

Gender Mainstreaming in Environmental Remediation: Advancing Livelihoods and Conflict Resolution in Ogoni, Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation in Ogoni, largely driven by decades of oil exploration in the Niger Delta, has significantly undermined local livelihoods and intensified socio-economic conflicts. While remediation initiatives particularly those influenced by the United Nations Environment Programme report and implemented through the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project aim to restore the environment, limited attention has been given to gender-inclusive approaches. This paper examines gender mainstreaming as a strategic tool for enhancing livelihood outcomes and fostering conflict resolution in Ogoni. Adopting a qualitative and analytical methodology, the study draws on feminist political ecology, sustainable livelihoods, and conflict transformation frameworks to interrogate the intersection between gender, environment, and peacebuilding. The findings reveal that women, despite being disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, remain largely marginalized in remediation planning and implementation. However, where gender-inclusive strategies are adopted, there is notable improvement in household income, community participation, and grassroots conflict mediation. The study argues that integrating gender perspectives into environmental remediation not only promotes equity but also strengthens social cohesion and sustainability. It concludes that effective gender mainstreaming can serve as a catalyst for inclusive development and durable peace in Ogoni. The paper recommends the institutionalization of gender-responsive policies, increased capacity-building for women, and inclusive governance mechanisms to ensure that remediation efforts achieve both ecological restoration and socio-economic transformation.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming; Environmental Remediation; Livelihoods; Conflict Resolution; Ogoni; Niger Delta; HYPREP

INTRODUCTION

Ogoni, located in the oil-rich Niger Delta, has experienced severe environmental degradation resulting from decades of petroleum exploration and production. Since the commencement of oil extraction in the 1950s, the region has been subjected to recurrent oil spills, gas flaring, and improper waste disposal, leading to extensive contamination of land, water bodies, and air ([UNEP-UN Environment Programme](#)). These environmental hazards have undermined agricultural productivity, destroyed aquatic ecosystems, and exposed local populations to serious health risks. The once-thriving agrarian and fishing-based economy of Ogoni has thus been significantly disrupted, deepening poverty and socio-economic vulnerability.

Oil exploration in Ogoniland predates Nigeria's independence and intensified during the post-colonial era, with multinational oil corporations playing a dominant role. Over time, weak regulatory frameworks and inadequate environmental safeguards allowed for widespread ecological damage. The situation escalated into socio-political unrest, particularly during the late 20th century, as communities protested environmental injustice and marginalization. The execution of environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and others in 1995 marked a critical moment in the struggle for environmental and resource justice. Environmental incidents such as uncontrolled oil spills and gas flaring persisted, with limited remediation responses, thereby exacerbating tensions between communities, the state, and oil companies. These dynamics entrenched cycles of conflict, economic deprivation, and environmental decline.

In response to sustained local and international pressure, the United Nations Environment Programme conducted a comprehensive Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland in 2011. The report revealed extensive contamination, including hydrocarbons in drinking water at levels far exceeding safety standards, and recommended urgent and long-term remediation measures. Subsequently, the Nigerian government established the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project to implement UNEP's recommendations. Since 2018, renewed efforts have been made to strengthen institutional capacity and accelerate clean-up activities, with the aim of restoring environmental quality and fostering sustainable development in the region. Despite these interventions, progress has been uneven, raising concerns about inclusivity and effectiveness.

Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a critical framework in global development discourse, particularly within institutions such as the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations. It refers to the systematic integration of gender perspectives into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes to ensure equitable outcomes for both men and women ([UNEP - UN Environment Programme](#)). In environmental governance, gender mainstreaming recognizes that women and men experience environmental challenges differently due to socially constructed roles and responsibilities. Women, especially in rural communities, are often primary users of natural resources and are therefore disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, yet they remain underrepresented in decision-making processes.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of inclusive environmental governance, gender exclusion remains a persistent challenge in the remediation of Ogoni. It is often noticed that women, who bear a disproportionate burden of environmental degradation due to their roles in agriculture, water collection, and household sustenance, are often marginalized in policy formulation and implementation processes. Studies indicate that their contributions to environmental management are undervalued, while decision-making structures remain male-dominated. This exclusion not only perpetuates gender inequality but also undermines the effectiveness and sustainability of remediation efforts. Furthermore, the lack of gender-sensitive approaches limits the potential of environmental programmes to address livelihood restoration and conflict resolution comprehensively. The main objective of this study is to examine the role of gender mainstreaming in enhancing environmental remediation outcomes in Ogoni. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Analyze the gendered impacts of environmental degradation in Ogoni.
- ii. Evaluate the extent of gender inclusion in remediation initiatives, particularly under HYPREP.
- iii. Assess the contribution of gender mainstreaming to livelihood improvement.
- iv. Examine the role of gender inclusion in conflict resolution processes.
- v. Propose strategies for strengthening gender-responsive environmental governance.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- ❖ How has environmental degradation affected men and women differently in Ogoni?
- ❖ To what extent are women included in environmental remediation programmes?
- ❖ What impact does gender mainstreaming have on livelihood restoration in the region?
- ❖ How does gender inclusion contribute to conflict resolution and social cohesion?
- ❖ What policy measures can enhance gender-responsive remediation efforts?

