



# SDN Annual Report

**2023**

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**SDN**

**For a  
peaceful,  
prosperous and  
pollution-free  
Niger Delta.**

*Image description: A woman selling pepper in the market. Credit: SDN*

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# Who we are

Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) is a charity working in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. Our office is based in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and is assisted by a small team in London, UK. We were established in 2004.

# What we do

SDN works with communities in the Niger Delta impacted by the oil and gas industry, weak governance, insecurity, a lack of jobs and wider environmental and climate challenges. We work with communities, government, civil society and the private sector to identify and implement solutions to these challenges, which promote sustainable development and the protection of human rights—including the right to a healthy environment. Guided by principles of participation, inclusion and non-discrimination, SDN promotes the perspectives and experiences of those living in the Niger Delta at the centre of all of our work and encourages transparency and accountability between all actors in the region.





# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

Dear friends, partners, and supporters,

As the Chair of Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), I am honoured to reflect on the collaborative efforts that have been the backbone of our achievements throughout the past year. Amidst the challenges faced by the Niger Delta, our commitment to positive change has been fortified by the strength of our staff, and our partnerships with communities, Federal and State governments, civil society, the private sector and friends of SDN.

Our work spans a broad spectrum, from environmental advocacy and governance strengthening to economic diversification and peacebuilding. The resilience demonstrated by our partnerships, even in the face of the turbulence witnessed in 2023, underscores their pivotal role in sustaining and amplifying our impact. Despite considerable economic and political change throughout the year, our collective commitment prevailed, resulting in significant accomplishments and the establishment of platforms for future growth.

We are pleased that SDN continues to receive support from a growing number of donors and would like to offer sincere thanks to all those who contributed to our programming in 2023 notably the European Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Ford Foundation, the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the United States Agency for International Development.

As we look ahead to 2024, we will celebrate the 20th Anniversary of SDN's establishment in the Niger Delta - reaching this milestone is a significant achievement and a testament to the enduring relationships we have built over the years in the Niger Delta and Nigeria. For our 20th Anniversary, we are planning an exciting series of events and publications to mark the occasion and look forward to sharing more information with all our partners and supporters throughout the year. We acknowledge the work that lies ahead and express gratitude to the communities we serve, our partners, and all who support our mission. The strength of our partnerships is the compass guiding us towards a more sustainable and equitable Niger Delta.

Warm regards,  
Josie D'Angelo,  
Chair of the Board of Trustees, Stakeholder Democracy Network.

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear supporters and friends of Stakeholder Democracy Network,

As the Executive Director of Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), I am pleased to share in the 2023 annual report the remarkable programmatic results that have defined our journey over the past year. In a year marked by significant transitions and challenges in the Niger Delta, our commitment to positive change has translated into tangible outcomes across various fronts.

Joining as Executive Director midway through the year, I had the privilege of witnessing the breadth of our work, encompassing environmental and climate change advocacy, governance strengthening, and the pursuit of a diversified economy with improved job opportunities. Despite the hurdles presented by the removal of the fuel subsidy, economic instability, and enduring environmental issues, we accomplished much and laid the foundations for sustained growth. I would also like to express my gratitude to my predecessor, Calvin Laing, who left behind a strong legacy of achievement. I also pay tribute to the hard work of all our staff.

Several highlights from the year stand out: Our Civic Engagement and Voter Registration initiatives during the 2023 general elections stand as a testament to the impact of our programmatic efforts. The unwavering commitment to democratic processes, coupled with collaboration with INEC, disabled people's organisations, and grassroots groups, facilitated accessible events for voter registration in Rivers State. The subsequent accountability measures by our Women and Youth Ambassadors underscore the program's success.

The 'Reducing the Digital Gender Gap in the Niger Delta' project, launched in April 2023, has achieved significant milestones. We undertook a comprehensive study on the digital gender gap coupled with a robust digital skills training program, which has garnered an overwhelming response.

The introduction of Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs) by the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) presented a significant opportunity for impactful change. Collaborating with communities, government, and oil and gas companies, we are actively contributing to the development of a guide supporting the effective implementation of the HCDT policy.



Our coordination of independent civil society monitoring of the Ogoniland clean-up has spurred improvements, yet challenges persist, and further work is needed for a comprehensive cleanup across the Delta. Working with Community Monitoring and Advocacy Groups we've been inspired by their success in bringing tangible benefits to their communities in terms of improved infrastructure and services. In 2023, we expanded this model to the state-level and helped highlight the demands of communities for more systematic change.

As we reflect on these programmatic achievements, we recognise the challenges ahead and express gratitude to the communities we serve, our partners, and all who support our mission.

Warm regards,  
Adam Heal,  
Executive Director,  
Stakeholder Democracy Network.



Image 1 description: Participants of the digital skills project in training. Credit: SDN Anthony Abeh

Image 2 description: SDN and HYPREP staff during soil sample collection at one of the clean-up sites in Ogoni-land. Credit: SDN, ThankGod Okorisha

# OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



**300**

rural farmers trained in climate-smart agricultural techniques generating a 157% increase in cumulative revenue.



**1 Billion**

Naira of investments secured by Community Monitoring and Advocacy Groups.

