HEDA RESOURCE CENTRE

Workshop on Divestment & Transition Accountability in the Niger Delta

COMMUNIQUÉ

Port Harcourt Town Hall

Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, GRA Phase II, Port Harcourt, Rivers State

Wednesday, 25th March 2026

Issued by participants of the Port Harcourt Town Hall

PREAMBLE

We, the participants of the HEDA Resource Centre Town Hall on Oil Divestment and Transition Accountability in the Niger Delta, gathered at Osborn La-Palm Royal Resort, Port Harcourt, Rivers State on Wednesday, 25th March 2026, comprising host community representatives, civil society organisations, women groups, youth representatives, environmental advocates, researchers, legal experts, government agencies, regulatory bodies, and media practitioners;

> COGNIZANT of the ongoing and accelerating divestment of onshore and shallow water oil and gas assets by International Oil Companies (IOCs) operating in the Niger Delta;
>
> DEEPLY CONCERNED that these divestments are being conducted without adequate transparency, community participation, or enforceable accountability for decades of environmental destruction and human rights violations;
>
> RECALLING that Nigeria's oil wealth has been extracted from the Niger Delta for over six decades, yet host communities continue to live in poverty, environmental degradation, and near-total absence of development;
>
> NOTING that the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021 now in its fifth year has largely failed to deliver its promised dividends to host communities, and that Chapter 3 of the PIA contains structural gaps that are now producing visible, harmful outcomes at community level;
>
> REFERENCING the UNEP Ogoniland Report and its findings on environmental contamination and the urgent need for decommissioning of obsolete and abandoned oil infrastructure across the Niger Delta;
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> AFFIRMING that environmental rights are human rights the right to a clean environment, to clean water, to clean air, and to livelihood and that their violation constitutes a justiciable human rights abuse;
>
> ACKNOWLEDGING the presence and commitments made by the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Rivers State Ministry of Justice, and the Rivers State Police Command at this forum;

HEREBY ADOPT THE FOLLOWING COMMUNIQUÉ:

SECTION 1: KEY OBSERVATIONS

Participants made the following key observations arising from the discussions:

1. The divestment of IOC assets in Nigeria is being driven primarily by self-interest declining profit margins, growing community resistance, legal accountability pressure, and operational cost increases rather than by genuine energy transition commitments. Solutions must be designed with this motive clearly understood.
2. IOCs are transferring assets without adequately ensuring that incoming operators have the technical, financial, and environmental management capacity to sustain operations or address pre-existing liabilities. What is being transferred in many cases are liabilities, not productive assets.
3. The PIA is now five years old. Host communities have seen little or none of the Act's promised dividends. Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs) are poorly understood by communities, community members do not know they belong to any trust, and company operational costs from which HCDT contributions are calculated are not published in any public domain.
4. Decommissioning and abandonment of obsolete oil infrastructure is the most urgent and under-addressed accountability frontier in the Niger Delta. Abandoned pipes, wells, and

facilities are left in communities without notification, without formal closure procedures, and without community engagement, causing ongoing oil spills and environmental harm. Oloibiri, Nigeria's first commercial oil community, stands as the starkest symbol of this failure.

5. The divestment agreements between IOCs and incoming operators are not publicly available. Communities and civil society have no visibility into whether incoming operators have explicitly assumed responsibility for pre-existing environmental damage, historical human rights violations, or outstanding community compensation obligations.
6. A pattern of fraudulent compensation has been documented by the National Human Rights Commission: in some cases, received by the Commission, oil companies claim to have compensated communities, but payments were made to community heads and elites who did not distribute them to the wider community. The NHRC notes this is not universal but represents a significant and recurring pattern of elite capture that undermines the compensation framework and must be systematically addressed.
7. A significant proportion of host communities remain inadequately informed about who their current operators are, what their rights are, and what decisions are being made about the land they live on. Many community members continue to reference Shell and other exiting IOCs as their operators, unaware that ownership and operational responsibility has transferred to new entities.
8. Over-securitisation of oil facilities, while understandable given insecurity, contributes to community tension and has not resolved the root causes of insecurity, which are traceable to oil-related grievances, environmental destruction, and poverty.
9. NUPRC noted at this workshop that key institutional stakeholders who should have been present, including certain operators and government agencies directly involved in the divestment process, were absent from the Port Harcourt Town Hall. Their absence limits the accountability value of this engagement and must be addressed in future forums.
10. NUPRC also raised concern about the fate of recommendations produced at prior HEDA-convened engagements on divestment, noting that previous observations and recommendations have not been adequately implemented, and in some cases appear to have been hijacked or diluted before reaching the appropriate policy channels. This pattern of recommendation non-implementation must itself be addressed as a governance failure.