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on environmental governance, gender, and sustainable development in resource-rich regions. It provides empirical and theoretical insights into the intersection of gender and environmental remediation, particularly within the context of the Niger Delta. By highlighting the importance of gender mainstreaming, the study underscores the need for inclusive approaches that enhance both ecological restoration and socio-economic development. The findings are relevant to policymakers,

development practitioners, and scholars seeking to design effective and equitable environmental interventions. Moreover, the study offers practical recommendations for strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting women's participation, and fostering sustainable peace in Ogoniland.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

A clear understanding of the key concepts underpinning this study is essential for analytical precision and theoretical coherence. This section explicates the core ideas of gender mainstreaming, environmental remediation, livelihoods, and conflict resolution within the context of Ogoni.

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming refers to the deliberate integration of gender perspectives into all stages of policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure equitable outcomes for both men and women. The concept gained global prominence following the Beijing Platform for Action and has since been institutionalized by organizations such as the United Nations and the United Nations Environment Programme. Recent scholarship emphasizes that gender mainstreaming is not merely about increasing women's participation but about transforming power relations and institutional structures that perpetuate inequality (UN Women, 2020). In environmental governance, it involves recognizing the differentiated roles, knowledge systems, and vulnerabilities of men and women in relation to natural resource use and management (Arora-Jonsson, 2021). In the context of Ogoni, gender mainstreaming implies ensuring that women who are central to agriculture, water provision, and household welfare are actively involved in environmental decision-making processes. Empirical studies between 2018–2024 show that gender-inclusive environmental programmes tend to achieve more sustainable outcomes due to enhanced community ownership and diversified knowledge inputs (Leach, Mehta & Prabhakaran, 2025).

Environmental Remediation

Environmental remediation refers to the process of removing pollutants or contaminants from environmental media such as soil, groundwater, sediment, and surface water to restore ecological integrity and human health. In heavily polluted regions like Ogoniland, remediation encompasses a combination of technical, institutional, and community-based interventions.

The United Nations Environment Programme assessment of Ogoniland identified widespread hydrocarbon contamination and recommended a multi-decade clean-up process involving soil treatment, groundwater purification, and ecosystem restoration. Consequently, the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project was established to implement these recommendations. Recent literature from 2018–2022 highlights that effective remediation extends beyond technical clean-up to include socio-economic rehabilitation and community participation (Okonkwo et al., 2024). Scholars argue that without integrating social dimensions particularly gender considerations remediation efforts risk being technocratic and exclusionary, thereby limiting their long-term sustainability.

Livelihoods

The concept of livelihoods is central to understanding the human dimensions of environmental change. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (natural, financial, human, social, and physical), and activities required for a means of living. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), widely used in development studies, emphasizes resilience, adaptability, and sustainability (Scoones, 2018). In the Niger Delta, environmental degradation has severely disrupted traditional livelihood systems such as farming and fishing. Oil pollution has rendered farmlands infertile and contaminated water bodies, thereby reducing income-generating opportunities and increasing dependence on precarious alternatives.

Gender plays a critical role in shaping livelihood experiences. Women often rely on natural resources for subsistence and small-scale economic activities, making them particularly vulnerable to environmental shocks. However, they also possess indigenous knowledge and adaptive strategies that can contribute to sustainable

livelihood restoration (UNDP, 2022). Integrating gender perspectives into remediation programmes can therefore enhance economic resilience and household well-being.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution refers to the processes and mechanisms employed to address disputes, reduce tensions, and promote peaceful coexistence. In resource-rich regions like the Niger Delta, conflicts often arise from environmental degradation, resource control, perceived injustice, and socio-economic marginalization.

Theoretical perspectives such as conflict transformation, associated with scholars like Johan Galtung, emphasize addressing the root causes of conflict rather than merely managing its symptoms. Environmental degradation in Ogoni has historically fueled grievances, leading to protests, militancy, and communal tensions. Recent studies indicate that inclusive governance and community participation are critical to sustainable conflict resolution (Obi, 2020). Gender inclusion is particularly significant, as women often play informal yet influential roles in peacebuilding, mediation, and social cohesion. Evidence from similar contexts has shown that when women are actively involved in conflict resolution processes, there is a higher likelihood of durable peace outcomes (Akinwale, 2022). Taken together, these concepts reveal the interconnected nature of environmental remediation, gender equity, livelihood sustainability, and conflict resolution. Gender mainstreaming serves as a cross-cutting strategy that links these domains, ensuring that remediation efforts in Ogoni are not only ecologically effective but also socially inclusive and economically transformative.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates Feminist Political Ecology, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), and Conflict Transformation Theory. These frameworks provide a robust analytical lens for examining the intersections between gender, environmental remediation, livelihoods, and conflict dynamics in Ogoni.