**SDN**



**300**

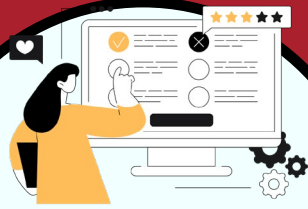
women and 120 women-led businesses in Rivers and Akwa-Ibom States trained in digital skills and provided with career support.



**10**

local businesses partnering with SDN to offer jobs, internships and mentoring for our digital skills trainees.





**9,600**

respondents to our digital gender gap survey; the largest study of its kind to-date.



**850**

soil and water samples from the Ogoniland clean-up collected and analysed.



**48**

Women and Youth (WeYOU) Ambassadors and 32 CSOs empowered as advocates for the Women and Youth Agenda (WAYA).



**58**

inmates illegally or wrongfully detained released from custody through the actions of our Civic Space Watch Cluster.



**63**

government officials and staff trained on methane measurement or oil spill contingency planning.



# PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE

*Image description: Nigerian youths on the streets during the endsars protest. Credit: SDN, ThankGod Okorisha*



# STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Communities in the Niger Delta are the best advocates for their own development. SDN has worked to empower 46 communities spanning six Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Bayelsa State, including host communities, to better navigate the challenges posed by the oil and gas sector. Across 44 communities, with an estimated total population of 1.6 million, 24 Community Monitoring and Advocacy Groups (CMAGs) have been established. By amplifying local voices and engaging with office and budget holders, the CMAGs aim to foster targeted and sustainable development initiatives tailored to community needs. In 2023, their efforts have led to significant infrastructure improvements, including the installation of solar street lights and the construction and renovation of roads, schools, and healthcare facilities, leading to investment worth 1 billion Naira (see page 12 and 13).

Additionally, 2023 saw for the first time representatives from the 24 CMAGs converge to form a State Monitoring and Advocacy Group (SMAG), a collective body empowered to address systemic challenges at the state level. Beyond advocating for abandoned projects, the SMAG endeavours to drive comprehensive policy reforms that have the potential to benefit all citizens of Bayelsa State in the long term. By creating a robust platform for collective action, SMAGs have strengthened civil society's capacity to monitor governance outcomes and hold duty bearers accountable, marking a significant advancement in the pursuit of sustainable development and social justice in the Niger Delta, for instance by attracting attention to abandoned health infrastructure projects.



Image description: CMAG and SMAG members during training.

## Ogbia town Community Story

In 2023, representatives of the Ogbia Town Community Monitoring and Advocacy Group (CMAG) embarked on a vital advocacy mission: to combat the rampant robberies and kidnapping attempts that had besieged Ogbia, severely hindering economic activities. To address these challenges, the CMAG sought an audience with the Chairman, Caretaker committee of the Ogbia Local Government Council and shared their concerns about how the insecurity was hurting businesses and scaring people off the streets. The Chairman listened and promised to take action.

In a remarkable display of commitment, within a mere two weeks, the Chairman spearheaded a series of initiatives aimed at bolstering the community's security apparatus. Through the provision of essential security gadgets such as Walkie-Talkies and other crucial accessories, alongside the implementation of a welfare package ensuring prompt monthly stipends for the dedicated vigilante group operating within the town, tangible progress was achieved. The ripple effect of this intervention is profound, as an estimated 6,000 individuals poised to directly benefit from the enhanced security measures now in place. Beyond safeguarding lives and property, these measures also promise to rejuvenate economic activity, fostering an environment where businesses can thrive without fear of disruption.

Moreover, recognising the importance of infrastructure in fostering resilience and connectivity within the community, the Chairman has embarked on ambitious road construction projects. By improving mobility and accessibility, these roads promise to further uplift the town, facilitating greater cohesion and development opportunities for all residents.

“

*As a CMAG member and also part of the vigilante team in the town, I can say that the impact of our action is being felt by the community. A closed mouth is a closed destiny, if we had not met with our duty bearer and told them what we want, maybe now we still would not have been empowered to tackle theft and insecurity.*

” Talent, Ogbia Town CMAG member.





“

*After our training on advocacy and communication by SDN, we went to work when we got back to our community. We took a video of the abandoned Government Science and Technical College and posted it online tagging the Commissioner of Education and Ministry of Works. So we got a call that the state government will commence work at the site. True to their words, the contractor has been mobilized to the site and construction is ongoing at a different level.*

”

Iduate, Igbeta-Ewoama  
CMAG Secretary.

## Igbeta-Ewoama Community Story

For over a year, the construction of structures in the Government Science and Technical College in Igbeta-Ewoama community, Nembe Local Government Area had been abandoned at various stages, leaving the community disappointed. With buildings halted at roofing states and lintel levels, the promise of a fully functional educational institution seemed distant and looked unrealistic.

Recognising the significance of this project for the education and economic growth of the region, our Community Monitoring and Advocacy Group (CMAG) took action. Equipped with newfound skills in advocacy and effective communication garnered from specialised training sessions delivered by SDN, the CMAG members embarked on a strategic campaign to push for the completion of the abandoned school.