SECTION 2: KEY CONCERNS

2.1 Environmental & Health Concerns

- Ongoing pollution of water sources, farmlands, and fishing grounds is causing direct health consequences, including kidney problems and chronic illnesses, without remediation or medical support from operators.
- Environmental degradation extends beyond oil spills to include cast iron and heavy metal contamination, gas flaring impacts, and other forms of industrial pollution that are frequently overlooked in divestment accountability conversations but cause serious, long-term harm to communities.
- Abandoned and decommissioned infrastructure is left in communities without notification, formal closure procedures, or hazard marking, creating ongoing environmental and safety risks.
- A significant proportion of communities had no credible Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted before oil projects commenced, and LGA-level records are missing or incomplete. Without a pre-project baseline, post-divestment remediation accountability is structurally difficult to enforce.
- Post-impact assessments, essential for quantifying environmental damage, do not currently exist at scale in divested communities.

2.2 Community Rights & Participation Concerns

- Communities are structurally marginalised in divestment decision-making processes, transactions negotiated at the highest levels of government and industry without community knowledge or consent.
- Divestment impacts are not gender-neutral: women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected and must be specifically included in all accountability and remediation processes.
- Community advisors, where they exist, are largely non-functional and do not represent genuine community interests.
- Legal victories against IOCs do not automatically translate into community benefit without robust impact tracking and distribution accountability. Court-ordered compensation continues to be captured by elites.

2.3 Governance & Regulatory Concerns

- Regulatory assurances from NUPRC, including commitments made at prior HEDA engagements, have been overridden by political decisions from the executive, raising serious questions about the practical independence and enforceability of the regulatory framework.
- The PIA Chapter 3 is structurally insufficient: it does not empower communities to protect facilities from third-party vandalism, does not resolve the security gap around asset protection, and has significant gaps around HCDT governance and allocation timelines.
- The appointment of a new NUPRC Chairman requires urgent civil society engagement to ensure the Commission's regulatory mandate is properly understood and independently exercised.

SECTION 3: DEMANDS & CALLS TO ACTION

3.1 To the Federal Government of Nigeria

11. Ensure the full and transparent implementation of the PIA 2021, particularly Chapter 3 provisions on host community development, environmental remediation, and HCDT governance within a clear, enforceable timeline.
12. Mandate the public disclosure of all divestment agreements between IOCs and incoming operators, including explicit confirmation of whether environmental liabilities, outstanding court cases, and community compensation obligations have been transferred to the incoming operator.
13. Immediately initiate a nationwide decommissioning and proper closure programme for all abandoned and obsolete oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta, guided by the recommendations of the UNEP Ogoniland Report.
14. Amend PIA Chapter 3 to close structural gaps, including provisions on community security responsibilities, HCDT contribution transparency, operational cost disclosure, and allocation timelines.
15. Publish all company operational costs relevant to HCDT contribution calculations on a publicly accessible domain, so communities can independently verify their entitlements.

3.2 To the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC)

16. Uphold the seven-point Regulatory Divestment Framework without exception or political interference. No divestment should be approved without full satisfaction of all criteria, including technical capacity, financial viability, environmental obligations, decommissioning costs, HCDT status, and data repatriation.