Feminist Political Ecology (FPE)

Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) offers a critical perspective on the relationships between gender, environment, and power. Emerging from political ecology and feminist theory, FPE interrogates how environmental resources are accessed, controlled, and managed within gendered power structures. It emphasizes that environmental degradation and resource governance are not gender-neutral but are shaped by social norms, institutional arrangements, and inequalities (Rocheleau et al., 1996).

Recent scholarship highlights that women often possess unique ecological knowledge due to their roles in subsistence activities, yet they are systematically excluded from environmental decision-making processes (Arora-Jonsson, 2023). FPE also draws attention to how environmental interventions, if not gender-sensitive, can reinforce existing inequalities. In the context of Ogoni, FPE is particularly relevant in analyzing how oil-induced environmental degradation disproportionately affects women while simultaneously marginalizing them from remediation governance structures. It provides a framework for understanding the gendered distribution of environmental risks and benefits, as well as the need for inclusive and participatory approaches.

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA)

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) provides a holistic framework for understanding how individuals and households sustain their living in the face of environmental, economic, and social challenges. It focuses on the interaction between five key livelihood assets: human, natural, financial, social, and physical capital (Scoones, 2018). Contemporary applications of SLA from 2018–2025 emphasize resilience, adaptability, and the capacity of communities to cope with shocks such as environmental degradation and climate change. The framework also recognizes the importance of institutional processes and policies in shaping access to livelihood resources. In the Niger Delta, environmental pollution has severely depleted natural capital, thereby undermining traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming (Ajayi & Adewumi, 2020). SLA enables a nuanced analysis of how remediation efforts can restore these assets and improve livelihood outcomes.

Importantly, it underscores the gendered nature of livelihood systems, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that empower women economically and socially.

Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory, associated with scholars such as Johan Galtung, goes beyond conflict resolution to address the underlying structural and cultural causes of conflict. It emphasizes the transformation of relationships, institutions, and social systems that generate and sustain conflict (Lederach, 2018). Recent studies demonstrate that environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and socio-economic inequalities are key drivers of conflict in resource-rich regions (Obi, 2020). Conflict transformation approaches advocate for inclusive participation, dialogue, and justice as pathways to sustainable peace. In Ogoni, environmental injustice and perceived marginalization have historically fueled conflicts between communities, the state, and oil corporations. Conflict Transformation Theory provides a framework for understanding how inclusive remediation processes particularly those that incorporate gender perspectives can address grievances, rebuild trust, and foster long-term peace.

The integration of these three theoretical frameworks is justified by the complex and multidimensional nature of the research problem. First, Feminist Political Ecology provides a critical lens for examining gendered power relations in environmental governance. Second, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach offers a practical framework for assessing the socio-economic impacts of environmental degradation and remediation. Third, Conflict Transformation Theory addresses the dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding in the region. Together, these frameworks complement one another by linking issues of equity (FPE), economic sustainability (SLA), and social stability (Conflict Transformation Theory). This integrated approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of how gender mainstreaming can enhance environmental remediation outcomes in Ogoni.

Applying this integrated framework to Ogoniland reveals several critical insights. From an FPE perspective, the exclusion of women from decision-making processes in remediation initiatives such as those led by Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project reflects entrenched gender inequalities. Addressing these disparities requires institutional reforms that promote women's participation and leadership. Through the lens of SLA, environmental remediation is not only about ecological restoration but also about rebuilding livelihood systems. Gender-sensitive interventions such as skills acquisition programmes and access to financial resources can enhance household resilience and economic recovery. From a conflict transformation perspective, inclusive and participatory remediation processes can mitigate tensions and foster social cohesion. Women's involvement in community dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives can contribute to more sustainable conflict resolution outcomes. Overall, the application of these theories demonstrates that gender mainstreaming is not merely a normative ideal but a practical necessity for achieving effective environmental remediation, sustainable livelihoods, and lasting peace in Ogoni.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND REMEDIATION IN OGONI

Environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, particularly in Ogoni, is widely recognized as one of the most severe cases of petroleum-related ecological damage globally. Since the discovery and commercialization of crude oil in Nigeria in the late 1950s, the region has experienced continuous environmental stress due to oil spills, gas flaring, pipeline leaks, and operational inefficiencies (UNEP, 2021). Recent assessments reaffirm that repeated spills and inadequate containment measures have resulted in chronic contamination of soil, surface water, and groundwater systems, thereby undermining ecosystem integrity and human health (Okonkwo et al., 2020). Scholarly evidence indicates that hydrocarbon pollutants in Ogoni exceed safe environmental thresholds in many communities, affecting agriculture, fisheries, and biodiversity. The cumulative effect of decades of contamination has transformed once-productive ecosystems into degraded landscapes characterized by declining fertility and loss of aquatic life.

