

Nigerian farmers sue Shell in Dutch case with global reach

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Fishing boats are seen abandoned on Bodo waterways polluted by spilled crude oil, allegedly caused by Shell equipment failure, in Ogoniland, in 2011. Four Nigerian farmers take on Shell in a Dutch court on Thursday, accusing the oil giant of destroying their livelihoods in a case that could set a precedent for global environmental responsibility.

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The civil suit, backed by lobby group Friends of the Earth, alleges that [oil spills](#) dating back to 2005 by the Anglo-Dutch company made fishing and farming in the plaintiffs' Niger Delta villages impossible.

The case was initially filed in 2008, demanding that Royal Dutch Shell

clean up the mess, repair and maintain defective pipelines to prevent further damage and pay out compensation.

In a landmark ruling, the Dutch judiciary in 2009 declared itself competent to try the case despite protests from Shell that its Nigerian subsidiary was solely legally responsible for any damage.

"I inherited the fishponds from my late father. I lost my income due to the [oil](#) spill. Now we are struggling to make ends meet," plaintiff Fidelis Oguru, the head of Oruma village, was quoted as saying by Friends of the Earth.



A local resident is seen scooping spilled crude oil, allegedly caused by Shell equipment failure, floating at the bank of B-Dere waterways in Ogoniland, Rivers State, in 2011. Four Nigerian farmers take on Shell in a Dutch court on Thursday, accusing the oil giant of destroying their livelihoods in a case that could set a precedent for global environmental responsibility.

[Oil pollution](#) has ravaged swathes of the Niger Delta in the world's eighth largest oil producer, which exports more than two million barrels a day.

Shell is the biggest producer in the west African country, where it has been drilling for over 50 years.

Environmental groups accuse Shell of double standards and treating spills in Nigeria differently from pollution in Europe or North America.

"The scale of the pollution is enormous: twice as much oil has been spilled in Nigeria than was in the Gulf of Mexico. Only there (Nigeria) it's never been cleaned up," Friends of the Earth Netherlands spokesman Geert Ritsema told AFP.

The 2010 explosion and sinking of BP's Deepwater Horizon rig led to around five million barrels of oil leaking into the [Gulf of Mexico](#) in the biggest ever marine spill.

Shell says that spills in Nigeria are well below five million barrels and that the company cleans up whenever there is a leak, many of which it says are caused by sabotage.

Environmentalists want the Netherlands, and other Western nations, to pass laws forcing companies to enforce the same environmental responsibility standards abroad as at home.

If the Nigerians' suit succeeds, it could lead to a flood of similar cases being brought before [Dutch](#) courts.

[Shell](#) operates in over 90 countries, according to its website.

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