

Community voices for change

Local advocacy in the Niger Delta

CASE STUDY 1: OGU COMMUNITY

This is the first case study in a three-part series looking at how local communities have successfully lobbied for change in the Niger Delta. This case study documents how members of Ogu community, in Rivers State, called on the government to rebuild school buildings which had been demolished. They led a campaign to engage with their local politicians and officials, and were successful in securing a commitment to quality education returning to their community.

Key outcomes



Improved educational infrastructure

Local school buildings rebuilt and re-equipped



Increased community capacity

Members of Ogu community were trained in how to document and discuss local issues



New relationships developed

Community members successfully engaged with local officials – building trust while making their concerns known

The community successfully ran an advocacy campaign to rebuild school buildings which had been demolished. They engaged with local politicians and officials, and were successful in securing a commitment to quality education returning to their community.



Location of Ogu community and the Rivers State capital, Port Harcourt, within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

The problem

Ogu is a community in Rivers State, in the Niger Delta. Over several years, its people have been fighting for the reconstruction of buildings at the Ogu government secondary school, which were knocked down by the Rivers State Government in 2009. This was supposedly to build a new 'model' school. But this never happened – causing untold hardship to parents, teachers, and students.

The quality of education received by students there is very poor compared to other government secondary schools. We are forced to merge students from different classes. Some of them sit on the floor or window sills, while others stay outside"

– Mrs Adline, a teacher at the school

There were originally eleven buildings, with nine taken down. The remaining two classroom blocks had to serve all the students in the junior and secondary school. There was not enough space to teach; the library and toilets had gone; and truancy increased because of the neglect and poor supervision at the school. Students and teachers suffered alike, and the quality of education in Ogu decreased.

"The community is not very happy with the present government. For no reason, the governor came and told the people that they want to put up a model secondary school for us and in place of that, he has to demolish the old Government Secondary School. Now, we don't have any places for the students. And after the demolition, for years now, nothing has been done." – Ogu community spokesman Chief Anthony Ibifuro

The action

Members of Ogu community had had enough. So in response, with SDN's support, they set up a 'Community Monitoring and Advocacy Group'. This included representatives of the local Council of Chiefs, as well as women's, youth and other groups. The purpose of the group was to engage

with local officials, make their collective voice heard, and demand action on the school.

In collaboration with the Council of Chiefs, the CMAG first staged a protest at the Local Government premises to register their displeasure at the slow pace of activity. In return, the Chairman of the Local Government promised that he would give their feedback to the right authority.

The elders then sent a letter to the office of the governor, from the Amanyabo of Ogu – the local traditional leader – and his Council of Chiefs, demanding that the demolished structures be rebuilt to a good standard.



A classroom at Ogu Government Secondary school which had to be abandoned.

When this tactic did not work, two community representatives from the Council of Chiefs went on air to express the challenges being faced. They took part in a radio discussion on Nigeria Info and Rhythm FM. This proved astonishingly effective. The next day, a response was made on air by the Governor's Special Adviser on Youth Affairs, rejecting claims that the reconstruction of the school had been abandoned, and saying that contractors would soon be on site.



Ogu Chiefs discussing community needs on the Nigeria Info radio station.

In addition, the secretary of the Ogu Council of Chiefs visited the Minister of State for Education, imploring him to help. The Minister for Education agreed, and scheduled a visit to the school to discuss its problems and the lack of progress. But before he did, the State Government hurriedly organised a foundation laying ceremony, to demonstrate its apparent work, and make it look like progress was being made. However, despite this – and the subsequent clearing of parts of the site – the equipment and workers who arrived at the school left a few weeks later. So it seemed like nothing would happen after all.



Blocks at the foundation-laying ceremony for the rebuilt school in Ogu.

Nevertheless, there was a silver lining to this cloud. The reason why the Minister of State for Education and the State Government were interested in the community's problems is that the election for the Governorship of the state was approaching, and the Minister of State for Education was intending to stand. So he and the incumbent state governor were both keen to demonstrate their willingness to address community issues. In the event, the Minister of State for Education won the election, and became Governor. And because he had publically promised to rebuild the school during his campaign, the Community was able to follow up with him after the election and make provisions for its reconstruction.

The outcome

Ultimately, this success was due to the pressure of the election. But Ogu community showed political savvy to capitalise on this opportunity. Public commitments from key leaders can bring about change – and politicians need to do more – but communities need to work over the longer term to build more accountable relationships between citizens and their representatives.

Although it took years of dogged advocacy, the reconstruction of Ogu's school was finally confirmed by the government in 2016. Work began in December of that year, with the government awarding contracts to build classroom blocks, teachers' and principals' quarters, a dining hall, hostels and a chapel. The buildings have now been completed and furnished, although the school itself still needs to be commissioned by the government, when students and teachers will be able to move into the new structures. It is hoped that this will take place in the next 12 months.



A new classroom block built thanks to Ogu community advocacy work.

"I am an alumni of this great school and it gives me joy to see the school being rebuilt to her past glory. This school used to house a boarding facility and we had students from Lagos, Cross River, Delta who were boarders. Now that reconstruction is almost complete, teachers from outside are lobbying to be posted to the school"
– Silas Iruene, Vice Principal of Ogu Government Secondary School.

"I and fellow students can't wait to step into the new buildings so this current one can be brought down. It would be a nice thing to go back to our boarding system of old which the school has been known for" – Atamuno Lucky Chapel Prefect

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Kingdom of the Netherlands

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