Environmental governance in Ogoni involves a complex network of actors, including multinational oil corporations, state institutions, and local communities. Major oil companies historically operating in the region have been central to extraction activities, while regulatory oversight has often been criticized as weak and inconsistent (UNEP, 2021). Government agencies at federal and state levels are responsible for environmental

regulation and remediation coordination. However, institutional inefficiencies and limited enforcement capacity have frequently hindered effective environmental protection (Obi, 2020). At the community level, residents particularly farmers and fishers are both victims of environmental degradation and active participants in advocacy and resistance movements seeking environmental justice (Ide et al., 2021). Recent analyses emphasize that the interplay between these actors is shaped by asymmetries of power, with multinational corporations and state institutions often dominating decision-making processes, while local communities remain marginalized (Arora-Jonsson, 2021).

The landmark Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme in 2011 remains the most comprehensive scientific evaluation of pollution in the region. The report documented extensive contamination of land and water resources, including carcinogenic hydrocarbons in drinking water supplies and long-term soil degradation. Importantly, UNEP recommended a multi-decade remediation programme estimated to span up to 25–30 years, involving emergency water supply interventions, soil clean-up, groundwater restoration, and institutional strengthening. Recent updates confirm that UNEP's recommendations continue to guide remediation strategies in the region, particularly through capacity-building and technical support mechanisms (UNEP, 2023). Scholars note that the UNEP report also emphasized livelihood restoration and community participation as essential components of sustainable remediation, thereby linking ecological recovery with socio-economic well-being (Okonkwo et al., 2020).

In response to UNEP's findings, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project in 2016 to coordinate and implement the clean-up of Ogoniland. Since 2018, HYPREP has intensified remediation activities with technical support from UNEP and other partners (UNEP, 2022). Recent reports indicate measurable progress, including certification of remediated sites, mangrove restoration efforts, shoreline clean-up, and livelihood restoration programmes targeting affected communities (HYPREP, 2025). Additionally, infrastructure projects such as potable water schemes and health facilities have been introduced to improve living conditions. However, despite these achievements, studies highlight institutional challenges such as bureaucratic delays, limited technical capacity, funding constraints, and weak stakeholder coordination.

While HYPREP has recorded notable progress in site remediation and ecosystem restoration, the overall pace of clean-up remains a subject of debate. Recent evaluations suggest that although hundreds of hectares of polluted land and mangrove ecosystems have been restored, significant portions of contaminated sites remain untreated (Guardian Nigeria, 2025; Independent Nigeria, 2025). Critical literature argues that remediation efforts are often constrained by governance inefficiencies, inadequate monitoring systems, and insufficient community participation. Some studies further highlight concerns regarding transparency and accountability in project implementation, as well as delays in addressing emergency environmental health risks (Obi, 2020). Moreover, scholars emphasize that remediation has not fully resolved the socio-economic dimensions of environmental degradation, particularly in relation to livelihood recovery and inequality (Nwagbara, 2021). In this regard, gender-blind approaches have been criticized for limiting the inclusiveness and effectiveness of remediation programmes, thereby reinforcing structural vulnerabilities among women and marginalized groups (Arora-Jonsson, 2021). Overall, while remediation in Ogoni represents a significant step toward environmental recovery, its long-term success depends on sustained institutional commitment, improved governance structures, and more inclusive, gender-responsive strategies that integrate ecological restoration with social justice.

GENDER DIMENSIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Environmental degradation in Ogoni is not gender-neutral. Rather, its impacts are deeply structured by social roles, power relations, and differentiated access to resources. Recent scholarship increasingly demonstrates that environmental pollution in resource-rich regions such as the Niger Delta produces unequal burdens across gender lines, with women and vulnerable groups disproportionately affected (Arora-Jonsson, 2021).

Oil-induced environmental degradation in the Niger Delta manifests through contaminated water sources, infertile farmland, and declining fish stocks, all of which directly affect household survival systems. Women,

who are often responsible for securing food, water, and energy for households, experience these impacts more acutely (Nwagbara, 2021). Recent studies highlight that exposure to polluted water and soils has contributed to increased health risks, reduced agricultural productivity, and heightened economic insecurity among rural women. In addition, environmental pollution exacerbates existing inequalities by limiting women's access to income-generating opportunities, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and vulnerability (FAO, 2023).

