

Over the years, West Africa has been known to be a fertile region for oil and gas exploration with significant oil production since 1956, only Nigeria has been a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), joining in 1971 with a daily production of over 2.5 million barrels per day. More recently countries such as Ghana, Benin, Ivory Coast and Senegal have followed and are at various stages of exploration and production with Ghana already producing a little over 170 thousand barrels per day and Cote D'Ivoire intensifying exploration and aims to increase the production of oil and gas.

However West Africa's rich endowment of extractive resources have not led to the anticipated development and inclusive growth for its people. Instead it has led to elite capture, human right abuses, environmental damage, conflicts, corruption and exclusion of a sizable portion of the population from benefiting from the national natural resource wealth. To compound the above challenges, various investments in promoting good governance in the extractives sector has not yielded the desired results and there is persistence in the deterioration of good governance practices in the region. Further, there is a poor contract management practice in the oil and gas sector and limited meaningful citizen engagement and an apathy to hold duty-bearers to account for decisions taken that affect good governance. This can be as a result of the inconsistent coverage of oil and gas issues by news media outlets and a lack of evidence-based in reporting to continually throw the sunshine on irregularities in the sector.

It is against this backdrop that Penplusbytes with support from Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) is initiating a project called "Drilling Down Oil and Gas in West Africa" to throw more sunshine on the oil and gas sector and other issues confronting the sector.

Goal

The overall goal of this project is to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of oil and gas sector in the sub-region through improved quality and quantity of reportage in the media and public sphere

Project Objectives

- To promote good governance in the oil and gas sector in West African through in-depth and investigative pieces and citizen participation and action.
- To increase investigative stories for effective scrutiny of the extractive sector especially the oil and gas sector.
- To connect key players (journalists, civil society, duty bearers) in the sector for knowledge and information exchange.
- To increase citizens voices and participation in the governance of the sector in addressing challenges of the sector.

Project Activities

The project will use the following activities to achieve its objective:

- Activity 1: Training: Specialized trainings targeting young journalists in Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana.

- Activity 2: Development of an Oil and Gas Sector Media Guide
- Activity 3: The use of new digital tools and customization of Penplusbytes' existing oil and gas online platform to inform and educate citizens on oil and gas issues.
- Activity 4: Researching on laws, policies and best practices on oil and gas governance to build advocacy for reforms with the media taking the lead (policy brief).
- Activity 5: Developing infographics to highlight key issues.

Conclusion

The Drilling Down Oil and Gas in West Africa project will ensure, in the long term, an increase in the transparency and good governance practices in the extractive sector in participating countries, Ghana and Cote D'Ivoire.