17. Require mandatory formal community introduction by all incoming operators, large or small as a condition of operational licence. Successor companies must establish documented relationships with host communities from the moment of asset transfer.
18. Mandate post-impact environmental assessments in all communities affected by divestment, to establish a current baseline of damage and specify remediation obligations for incoming operators.
19. Require the formal notification and involvement of communities in all abandonment and decommissioning processes. Communities must be informed of the status of every infrastructure asset on their land.
20. Engage proactively with the incoming NUPRC Chairman, Senator Magnus Abe, to brief him fully on the community accountability dimensions of divestment. This engagement should be conducted through discreet, direct channels, private meetings and sideline conversations rather than through public campaigns or adversarial positioning, to maximise the likelihood of a productive and receptive outcome. Civil society should approach this as an opportunity to inform and build an ally, not a confrontation.
21. Make NUPRC's monitoring and enforcement activities visible and accessible to communities. Field validation and cleanup monitoring must be proactive, not demand-driven.

3.3 To Divesting International Oil Companies

22. Prior to any divestment approval, fully address all outstanding environmental liabilities, court-ordered compensation, and community obligations accumulated during your operational tenure. You cannot transfer assets and leave liabilities behind.
23. Ensure all data generated during the operating life of divested assets is fully repatriated to Nigeria's National Data Repository before exit.
24. Cease the practice of paying compensation to community heads and elites without verifiable community-wide distribution mechanisms. All compensation must be transparent, documented, and independently verified as reaching the intended recipients.

3.4 To Incoming & Successor Operators

25. Understand and accept that when you acquire divested assets, you acquire all attached liabilities, historical environmental damage, outstanding court cases, and community compensation obligations as part of what you have purchased.
26. Demonstrate genuine technical, financial, and environmental management capacity before operations commence. The communities you will operate among have already suffered decades of harm; they deserve operators who are capable, accountable, and committed.
27. Establish formal, documented community engagement structures from day one of operations. Communities must know who you are, what you are doing, and how to reach you.

3.5 To the Rivers State Government

28. The Rivers State Ministry of Justice should use its legal authority to support communities in asserting their rights in divestment-related litigation, including class action suits, environmental enforcement, and challenges to fraudulent compensation distribution.
29. The Rivers State Commissioner of Police should engage formally with civil society and communities on the security dimensions of the divestment transition, including the over-securitisation of oil facilities and their links to community insecurity and tension.

3.6 To the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

30. Prioritise the documentation and investigation of extraction-linked human rights violations, including environmental health harms, livelihood destruction, and fraudulent compensation, as a distinct and urgent category of human rights abuse.
31. Proactively visit and engage communities in the Niger Delta through mediation and conciliation processes, without waiting for formal complaints to be filed.

32. Widely disseminate communities' rights under PIA Chapter 3 and the NHRC's accessible, low-cost mediation mechanisms as an alternative to costly litigation.

3.7 To Civil Society Organisations

33. Adopt a segmentalised, evidence-based advocacy strategy, focused, specific campaigns with measurable targets, beginning with decommissioning and proper closure of abandoned infrastructure as the immediate priority.
34. Invest in genuine, two-way community engagement, not consultations where communities are brought as audiences, but deep listening processes that allow community priorities to drive the advocacy agenda from the ground up.
35. Build the communities' capacity to use the 3% PIA operational cost allocations strategically, for expert opinions, legal support, environmental assessments, and data documentation.
36. Training communities in digital documentation of abandoned and decommissioned infrastructure, systematic photography and social media campaigns can generate domestic and international accountability pressure at no cost.

SECTION 4: IMMEDIATE ACTION POINTS

#	Action	Lead	Timeline
1	Organise a coordinated civil society delegation to the new NUPRC Chairman (Sen. Magnus Abe) with a structured briefing on divestment accountability failures	HEDA + CSO coalition	Within 30 days
2	Launch decommissioning accountability campaign document, photograph, and publish all known abandoned infrastructure in the Niger Delta	Social Action, SDN, CREDEF + communities	Immediate
3	Petition NUPRC and FGN for mandatory public disclosure of all divestment agreements	HEDA + legal partners	Within 30 days
4	Develop and distribute community rights education materials on PIA Chapter 3 and HCDT entitlements	NHRC + HEDA + CSOs	Within 60 days
5	Follow up with Rivers State Commissioner of Police for a formal briefing on the security dimensions of divestment	HEDA + workshop organisers	Within 14 days
6	Initiate advocacy for the amendment of PIA Chapter 3 to address structural gaps identified at this workshop	HEDA + legal CSOs	Medium-term
7	Submit workshop outcomes and policy brief to NUPRC, NHRC, Rivers State Ministry of Justice, and relevant National Assembly committees	HEDA	Within 14 days