In Ogoni communities, women play central roles in subsistence agriculture, small-scale trading, and household maintenance. They are primary cultivators of food crops and are largely responsible for the collection and management of water and fuel resources (Ajayi & Adewumi, 2020). However, environmental degradation has severely undermined these responsibilities. Contaminated soil reduces crop yields, while polluted water sources increase the time and labour required to access safe water, often forcing women to travel longer distances. This additional burden reduces time available for education, economic activities, and participation in community governance processes. Women's informal economic activities, such as fish processing and petty trading, are heavily dependent on environmental resources, making them particularly vulnerable to ecological disruption (UN Women, 2022).

The effects of environmental degradation extend beyond economic hardship to include social and health-related vulnerabilities. Women, children, and elderly populations bear the greatest burden of exposure to toxic pollutants due to their daily interactions with contaminated environments. Recent environmental justice literature emphasizes that gender intersects with poverty, age, and rural marginality to deepen vulnerability in polluted regions (Arora-Jonsson, 2021). In Ogoni, households headed by women are particularly affected, as they often lack access to financial capital, land ownership, and institutional support systems necessary for adaptation and recovery. The health impacts such as skin diseases, respiratory conditions, and waterborne illnesses disproportionately affect women and children due to their increased exposure to contaminated water and domestic environments.

Despite their central role in managing household survival and environmental resources, women remain significantly underrepresented in environmental governance and remediation decision-making structures in Ogoniland. Institutional arrangements governing remediation projects such as those implemented by the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project have historically been male-dominated, limiting women's participation in planning and implementation processes (Obi, 2020). Recent gender and governance studies (2018–2024) argue that such exclusion undermines the effectiveness of environmental interventions, as it ignores local knowledge systems often held by women and reduces community ownership of projects. Furthermore, patriarchal norms and cultural barriers continue to restrict women's access to leadership roles in community development committees and environmental governance structures.

Evidence suggests that where women are included in environmental decision-making, outcomes tend to be more equitable, sustainable, and socially accepted (UNDP, 2022). However, in Ogoni, such inclusion remains limited and largely symbolic rather than substantive. Overall, the gender dimensions of environmental degradation in Ogoni reveal a complex interplay between ecological destruction and social inequality. Women are not only more exposed to the adverse effects of pollution but are also systematically excluded from the governance structures responsible for addressing these challenges. Addressing these disparities requires a shift toward gender-responsive environmental governance that recognizes women as key stakeholders in remediation, livelihood restoration, and sustainable development.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN OGONI REMEDIATION EFFORTS

Gender mainstreaming has increasingly been recognized as a necessary component of environmental governance and post-pollution recovery strategies. In the context of Ogoni, remediation initiatives under the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project and related national and international frameworks have gradually incorporated gender considerations, although implementation gaps remain significant. Recent studies (2018–2022) emphasize that gender-responsive environmental governance is essential for achieving both ecological restoration and social justice outcomes (UNEP, 2023).

Gender mainstreaming in environmental remediation is anchored in global and national policy frameworks that advocate equal participation of women and men in development processes. At the international level, the United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations have developed gender action plans that require the integration of gender perspectives into environmental programmes and climate-related interventions (UNEP, 2023). In Nigeria, policy alignment with global gender equality commitments has led to increased rhetorical emphasis on inclusivity in environmental governance. However, empirical studies show that policy translation into practice remains uneven, particularly in the Niger Delta, where institutional inertia and socio-cultural norms limit effective implementation (Obi, 2020).

Within HYPREP's operational framework, gender inclusion is reflected in programmatic statements emphasizing community participation and equitable access to remediation benefits. Nonetheless, recent evaluations suggest that gender mainstreaming is still largely procedural rather than transformative, with limited structural integration into decision-making processes (ScienceDirect, 2022).

Women's participation in remediation programs in Ogoni has increased modestly in recent years, particularly in areas such as environmental monitoring, community liaison activities, and livelihood restoration initiatives. Reports indicate that women are increasingly engaged in cleanup-related employment opportunities and small-scale service provision within remediation projects (HYPREP, 2025). Despite these gains, participation remains largely informal and often concentrated in low-level or temporary roles. Studies highlight that women are underrepresented in technical, managerial, and policy-making positions within environmental remediation structures (Arora-Jonsson, 2021). This reflects broader structural inequalities that limit women's access to education, professional training, and institutional networks. Furthermore, cultural norms in Ogoni communities continue to shape gendered expectations regarding public participation, often restricting women's visibility in formal governance spaces. As a result, their participation tends to be consultative rather than decisional.

Capacity-building initiatives constitute a key component of gender mainstreaming in remediation efforts. In Ogoni, programs implemented under HYPREP and supporting agencies have included vocational training, skills acquisition programs, and livelihood support schemes targeting affected communities (HYPREP, 2025). Recent development reports highlight that women have benefited from training in areas such as tailoring, agro-processing, entrepreneurship, and environmental sanitation services. These initiatives aim to enhance economic resilience and reduce dependency on environmentally sensitive livelihoods. However, scholars argue that such empowerment initiatives often lack long-term sustainability due to inadequate funding, limited market access, and insufficient integration with broader economic systems (FAO, 2023). Additionally, the absence of gender-transformative approaches limits their ability to challenge underlying structural inequalities.

