shell to 13,652.

The claims say oil spills resulting from Shell's operations in the Niger Delta have destroyed farms, contaminated drinking water and harmed aquatic life.



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"The next stage in the case is for a case management hearing to be set in Spring 2023, ahead of the full trial which is likely to occur the following year," Leigh Day said in a statement.

A Shell spokesperson said the majority of spills related to the Ogale and Bille claims were caused by illegal third-party interference, including pipeline sabotage but that SPDC would continue cleaning affected areas.

"We believe litigation does little to address the real problem in the Niger Delta: oil spills due to crude oil theft, illegal refining and sabotage, with which SPDC is constantly faced and which cause the most environmental damage," the spokesperson said.

Oil spills, sometimes due to vandalism or corrosion, are common in the Niger Delta, a vast maze of creeks and mangrove swamps criss-crossed by pipelines and blighted by poverty, pollution, oil-fuelled corruption and violence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reporting by MacDonald Dzirutwe; Editing by Kirsten Donovan

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