Utilising the power of social media, they documented the state of the structures through a compelling video and circulated it widely on platforms like Facebook. Additionally, they directly engaged key decision-makers, including the Commissioner of Education and the Bayelsa State Ministry of Works, through targeted direct messages. The impact was swift and profound. Responding to the community's outcry and the evidence presented by the CMAG, the Deputy Governor personally reached out to the CMAG Chairman, expressing a commitment to rectify the situation. True to this promise, efforts were swiftly made to bring contractors back to the site, resuming construction activities and construction is now back on track.



Image description: Construction of the college ongoing in Igbeta-Ewoama.

# AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF WOMEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Young people, women and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) have historically been marginalised in the Niger Delta and remain under-represented in political decision-making. Relatedly, there are few mechanisms providing voice to these groups and supporting them to hold elected decision-makers to account. The 2023 general elections demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm for meaningful political engagement among women and youth populations and reflected their desire for a more inclusive and democratic process.

Through the end of 2023 and into 2024, SDN worked directly with 48 selected Women and Youth (WeYOU) Ambassadors and 32 representatives from civil society, along with private sector representatives, to follow up on electoral commitments made by elected candidates and policy demands contained in the Women and Youth Agenda. Specifically, WeYOU Ambassadors and CSO Networks were supported to carry out advocacy engagements with key stakeholders at the state and local government levels. This advocacy led to notable successes including the development of a Rivers State Gender Policy. The policy, if implemented, will establish capacity-building initiatives to enhance women's entrepreneurship skills through the Ministry of Women Affairs as well as promote women's representation in appointive and elective positions - applying the affirmative action provisions that encourage 50% female representation.

Additionally, a draft bill was prepared (Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities, 2024) to repeal and replace the Rivers State Persons with Disabilities Welfare (Enhancement) Law. This draft bill provides for the full integration of Persons with Disabilities into society via inclusive practices; establishes the Rivers State Council for Persons with Disabilities and vests in the council the responsibilities for PwD's education, healthcare, housing, social, economic and civic rights.

SDN helped review and draft a comprehensive Rivers State Youth Policy through collaboration with the Ministries of Youth Development, Justice, and Agriculture, along with CSOs, youth representatives and academic experts. The policy prioritises political inclusion, employment creation and entrepreneurship through the inauguration of the Rivers State Youth Parliament where opportunities will be provided for young people to drive youth-centric programmes, amplify their voices and engage in capacity-building and skills development towards achieving their political and socio-economic goals.



Image description: SDN staff, We-You ambassadors, and INEC staff at PVC sensitisation in Okrika, Rivers State. Credit: SDN, ThankGod Okorisha.



# SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Ahead of the 2023 national elections, SDN took action to enhance the political participation and representation of women, young people, and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Rivers State leading up to the 2023 elections. Noting the centrality of voter registration, we made considerable strides in raising awareness and engagement through various campaigns and activities, reaching over 1.27 million individuals online and about 20,000 persons directly through Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) rallies in four Local Government Areas. In collaboration with INEC, Disabled People's Organisations, and grassroots groups, we facilitated accessible events for voter registration in Rivers State. The Rivers Governorship Debate, a collaboration with the Rivers Debate Group, further underscored the project's impact, drawing significant attention with over 700,000 views and substantial physical attendance.

Women and Youth (WeYOU) Ambassadors played a pivotal role in our efforts, embodying the initiative's spirit by actively engaging in political processes and advocating for inclusive political representation. These ambassadors, a diverse group comprising women, young people, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), and male champions, were instrumental in driving the project's objectives on the ground. They were trained in leadership, campaigning, policy, and influencing skills, enabling them to mobilise citizens effectively during various campaign activities. Key achievements of the WeYOU Ambassadors include a significant presence in political parties with 64% being registered members, 32% contesting for elective or other leadership positions in their communities. WeYOU advocacy efforts led to the passage of the Women Inheritance Rights law in Rivers State, showcasing their effectiveness in influencing policy for the betterment of civic representation and rights.



Image description: SDN CVR sensitisation rally at the University of Port Harcourt. Credit: SDN.



## SECURING CIVIC SPACE

Restrictions on civic space in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers state in the Niger Delta are a core concern. Citizens are often exposed to high levels of harassment, violence and illegal detention by state agencies when exercising their civic freedoms. SDN worked to address threats to civic space through effective implementation of the Administration of Criminal Justice Law (ACJL) in Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom states. Through a collaborative effort among seven non-governmental organisations and anchored by SDN, we utilised a four-pronged approach of knowledge sharing, collaboration, advocacy, and dialogues. The creation of Civic Space Watch Clusters has been a powerful force for change, focusing on enhancing access to justice and protecting citizens' rights against illegal arrests, detentions, and discrimination, particularly against women.

In 2023, notable successes include the advocacy-led signing of the ACJL in Akwa Ibom five years after its legislative passage, the establishment of the Administration of Criminal Justice Monitoring Committees in both Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom, and the inception of the Police Duty Solicitor Scheme in Rivers State. These initiatives have led to tangible improvements in the administration of justice, including the protection of suspects' rights, the reduction of torture in detention, and the enhancement of women's rights in the justice process.

The project's comprehensive approach to fostering dialogue between civil society actors and government entities, as well as its efforts to mobilize public support for ACJL implementation, have resulted in improved collaboration among stakeholders, the development and delivery of targeted advocacy campaigns, and the establishment of observatory committees to support ongoing advocacy efforts. In addition Cluster members have helped individuals illegally or wrongfully held by the police, achieving the release of over 50 individuals.