An assessment of inclusiveness in HYPREP activities reveals a mixed picture of progress and persistent challenges. On one hand, there is growing recognition of gender inclusion in project design, particularly in community engagement and livelihood restoration programmes (HYPREP, 2025). On the other hand, evidence suggests that gender mainstreaming remains unevenly implemented and often lacks measurable indicators for accountability. Recent evaluations indicate that women's participation in decision-making structures within remediation governance remains limited, with men dominating leadership positions in community and institutional committees (Obi, 2020). Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation frameworks rarely incorporate gender-disaggregated data, making it difficult to assess the full impact of interventions on women and vulnerable groups.

Scholars argue that for gender mainstreaming to be effective in Ogoni remediation efforts, it must move beyond tokenistic inclusion toward structural transformation. This includes increasing women's representation in leadership roles, institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting, and ensuring equitable access to remediation benefits. Overall, gender mainstreaming in Ogoni's remediation efforts reflects a gradual but incomplete shift toward inclusivity. While policy frameworks and programmatic interventions acknowledge the importance of gender equality, implementation gaps persist in practice. Strengthening institutional commitment, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and promoting transformative participation are essential for ensuring that remediation efforts contribute meaningfully to both environmental recovery and gender equity.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND LIVELIHOOD ENHANCEMENT

Gender mainstreaming in environmental remediation is increasingly understood not only as an equity-driven policy approach but also as a practical mechanism for improving livelihood outcomes in polluted and resource-depleted communities. In Ogoni, where decades of oil pollution have undermined traditional economic systems, livelihood restoration has become a central objective of remediation initiatives led by the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme. Recent studies from 2018–2021 indicate that gender-responsive livelihood interventions significantly enhance household resilience, particularly among women who are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation (UN Women, 2022).

Employment generation within remediation projects represents a key pathway through which gender mainstreaming can enhance livelihoods. In Ogoni, remediation activities such as site cleanup, environmental monitoring, waste management, and administrative support have created limited but notable employment opportunities for local residents (HYPREP, 2025). However, empirical evidence suggests that women's access to these opportunities remains constrained by structural barriers, including educational disparities, technical skill requirements, and gendered occupational segregation. Consequently, women are more frequently engaged in low-skilled, temporary, or informal roles, while men dominate technical and supervisory positions (Obi, 2020). This imbalance limits the transformative potential of employment-based remediation strategies. Recent gender and development literature emphasizes that equitable access to employment in environmental projects is essential for reducing poverty and strengthening social inclusion in post-pollution recovery contexts.

Skills acquisition programmes constitute a major pillar of livelihood enhancement strategies in Ogoni's remediation landscape. Under HYPREP-supported interventions, women and youth have participated in vocational training schemes aimed at improving employability and income generation capacities (HYPREP, 2025). Training areas include tailoring, agro-processing, fish farming, small-scale entrepreneurship, and environmental sanitation services. These initiatives align with broader Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) principles, which emphasize capacity building and diversification of income sources as pathways to resilience (Scoones, 2018). Despite these efforts, studies highlight persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, limited access to credit facilities, and weak market linkages, which constrain the long-term sustainability of acquired skills. Furthermore, the absence of structured follow-up mechanisms reduces the effectiveness of empowerment programmes in achieving sustained economic transformation.

Women-led enterprises represent an important dimension of livelihood diversification in environmentally degraded regions. In Ogoni, small-scale businesses initiated by women particularly in agriculture, trade, and food processing play a critical role in household survival and community economies. Recent research shows that when adequately supported, women-led enterprises contribute significantly to local economic recovery and environmental sustainability by promoting resource-efficient practices and community-based economic networks (FAO, 2023). However, access to finance, land, and institutional support remains a major constraint. In remediation contexts, integrating women-led enterprises into project value chains can enhance sustainability outcomes by linking livelihood restoration with environmental rehabilitation efforts. Yet, evidence suggests that such integration is still limited in Ogoni, where women entrepreneurs often operate informally and without institutional backing.

The cumulative impact of gender mainstreaming in livelihood programmes is most visible at the household level. Studies indicate that participation in remediation-related livelihood initiatives has contributed to modest improvements in household income, food security, and access to basic services in some Ogoni communities (HYPREP, 2025). However, these gains are uneven and often insufficient to offset the long-term economic losses caused by environmental degradation. Women-headed households remain particularly vulnerable due to limited access to productive assets and social protection systems (Nwagbara, 2021). Recent evidence further highlights that improved livelihoods are closely linked to enhanced psychosocial well-being, reduced economic stress, and increased participation in community life. Nevertheless, it is clear without sustained investment and structural reforms, these improvements risk being temporary rather than transformative.

