Kiisi Trust FAQ

Where did the money come from?
The Kiisi Trust Fund was formed in 2009 as part of a United States Federal Court Settlement in the Southern District of New York. The settlement arose from a lawsuit against Royal Dutch Shell Company by survivors and family members of people who were victims of human rights abuses arising out of Shell’s Nigerian operations in Ogoniland in Rivers state, Nigeria, the homeland of the Ogoni people. The Ogoni Plaintiffs included victims of torture and arbitrary detention as well as the survivors of husbands, brothers and fathers who were summarily executed for their role in protesting the cultural and environmental devastation caused by Shell’s operations in Ogoniland. The name “kiisi” means “progress” in Ogoni.

Why is the settlement important?
The settlement of the Wiwa v. Shell case is recognized as a victory for human rights and environmental justice in Nigeria and as a pivotal step towards holding corporations accountable for complicity in human rights violations, wherever they may be committed.

How much money was awarded?
The Ogoni Plaintiffs reached a $15.5 million settlement with Shell, $5 million of which was set aside by the Plaintiffs to fund the Kiisi Trust to support programs in education, health, community development, and other benefits for the Ogoni people and their communities. It was their desire to share the benefits of the litigation with the larger Ogoni community. At the time of the settlement, the Ogoni plaintiffs released a statement urging “our people to cherish and nourish the Kiisi Trust because it should stand as one legacy of the labours of our heroes past.”

Is all the original money still there?
Yes, the original allocation of $5 million by the plaintiffs is there, intact and ready to be dispersed for activities to benefit the Ogoni people.

How will the money be spent?
The Trust will allow for initiatives for education, health, community development and other benefits for the Ogoni people and their communities, including educational endowments, skills development, agricultural development, women’s programmes, small enterprise support, and adult literacy. Plans are underway to develop a process to involve key parts of the Ogoni community in determining the most pressing needs and how Kiisi Trust might best address them.

Why is TrustAfrica involved?
The Kiisi Trust wanted to ensure transparency in the process of allocating funds as well as the efficient use of the funds. In 2016, the Kiisi Trustees conducted a competitive bidding process to identify a Donor Advised Fund Manager to manage the grantmaking process on behalf of
Kiisi Trust. Through this process, the Trustees selected TrustAfrica as the Donor Advised Fund Manager. TrustAfrica is dedicated to the achievement of political, economic and social justice for all citizens throughout the African continent. It was founded in 2006 on the conviction that Africans must play a leading role in setting the development agenda and shaping the decisions that affect their lives. TrustAfrica works principally through collaborative relationships and partnerships with like-minded institutions and donors.

With over a decade of grant-making, TrustAfrica has earned the trust of major donors, and has worked with some 500 grantee partners across the continent. TrustAfrica’s accounting and financial processes are of the highest standards and it consistently receives positive annual audits. Its grant-making processes are deeply rooted in the community, which the Kiisi Trust determined to be a critical factor in its final decision.

**How will Kiisi Trust decide who gets the grants?**
TrustAfrica, working closely with the Kiisi Trustees and its Advisory Council, will administer a participatory community-based process to identify and assess potential grantees, develop grant dockets for approval, administer monitoring and reporting, and distribute and manage the trust funds. The Advisory Council, made up of predominately Ogoni community representatives, will primarily be responsible for reviewing and recommending funding proposals from potential grantees to the Kiisi Trustees for approval. Unsolicited proposals for funding will not be considered. TrustAfrica will ensure the grant-making process is open and clear every step of the way – and known to be so. We will publish the list of grant recipients on our website along with updates and reports on the results of the work with our grantee partners.

**What types of grants will Kiisi Trust make?**
The Trust Deed sets out several areas of possible focus (such as community building, women’s empowerment, and agriculture) but the strategy will be shaped according to community input and then refined in consultation with the Advisory Council.

**Why has it taken eight years to get the Kiisi Trust underway?**
The fund’s launch was delayed because of issues related to the original trustees, including a resignation and a death. In late 2015, however, two new trustees were named, making it possible to begin to operationalize the fund. Since then the trustees have moved quickly, choosing TrustAfrica from among several applicants to manage the fund’s grant-making programme.

**How will Kiisi Trust ensure that Ogoni people have a say in where the money goes?**
There are four main ways the Ogoni people will be directly involved in Kiisi Trust:

1. One of the Trustees is an Ogoni woman with deep roots in the community.
2. An Advisory Council made up of predominately Ogoni representatives will be responsible for reviewing and recommending funding proposals from potential grantees to the Kiisi Trustees for approval. In addition, they will lead on a participatory community-based strategy that will empower local communities in deciding for themselves what is best for them.

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1 Kiisi Trust board members include Uche Onyeagucha, Deezia Karikpo, and Chet Tchozewski, an American with long experience in community development and social justice grant-making.
3. On-going Ogoni stakeholder consultations will ensure that feedback and input on the operations of the Trust Fund remain an ongoing conversation throughout the lifespan of Kiisi Trust.

4. Kiisi Trust will run a NextGen Ogoni Internship program geared specifically for Ogoni youth to build professional capacity and knowledge in the key thematic areas Kiisi Trust will be operating in.

How does the Kiisi Trust work?
The Kiisi Trust is a legally incorporated fund governed by a Board of Trustees. It will award grants to a limited number of organizations in Ogoniland whose work corresponds to the mission and aims of the Kiisi Trust. The grantee-partners must be able to effectively utilize the funds for the betterment of the Ogoni people, conduct full accounting and report the results of their work. Kiisi Trust anticipates working closely with its grantees, and in some cases helping to build organizational capacity, including communicating the results of their good work to the larger community.

How can people get in-touch with Kiisi Trust?
General inquiries can be sent to kiisitrust@trustafrica.org. Please note, as this is a general inbox, responses to inquiries may be delayed.