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*I used to believe that my voice didn't matter, but through the support and empowerment I received from the Civic Space Watch Cluster, I've learned that I have the power to make a difference. Now, I stand tall, knowing that knowledge is my greatest weapon and advocacy is my voice for change.*

” Blessing, project participant.

## Blessing's Story



*Image description: Blessing, project participant.*

Blessing, a resilient entrepreneur from Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, has emerged as a beacon of change in her community, thanks to the concerted efforts of the Civic Space Watch Cluster - Mac-Jim Foundation and Family Welfare Foundation, under the leadership of SDN.

Before the inception of our project, Blessing, like many other women in her community, faced systemic discrimination and injustice, including by police officers who refused to allow women to stand as sureties or grant bail to suspects. Additionally, she encountered the unjust practice of arrest by proxy, where individuals (often relatives) were detained in relation to another person's offence.

During the project's implementation, Blessing witnessed a transformative shift. Through a series of advocacy efforts, quarterly forums, and radio sensitisation programmes, the project team diligently educated the public on the provisions of the Administration of Criminal Justice Law (ACJL), specifically highlighting the rights of women to act as sureties and secure bail for suspects. Notably, sections 117(3) and 5 of the ACJL unequivocally prohibit denying women the opportunity to stand as sureties and condemn the practice of arrest by proxy.

Blessing actively engaged in the project's activities, attending quarterly fora and tuning in to the weekly radio programme on Glory FM 97.1, Yenagoa. Equipped with knowledge and empowered by the right information, Blessing exemplified the impact of informed advocacy when she intervened and prevented a police officer from unlawfully arresting a woman in her compound in place of her husband in July 2023. Asserting her rights under the ACJL, Blessing effectively halted the arrest. She told the police officers that they were told not to allow any police officer to arrest any of their family members in place of an offence committed by another person and that the ACJL also disallows it. This made the police officer leave the compound without carrying out the arrest.

Blessing's experience reflects a broader societal shift, where women are increasingly equipped with knowledge about their rights and emboldened to assert them. No longer passive bystanders, women like Blessing now possess the confidence to engage with law enforcement officers and challenge unjust practices.



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*The youths in Rumukwachi are now aware of their rights. They also now know human rights lawyers who can defend their rights on pro-bono. By understanding the ACJL, we become advocates for change, ensuring that every citizen's rights are respected and defended.*

”

Prince, project participant.

## Prince's Story



*Image description: Prince, project participant*

Prince, a driven self-employed undergraduate residing in Rumukwachi, Obio Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, embodies the transformative potential of legal education and community engagement. Like many young people in Rivers State, Prince faced a significant barrier: a lack of understanding of his rights under the Administration of Criminal Justice Law (ACJL) 2015.

However, Prince's commitment to addressing this issue led him to actively engage in learning events and quarterly fora organised by the Civic Space Watch Cluster, spearheaded by SDN in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Through these platforms, Prince gained a comprehensive understanding of the ACJL, particularly its provisions for the protection of human rights. He also learned about the availability of human rights lawyers who provide pro-bono services to defend individuals' rights.

Driven by his passion for human rights protection, Prince became an Ambassador of ACJL in Rumukwachi. He took on the responsibility of educating fellow young people about the key sections of the ACJL and how it safeguards their rights. Additionally, he facilitated connections between young people in his community and human rights lawyers who offered pro-bono assistance in cases of illegal arrests or detention by the police. According to him, "The youths in Rumukwachi are now aware of their rights. They also now know human rights lawyers who can defend their rights on pro-bono. By understanding the ACJL, we become advocates for change, ensuring that every citizen's rights are respected and defended".

The significance of Prince's story is profound. By empowering himself and his community with knowledge of the ACJL, Prince contributes to reducing instances of intimidation, harassment, illegal arrests, and detentions by law enforcement officers. His advocacy underscores the importance of security agencies being well-informed about the law to prevent the infringement of citizens' fundamental rights.





# **PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND ADDRESSING CLIMATE IMPACTS**

*Image description: A beneficiary of SDN's livelihood project walking an SDN staff through his rice farm. Credit: SDN, ThankGod Okorisha*



# MONITORING THE Ogoni-LAND CLEAN-UP

The clean-up of Ogoniland under the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) is the largest oil spill clean-up and environmental remediation project in Nigeria. For several years, SDN has been leading independent monitoring of the clean-up, assessing both its technical rigour and community engagement and satisfaction. In 2023, in collaboration with HYPREP, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), the Ministry of Environment, and the Civil Society Monitoring team, we successfully conducted joint visits to Ogoniland, resulting in the collection of nearly 850 soil and water samples. To bolster our monitoring capabilities, we trained 42 civil society monitors in oil spill impact assessment, remediation technologies, and health and safety precautions for oil-polluted sites, leveraging expertise recommended by NOSDRA.

In 2023, our monitoring efforts for the Ogoni-land cleanup have significantly influenced the quality of remediation work undertaken by HYPREP and its contractors. Our monitoring continued to identify problems with revegetation in many of the sites that had been remediated. SDN recommendations which were shared with NOSDRA and HYPREP contributed to the reclassification of poorly remediated so that they can be properly treated. Corrective actions and extended monitoring periods were ordered for lots that had contaminant levels above thresholds to ensure they meet the regulatory requirements for close-out and can support vegetation afterwards.