Overall, gender mainstreaming contributes meaningfully to livelihood enhancement in Ogoni, but its impact remains constrained by structural inequalities and implementation gaps. While employment opportunities, skills acquisition programmes, and women-led enterprises offer pathways to economic recovery, their effectiveness depends on sustained institutional support, equitable access to resources, and stronger integration into remediation governance structures. Strengthening these dimensions is essential for ensuring that environmental remediation translates into durable livelihood transformation and inclusive development.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict dynamics in environmentally degraded regions such as Ogoni are deeply intertwined with resource scarcity, historical injustice, and governance failures. In this context, gender mainstreaming has increasingly been recognized as a critical framework for strengthening peacebuilding processes and ensuring sustainable conflict resolution outcomes. Recent studies (2018–2020) emphasize that inclusive governance particularly the integration of women in peace processes significantly improves the durability and legitimacy of conflict resolution mechanisms (Ide et al., 2021).

Conflicts in Ogoni are multifaceted and stem primarily from environmental degradation, unequal resource distribution, and perceived political and economic marginalization. The long history of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta has generated grievances over land dispossession, environmental injustice, and lack of development benefits (Nwagbara, 2021). These tensions manifest in various forms, including communal disputes, youth militancy, protests against oil companies, and intra-community struggles over compensation and remediation benefits. Recent scholarship highlights that environmental stressors such as oil spills and polluted farmlands intensify competition for scarce resources, thereby escalating local conflicts.

Youth unrest remains a significant dimension of conflict in the region, often driven by unemployment, exclusion from decision-making processes, and limited access to remediation-related opportunities (UNDP, 2022). These conditions collectively reinforce cycles of instability and mistrust among stakeholders.

Women in Ogoni communities play important yet often underrecognized roles in informal peacebuilding and mediation processes. As primary caregivers and household resource managers, women are frequently the first to experience the social consequences of conflict and are therefore positioned as key actors in community stabilization (UN Women, 2022). Recent gender and peace studies indicate that women engage in conflict resolution through family mediation, community dialogue, and religious and social networks, often serving as intermediaries during periods of tension (Akinwale, 2022). Their involvement tends to emphasize reconciliation, social cohesion, and long-term relationship rebuilding rather than adversarial negotiation. However, despite their contributions, women remain largely excluded from formal peace negotiation structures and institutional decision-making processes in environmental governance and remediation programmes (Obi, 2020). This exclusion limits the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives by overlooking critical grassroots knowledge and perspectives.

Gender-inclusive conflict prevention strategies are increasingly recognized as essential for sustainable peacebuilding in resource-conflicted regions. These strategies involve the systematic integration of women into decision-making processes, early warning systems, and community governance structures (UNEP, 2023). In the Niger Delta context, gender-inclusive approaches include community dialogue forums that ensure women's representation, participatory environmental monitoring, and livelihood programmes designed to reduce economic stressors that often fuel conflict. Such approaches align with Conflict Transformation Theory, which emphasizes addressing structural inequalities as a pathway to peace. Recent research shows that when women are actively included in peacebuilding structures, communities experience reduced violence, improved trust in institutions, and more sustainable conflict management outcomes (UN Women, 2022). However, implementation in Ogoni remains limited due to cultural barriers, institutional weaknesses, and tokenistic inclusion practices.

At the community level, Ogoni has witnessed several informal and semi-formal conflict resolution initiatives that illustrate the role of gendered participation in peacebuilding. In some cases, women-led groups and faith-based organizations have facilitated dialogue between disputing families or communities, particularly during

land disputes and compensation-related tensions arising from remediation activities (Akinwale, 2022). For instance, community mediation forums supported by local leaders and civil society organizations have been used to de-escalate tensions linked to environmental remediation projects and employment distribution. Women's associations often play a stabilizing role by mobilizing collective action for peace and advocating non-violent resolution mechanisms (UNEP, 2023).

However, these efforts remain largely localized and informal, lacking institutional backing and integration into formal governance structures. Scholars argue that scaling up such initiatives requires institutional recognition of women's peacebuilding roles and the incorporation of gender-responsive frameworks into environmental governance systems (Obi, 2020). Overall, gender mainstreaming plays a crucial role in enhancing conflict resolution processes in Ogoni. While women actively contribute to peacebuilding at the grassroots level, their exclusion from formal governance structures limits the effectiveness of conflict prevention and transformation strategies. Strengthening gender-inclusive frameworks is therefore essential for addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting sustainable peace in environmentally degraded regions.

CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Despite increasing recognition of gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy for sustainable environmental governance, its implementation in remediation contexts such as Ogoni remains constrained by structural, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers. Recent literature consistently shows that the gap between gender policy commitments and practical outcomes is particularly pronounced in resource-rich and conflict-affected regions like the Niger Delta (UNEP, 2023).