3.8 Strengthening the Governance & Institutional Framework

37. All stakeholders — including regulators, operators, community structures, and civil society — must collectively commit to strengthening the governance and institutional framework of the extractive sector. Harassment of communities, asset abandonment, and liability

avoidance are not inevitable outcomes; they occur because the governance framework is insufficiently strong to prevent them.

38. NUPRC's regulatory independence must be institutionally protected and strengthened; political interference in the Commission's mandate, as evidenced by the presidential override of regulatory commitments documented at this workshop, must be structurally prevented through legislative and institutional safeguards.
39. Community governance structures, including HCDTs, must be strengthened with clear mandates, transparent operations, and independent oversight to prevent elite capture and ensure benefits reach intended recipients.

Note: NUPRC confirmed on record at this workshop that incoming operators assume both benefits AND liabilities in divestment transactions. This commitment is binding and must be reflected in all future divestment approvals.

3.9 Enforcement, IOC Interference & HCDT Reform

40. The fundamental problem in Nigeria's extractive sector governance is not the absence of policy; it is the failure of enforcement. The PIA took nearly 20 years to pass and still contains structural gaps that were visible even at the point of enactment. Strong policies mean nothing without the political will and institutional capacity to enforce them consistently and without exception.
41. International Oil Companies are actively working to undermine the stringency of Nigeria's regulatory framework, including by cultivating relationships with civil society organisations and community actors to ensure that advocacy remains muted and regulations stay favourable to industry interests. Civil society must be vigilant about this form of institutional capture and resist it explicitly.
42. The Host Community Development Trust (HCDT) framework, as currently structured and implemented, is failing its intended purpose. Most community members do not understand what the HCDT is, some believe it benefits only a select few, and there is no visible development in host communities that can be directly attributed to HCDT allocations. The framework requires fundamental reform, not incremental adjustment.
43. HCDT allocations were designed for non-producing host communities, yet the communities that most need this development support remain without basic infrastructure, such as functioning primary schools. This gap between legislative intent and implementation reality must be urgently addressed.
44. The existence of weak enforcement mechanisms, combined with IOC interference in the regulatory and civil society space, means that even well-designed policies produce no community benefit. Any governance strengthening agenda must therefore include: independent enforcement audits, anti-capture safeguards for civil society, transparent HCDT reporting, and community-level impact verification.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

We, the participants of the Port Harcourt Town Hall, leave this forum with renewed resolve. The transition taking place in Nigeria's oil sector must not become another chapter of injustice for Niger Delta communities. It must become a turning point.

We note and welcome the affirmation by the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission that progress is being made under the PIA, that the Commission holds itself accountable for its mandate, and that it remains committed to working with all stakeholders to address the challenges of this industry collectively. We hold these commitments on record and call for their consistent translation into community-level outcomes.

We acknowledge the presence and contributions of NUPRC, the NHRC, the Rivers State Ministry of Justice, and the Rivers State Police Command at this forum, and hold their stated commitments on record. We call on all institutional actors to treat this Communiqué not as a document to be filed, but as a mandate for action.

We are particularly mindful of the communities not represented in this room today, those too afraid, too remote, or too exhausted to attend. This Communiqué speaks for them too. We will not stop until the transition taking place in the oil sector delivers transparency, remediation, and justice for every community that has paid the price of Nigeria's oil wealth.

Issued at Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on this 25th day of March 2026.

Signed: __________________________ Convener / HEDA Representative	**Signed:** __________________________ On behalf of Participants