SDN also conducted surveys and held focus group discussions to collect data for the established key performance indicators used to measure the success of the clean-up. The findings were documented and uploaded on an online dashboard for ease of access by the stakeholders including the general public and to reflect new HYPREP projects such as mangrove restoration, the Ogoni power project, and the Ogoni Specialist Hospital.

In 2023, we forged strategic partnerships with the Honourable Minister for Environment, the Minister of State for Environment, and key departments within the Ministry, including Marine Protection, Contaminated Sites Clean-up and Remediation (MCCR), and Forestry. These collaborations provided avenues for us to offer recommendations for enhancing HYPREP's performance and facilitated discussions on sustainable mangrove restoration in Ogoniland and other coastal communities in the Niger Delta.



# ADDRESSING POLLUTION FROM THE EXTRACTIVE SECTOR

SDN continues to shine a light on the environmental consequences of the oil and gas sector's operations in the Niger Delta. We aim to mitigate the environmental impact of Nigeria's oil and gas industry by increasing transparency and engaging in policy discussions for equitable distribution of industry benefits and transition to clean energy.

Using available public data, our Environmental Performance Index reports analyse annual emissions from oil spills and gas flares by oil producing companies operating in the Niger Delta. This includes measurements of pollution from oil spills and gas flaring and provides for comparisons between companies, states, and countries. The latest report shows that Nigeria was the world's 10th largest oil producer, and according to this analysis, had the worst ratio of emissions to production in the world. While international oil companies (IOCs) are the largest contributors to total emissions, domestic oil companies show alarmingly high emissions relative to their production volume, raising concerns as they increasingly take over operations from international counterparts.

SDN has consistently raised the issues associated with IOCs selling their onshore assets in the Niger Delta at an accelerated rate, and seeking to leave without adequately addressing the legacies of environmental pollution, social strife, and governance problems created by their operations over the past 60 years. To galvanise action by the Federal Government, SDN convened civil society to draft 'National Principles for Responsible Oil Industry Divestment', which were published in 2023. The principles include a checklist that must be satisfied before any divestment can be approved by the government – including environmental remediation, decommissioning of abandoned infrastructure, compensation to communities for damage, and more transparency and participation in due diligence decisions. Through 2023, we have engaged with legislators and regulators to urge adoption of these principles and will continue to do so in 2024 - not least in the context of Shell's decision to sell its Nigerian onshore assets which makes the case for reform of divestment procedures even more urgent.



Image description: Gas flare, bodo oil spill. Credit: NACGOND.



# INNOVATION TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Methane, a potent greenhouse gas with a global warming potential more than 80 times greater than that of carbon dioxide over a 20-year period, plays a significant role in climate change. Controlling methane emissions is crucial for mitigating global warming and its adverse impacts on ecosystems, weather patterns, and sea levels.

Nigerian government regulators lack a tool to accurately track and measure methane emissions, especially from the oil and gas sector, limiting their ability to identify and respond to major sources of methane and imperiling its ambition to achieve reductions of methane emissions of 61% by 2030. On behalf of the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), SDN made progress in 2023 on developing a prototype Nigerian Methane Tracker (NMT) which will showcase how satellite data can be leveraged to promptly identify significant sources of methane emissions, integrating additional data layers that highlight major oil and gas infrastructure and assist with source identification.

Over time, our ambition is that the prototype will be converted into a fully functional methane tracker with an easy-to-use dashboard and interface providing timely, usable data to NOSDRA and other government and private entities, thereby enabling robust monitoring of methane emissions, facilitating better identification of methane sources, particularly super emitters, and providing a basis for rapid response to sudden emissions spikes.





A woman is shown from the side, bent over and working in a field. She is wearing a black headwrap, a red top, and a patterned shawl with pink and purple floral designs. She is using a wooden tool to clear the ground. The background shows a clear blue sky with some clouds and a line of trees in the distance. The ground is dry and sandy with some sparse vegetation.

# FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

*Image description: A participant of the SDN livelihood project clearing her rice farm. Credit: SDN, ThankGod Okorisha*



## BRIDGING DIGITAL GENDER GAPS

In April 2023, we launched the “Reducing Digital Gender Gaps in the Niger Delta” project, aimed at equipping women with crucial digital skills. Despite the digital sector’s growth, women remain underrepresented, facing barriers such as cultural prejudices and the costs of tech education. Our programme, responding to the strong demand for digital training among women, will offer courses in data analytics, web design, and more to 1500 participants in total.

In December 2023 we were thrilled to celebrate the graduation of our first cohort, a landmark step towards empowering Niger Delta women for the digital economy. After a rigorous selection from over 3000 applicants, students attended a tailored 12-week training in Port-Harcourt, and 438 women graduated, showcasing their new skills in a ceremony attended by key industry stakeholders.

Understanding the need for more than just training, we provided comprehensive career support, including a mentorship program and the Employment Extension Service Platform (E2S), to aid in job searches and networking. The positive outcomes include internships and job offers, notably with Airtel, underscoring our commitment to improving gender equality in tech and enhancing community livelihoods in the Niger Delta.