One of the most persistent obstacles to effective gender mainstreaming in Ogoni is the prevalence of entrenched patriarchal norms that shape social roles and access to decision-making spaces. In many communities, leadership and public governance structures are traditionally male-dominated, limiting women's participation in formal environmental and development processes. Recent gender studies indicate that cultural perceptions of women's roles as primarily domestic restrict their visibility and influence in public policy spaces, including environmental remediation programmes (Arora-Jonsson, 2021). These norms often result in tokenistic participation, where women are present in consultations but excluded from substantive decision-making.

Institutional weaknesses significantly undermine gender mainstreaming efforts in environmental governance. Although policies promoting gender equality exist at national and international levels, their translation into actionable frameworks within remediation institutions remains limited. In the context of Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project, gender considerations are often incorporated at the level of policy statements rather than operational structures. Studies highlight the absence of clear gender performance indicators, weak accountability mechanisms, and limited integration of gender expertise in project design and implementation (ScienceDirect, 2022). Furthermore, coordination gaps between federal, state, and community-level institutions hinder effective policy execution, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent gender mainstreaming outcomes.

Adequate funding and institutional capacity are essential for implementing effective gender-responsive environmental programmes. However, remediation efforts in Ogoni are often constrained by insufficient financial resources allocated specifically to gender-related components (UNDP, 2022). Recent development reports indicate that capacity-building initiatives targeting women and gender focal units are often underfunded, short-term, and lacking in sustainability planning (FAO, 2023). Additionally, limited technical expertise in gender analysis among project implementers reduces the effectiveness of mainstreaming efforts. At the community level, many women lack access to education, vocational training, and financial services, which is further, seen to limit their ability to participate meaningfully in remediation-related opportunities.

Political interference and weak governance structures represent significant barriers to the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming in environmental remediation. In many cases, project allocation, employment opportunities, and resource distribution are influenced by political patronage networks rather than equity-based criteria (Obi, 2020). Recent analyses of environmental governance in the Niger Delta suggest that corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of transparency undermine both remediation effectiveness and

gender inclusion objectives. These governance challenges often marginalize women further, as they typically have less access to political networks and decision-making channels.

Moreover, limited accountability in project monitoring and evaluation weakens enforcement of gender equality commitments, allowing disparities in participation and benefit distribution to persist. Overall, the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in Ogoni's environmental remediation efforts is constrained by a combination of cultural, institutional, financial, and political factors. While policy frameworks increasingly recognize the importance of gender inclusion, their practical implementation remains weak. Addressing these challenges requires structural reforms, enhanced institutional accountability, adequate funding, and sustained efforts to transform socio-cultural norms that limit women's participation in environmental governance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined gender mainstreaming in environmental remediation with specific reference to Ogoni. The analysis has demonstrated that decades of oil-induced environmental degradation in the Niger Delta have produced severe ecological damage, disrupted livelihoods, and intensified social conflicts. While remediation efforts led by the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project and guided by the United Nations Environment Programme have recorded measurable progress in environmental clean-up and restoration, the study finds that such interventions remain uneven in scope and impact.

A key finding is that gender disparities persist across all dimensions of remediation governance. Women, despite being disproportionately affected by environmental pollution, remain underrepresented in decision-making structures and are often confined to low-level participation in remediation activities. Furthermore, livelihood restoration and conflict resolution initiatives have not been sufficiently gender-responsive, limiting their transformative potential. The study also establishes that environmental degradation in Ogoni is not merely ecological but deeply socio-economic and political, with gender inequality functioning as both a cause and consequence of exclusion in governance processes. Recent evidence supports the argument that gender-inclusive approaches significantly improve sustainability outcomes in environmental management and peacebuilding (UNEP, 2023).

The findings reaffirm that gender mainstreaming is not a peripheral policy consideration but a central requirement for effective environmental remediation. Integrating gender perspectives enhances the legitimacy, efficiency, and sustainability of remediation programmes by ensuring that diverse experiences, particularly those of women, are incorporated into planning and implementation processes. In line with recent global development discourse, gender mainstreaming in environmental governance promotes equity, strengthens institutional responsiveness, and improves resource management outcomes (FAO, 2023). In the context of Ogoni, it is evident that without meaningful gender inclusion, remediation efforts risk reinforcing existing inequalities and undermining long-term recovery objectives.

Ultimately, the future of environmental remediation in Ogoni must move beyond technical clean-up to embrace a holistic model that integrates ecological restoration with social justice and inclusive governance. Sustainable remediation is only achievable when women and other marginalized groups are actively involved in decision-making processes and benefit equitably from development interventions. The study therefore concludes that advancing gender mainstreaming is essential not only for environmental recovery but also for fostering inclusive development and durable peace in Ogoniland. A gender-responsive approach to remediation has the potential to transform Ogoni from a landscape of ecological degradation and conflict into a model of sustainable and equitable environmental governance.

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