We also conducted the most comprehensive study of digitisation in the Niger Delta, with a survey of 9,600 people across the region, and several interviews and focus group discussions. This shows that women are falling behind men, especially in the workplace and technology sector. However, it also shows that the situation is much better than at the national level, and in other comparable countries. This highlights a huge opportunity to develop the sector, generate employment, and start addressing economic and social issues with digital solutions. It will also inform our work with State Governments to develop digital policies tailored to the specific situation in each state.



Image description: Participants of the digital skills project during the digital skills training. Credit: SDN, Anthony Abeh

“

*The training has been a game-changer for me and our ice-making business. Previously, we struggled to produce 500 pieces of ice per day, but now we're churning out as many as 1500. I applied the insights gained during the training by creating a Facebook page for our business and optimising it with relevant information. This has enabled us to reach a wider audience and attract bulk orders and resale opportunities. It's truly been a remarkable journey of growth and learning*

» Helen, project participant.

## Helen's Story



*Image description: Helen putting water in the ice maker. Credit: SDN, Anthony Abeh.*

## Empowering women entrepreneurs through digital skills

In today's digital world, establishing a strong online presence is essential for business growth and success. However, many women-owned businesses face significant barriers due to a lack of access to digital skills. Helen, a dynamic businesswoman from Port Harcourt, found herself in this exact predicament despite investing in a cutting-edge ice-making factory and producing high-quality ice.

For years, Helen struggled to attract customers and expand her business due to her limited knowledge of digital marketing. Recognising the importance of bridging this gap, she eagerly applied for SDN's digital skills training programme. After being selected, Helen underwent comprehensive training on various aspects of digital marketing and learned how to leverage social media to enhance the visibility of her business.

Empowered with tech skills, Helen transformed her business. By establishing a robust online presence through platforms like Facebook, she was able to triple her sales and significantly increase her daily ice production. Sharing her success story, Helen emphasised the profound impact of the training on her business.

Helen's story exemplifies the transformative power of providing women entrepreneurs with access to digital skills. Through initiatives like our digital skills training programme, we continue to empower women like Helen to thrive in an increasingly digital world, driving economic growth and fostering gender equality.



“

*I have always wanted to learn a digital skill, but financial constraints delayed me until 2023. Getting the opportunity from SDN to learn Data Analytics was the breakthrough I needed. It has indeed been a programme worth taking. The program has proven to be a game-changer, providing me with valuable opportunities in the Tech industry, I hope more women get this opportunity too*

” Inieke, project participant.

## Inieke's Story

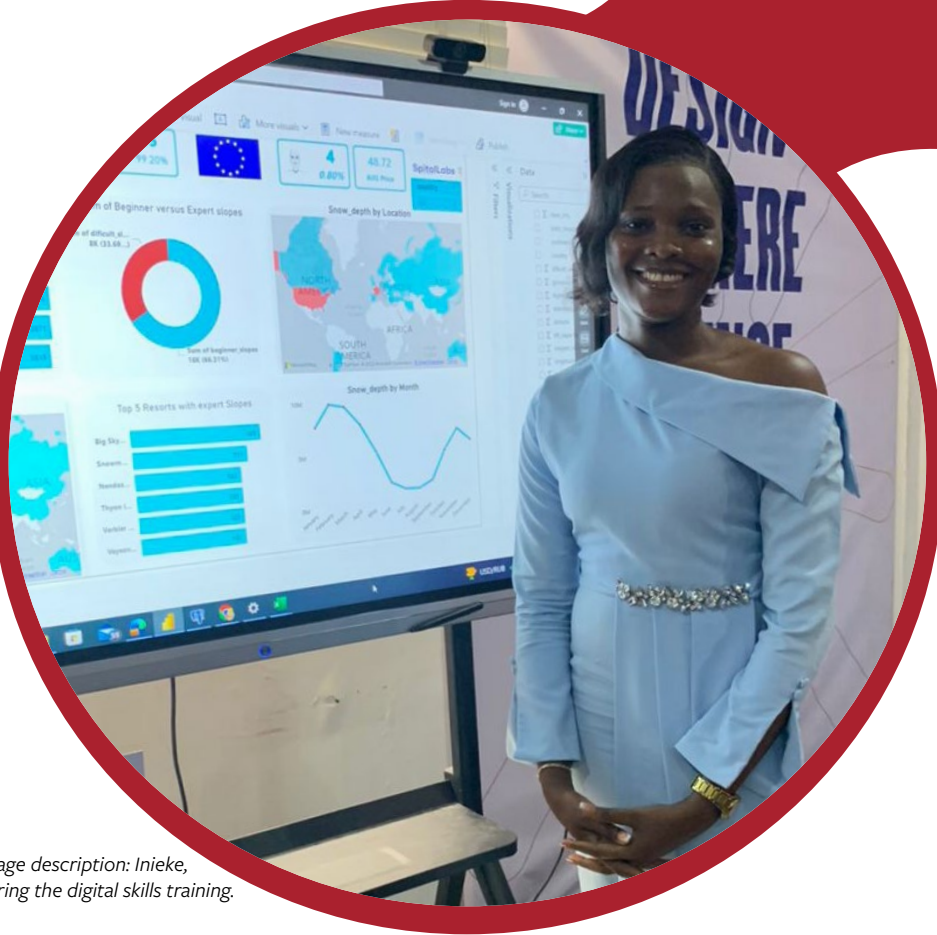


Image description: Inieke, during the digital skills training.

## Seizing opportunities into the world of technology

To acquire digital skills, cost often presents a formidable barrier for many aspiring individuals, particularly women. In conversations with women, it became evident that the prohibitive expense of tech courses hindered their ability to pursue their ambitions. Jimmy Inieke, much like many of these women, encountered this challenge firsthand.

Fresh out of university with a degree in hand, Inieke quickly realised that the job market was fiercely competitive, and her qualifications alone weren't enough to secure a stable career. Undeterred by the challenges, she made a bold decision to pivot towards the burgeoning field of technology. She had always been intrigued and fascinated by the endless possibilities it offered. With unwavering determination, she embarked on a journey to learn tech skills that would make her more employable.

However, the high cost of tech training courses posed a significant hurdle. Despite her fervent desire to learn, the financial burden seemed overwhelming. Nonetheless, Inieke remained resolute in her determination to pursue her tech journey. Her optimism paid off when she seized the opportunity presented by SDN's digital skills training aimed at bridging the digital gender gaps in the Niger Delta.

Selected for the programme, she underwent rigorous training in Data Analytics. Equipped with the foundational knowledge imparted to her, she secured an internship with one of the region's leading tech companies. Here, she not only continues to hone her skills but also has the invaluable opportunity to network with industry experts and engage in diverse projects. Inieke's story exemplifies what many women can achieve when they have access to tech training. Through initiatives like these, we are committed to empowering ambitious women, fostering a more inclusive and diverse landscape within the tech industry.

# REALISING THE POTENTIAL OF HOST COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUSTS

The creation of Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs) is perhaps the most significant opportunity to drive improved development outcomes in the Niger Delta in the past two decades. Established under the 2021 Petroleum Industry Act (PIA), the Trusts will replace previous voluntary agreements between oil and gas operators and host communities with new institutions to administer sizeable mandatory payments that could reach up to \$800 million per annum. If well-managed by the HCDTs, these funds can have a transformative effect on communities' well being - supporting investment in human capital, environmental improvements and economic diversification. Badly managed, the trusts could repeat the mistakes of previous initiatives and fail to achieve broad-based benefits for communities while fuelling further tensions over the distribution of resources.

SDN has undertaken significant efforts to support the implementation of Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs) together with affected communities. In 2023 we collaborated with a diverse range of stakeholders to develop a handbook titled "Practical Approaches to the Successful Implementation of Host Community Development Trusts". This handbook provides recommendations and guidance that stakeholders can utilise to facilitate the successful implementation of HCDTs. SDN actively collaborated with six host communities across three states in the Niger Delta region (Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta) to derive some of these recommendations. Additionally, SDN organised regional group meetings involving representatives from the designated host communities, Civil Society Organizations, Host Communities Oil and Gas in Nigeria (HOSTCOM), and the Pan Niger-Delta Forum to improve their understanding and awareness of the regulations governing Host Community Development Trusts. In November 2023 we shared recommendations on legislative revisions with the House of Representatives Committee on Environment, who made a commitment to review the HCDT section of the PIA, particularly section 257 (2) on third-party damage.

Recognizing both the enormous opportunity and the multifaceted challenges inherent in the implementation of Host Community Development Trusts, SDN is now developing proposals for a comprehensive project aimed at addressing supporting more effective implementation of HCDTs so they can deliver on their enormous potential, for example through robust independent monitoring and capacity-building within communities.



Image description: SDN staffs and other stakeholders during the SOMO validation workshop.





# RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

*Image description : SDN and CEHRD staff during the HCDT handbook validation workshop. Credit: SDN, Anthony Abeh*



### Gas expansion and the energy transition in Nigeria and the Niger Delta

This policy brief looked at the proposed expansion of gas production in Nigeria, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the implications that this would have on the Niger Delta.



### Opportunities to improve the Host Community Development Trusts under Nigeria's Petroleum Industry Act

This policy brief examined the opportunities created by the establishment of Host Community Development Trusts, in line with the Petroleum Industry Act. The brief also informed the development of a detailed guide for community members to understand the role of HCDTs and how they can participate.



### Independent Monitoring of the Ogoniland Clean-up: Biannual Progress Report

July-December 2022

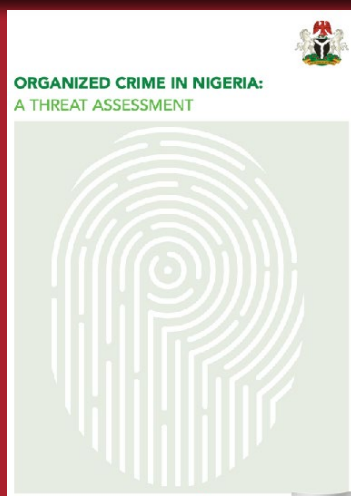


In 2023, we produced bi-annual reports from our independent monitoring of the Ogoniland clean-up. These track progress, and highlight issues such as lots that have been certified as cleaned, but which still have contaminants above target thresholds. These help to inform our engagements with the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP), and push for improvements.



### 2019 Nigerian oil industry environmental performance index

We produced the annual Environmental Performance Index (EPI), which tracks how much oil is spilled, and gas flared, by companies. It continues to find that Shell is the worst performer and that the Nigerian industry compares extremely poorly worldwide.



### ORGANIZED CRIME IN NIGERIA: A THREAT ASSESSMENT



our research on sea piracy and cult gangs was published in the UNODC National Organised Crime Threat Assessment (NOCTA). This was a strong contribution on two growing phenomena, which have very little research that engages directly with individuals involved.

In 2023, we also continued our regular political economy analysis, researching topics such as pipeline surveillance contracts and the artisanal oil industry. With the elections, politics was a major focus. We tracked the dynamics in the run-up across the Niger Delta, including how power and was shifting between candidates. This included a detailed overview of the irregularities in Rivers State, and the subsequent political crisis.





# DONORS AND PARTNERS

*Image description: Participants of the digital skills project in training with SDN partner, Talk Love Africa. Credit: SDN, Anthony Abeh.*

**S**DN is hugely grateful to all our donors and partners for their support in 2023. Without their consistent backing and commitment, none of our work on behalf of the peoples of the Niger Delta would be possible.

**Our 2023 funding partners are listed below.**

| Project   | Partner  | Budget            | Duration                       |
|---|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Strengthening Environmental Policy & Accountability in Governance (SEPAG)   | Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation, Netherlands | NGN 1,148,153,581 | November 2021 to December 2024 |
| Enabling Civic Space in the Niger Delta (SCALE)   | USAID/Palladium  | NGN 104,224,630   | January 2022 to January 2024   |
| Developing a Host Community Development Trust and Livelihoods Guide in the Niger Delta                                | Ford Foundation  | USD\$ 200,000     | October 2022 to April 2024     |
| Reducing the Digital Gender Gap in the Niger Delta  | European Union   | EUR 783,971.52    | February 2023 to July 2025     |
| Deepening Accountability and Strengthening Inclusion (DASI)   | UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office                      | GBP 100,000       | September 2023 to March 2024   |
| A Community-Centred Approach to Transforming Criminality and Violence in the Niger Delta” Project                     | EU/Search for Common Ground  | EUR 836,000       | November 2023 to April 2024    |
| Validation, Promotion and Dissemination of Research on Improved Approaches to Divestment in the Nigerian Oil Industry | Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO)             | GBP£ 11,193       | October to December 2024       |





SDN

Some policy priorities include:

- Legislation to achieve representation of women in elected and appointed positions at least 35 per cent
- Adoption of the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Bill by the Rivers State House of Assembly
- Implementation of the Youth Policy in Rivers State through a youth policy document with Civil Society Organisation for Development.
- Through pushing for transparency in the implementation of multiple taxes in order to attract investors dominated by women and

# LOOKING AHEAD: SDN IN 2024

Image description: SDN staff during the DASI project stakeholder workshop.

**H**aving reflected back on the successes of 2023, with excitement and anticipation we're pleased to offer a glimpse into what lies ahead in 2024.

### **Celebrating Two Decades of Impact: SDN's 20th Anniversary**

In 2024, SDN proudly marks its 20th anniversary in the heart of the Niger Delta. This milestone is a testament to the enduring commitment of our team, partners, and the communities we serve. We look forward to celebrating with you.

### **Empowering Women Through Digital Skills Training**

Our commitment to gender equality remains steadfast. In 2024, SDN will intensify efforts to empower women through digital skills training and further expand our network of private sector partners offering pathways to employment.

### **Innovating for a Greener Future**

SDN aims to pioneer a groundbreaking initiative with the development of Nigeria's first dedicated methane tracker. This innovative tool will play a crucial role in monitoring and mitigating methane emissions, contributing to tackling climate change. We will also expand efforts to galvanise protection and restoration of Nigeria's unique mangrove habitats, a vital community resource, biodiversity hot spot and carbon sink.

### **Expanding Support for Host Community Development Trusts**

SDN is committed to enhancing community-driven development through the expansion of our support for Host Community Development Trusts. By fostering local ownership and inclusive development practices we aim to ensure this huge opportunity for the Niger Delta is seized.

### **Advancing Peacebuilding Initiatives in the Niger Delta**

SDN recognizes the importance of fostering peace in the Niger Delta. In the coming year, we will continue our efforts to support peacebuilding initiatives that promote dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among diverse communities.

### **Advocacy for a Just Transition**

SDN will continue to diligently monitor and advocate for the successful implementation of oil pollution cleanup efforts. We will also push for responsible divestment in the oil and gas sector to secure a broader clean-up and transition to a clean economy.

### **Securing our Future with a New Long-term Strategy**

During 2024 SDN will launch a new long-term strategy for the organisation, with a refreshed vision of how we can drive change in the Niger Delta. Our strategy will be shaped by consultations with staff, partners, donors and communities.

As we embark on this exciting journey into 2024, we extend our deepest gratitude to our friends and the resilient communities of the Niger Delta.

Thank you for being an integral part of SDN's story.



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SDN supports those affected by the extractives industry and weak governance. We work with communities and engage with governments, companies and other stakeholders to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to a healthy environment. Our work currently focuses on the Niger Delta.

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