

Re-Source DEMOCRACY



HOMEF
HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION
www.homef.org

**Re-SOURCE
DEMOCRACY**

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Other publications of HOMEF include

1. Eco-Instigator – a quarterly journal
2. Defending our Biological Diversity
3. To MINT an Illusion – Economic + Poverty Growth in an Extractivist Rentier State

About HOMEF

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) is an environmental/ ecological think tank dedicated to building knowledge across the strata of the Nigerian society and building resistance to the expansion of fossil fuels extraction. HOMEF also works on hunger politics, proposing that food sovereignty and support of small-scale farming are the keys to abolishing hunger. HOMEF was registered in Nigeria in 2011 and began operations in March 2013.

HOMEF is an ecological think tank that promotes a culture of ecological knowledge, resource ownership and environmental defence. A pan Africanist ecological think tank working at all times in support of socially cohesive and inclusive environments.

Goals and Objectives:

Our goal as an ecological think tank is to build knowledge and work with rural communities, government institutions and organizations in Nigeria/Africa to develop and effectively implement appropriate environmental protection programs as integral parts of their operations.

- (i) To promote the observance of the environmental human rights of all Nigerians, Africans and all of humanity.
- (ii) To promote basic principles of environmental human rights as enshrined in the Constitution of a democratic Nigeria; the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ILO convention 169 and all other such instruments which promote and protect the dignity of humankind and the integrity of the biosphere.
- (iii) To influence policies and policy directions of government, corporations and organizations in such a manner as to promote ecological viability.

Re-Source Democracy

Re-source democracy hinges on the recognition that a natural 'resource' fundamentally belongs to Nature and secondly to communities of species and peoples who live in the territory or have traditionally held the territory where the 'resource' such as forests, rivers or grazing lands exists. Re-source democracy is about stewardship that recognises the right of citizens to establish rules and to act in line with traditional as well as best available knowledge to safeguard the soil, trees, crops, water and wildlife first as gifts of Nature and secondly to enjoy the gifts as necessary provisions that support their lives and livelihoods as well as those of future generations. Re-source democracy calls on us to *re-source*, to re-connect with Earth – our source of life – and to respect her as a living being with inherent rights, and not just a 'resource' to be exploited.

It hinges on pragmatic politics and wisdom that our relations with nature cannot be left to speculators and manipulators of market forces whose drive is to commodify Nature. It ensures the right (and demands a responsibility) to participate in decisions that determine our access to, and enjoyment of nature's gifts and removes the obstacles erected by the politics of access while providing process for redress. It demands that certain places must be off limits to extractive activities especially when such re-sources are found in fragile ecosystems or in locations of high cultural, religious or social significance in order to support the higher objectives of clean and safe environments to ensure citizens' wellbeing.

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FOREWORD

Some words and concepts tend to raise preconceived interpretations that sometimes obscure their true meanings. As a participant in the efforts to build a new Nigeria the tendency to get stuck in that mire is often very visible. From the debates and ideas being shared we have the conviction that most Nigerians desire fundamental changes in our polity and way of life. Our relationship with Nature and her gifts is a primary determinant of the modes of our relations as citizens and as communities.

Properly understood, the things we term 'natural resources' are the resources of Nature and not of humans. The fact that we discover them or extract them does not make these objects or things ours. At best, humans are merely borrowing from nature. Unfortunately, the process of borrowing often brings harm to nature, and her constituents, including humans.

In this publication we are calling for a shift in our relationship with Nature, especially our notion that physical objects must always be appropriated, exploited and turned into commodities. We are urging a reconnecting with Nature and our environment in a way that heals political divisions, recovers our basic duty as stewards of a common patrimony.

In other words, we are urging a reconnection to the source of the gifts that we enjoy as humans, keeping in mind that we are one species among many others. We must not see Nature as a theatre of exploitation, and move from resource to re-sourcing with Earth, intentionally reconnecting with our natural life source.

Re-source democracy is a call in sync with calls for Earth Democracy,¹ Rights of Mother Earth and the growing body of Earth Jurisprudence² including the movement to make Ecocide a recognised crime. Earth Jurisprudence 'is the term first proposed by cultural historian Thomas Berry to name this philosophy of governance and law which recognises that Earth, not human interest, is primary. It acknowledges that humans are born into an ordered and lawful Universe, to

whose laws we need to comply if we are to be a benign presence on Earth. Thomas Berry called for a transformation of human behaviour from a destructive to a mutually enhancing presence on Earth, and a re-alignment from human-centred to Earth-centred governance. Thomas reminded us of our humble place on Earth.¹³

'We need a new paradigm to respond to the fragmentation caused by various forms of fundamentalism. We need a new movement, which allows us to move from the dominant and pervasive culture of violence, destruction and death to a culture of non-violence, creative peace and life...the Earth democracy movement...provides an alternative worldview in which humans are embedded in the Earth Family, we are connected to each other through love, compassion, not hatred and violence and ecological responsibility and economic justice replaces greed, consumerism and competition as objectives of human life.'⁴

This publication aims to contribute to the understanding of the concept of **Re-source Democracy** and is a contribution of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) to the knowledge being generated by delegates at the Nigerian National Conference 2014. 'This report is timely to call for 'Re-source Democracy Now!' - whether we are referring to mineral 'resources' or to Nature's abundant and diverse gifts across our Nations.

We extend special thanks to everyone who has contributed comments to help in this publication. We are grateful to 2004 National Conference delegates **Asume Osuoka** of Social Action and **G. G. Darah** of Delta State University for their insights. Thanks also to CarineNadal of Gaia Foundation for critical inputs and to **Babawale Obayanju** who handled the production design.

Nnimmo Bassey

Director, HOMEF

June 2014

Introduction: What About Re-Source Democracy?

Re-source Democracy: A Clarion Call

Re-source democracy is a clarion call to protect, defend and replenish our re-sources and environment for the common good. It seeks to ensure that present generations enjoy what they have without jeopardising the interests of future generations. The concept is predicated on a culture that respects life and hinges on the premise that “the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth.”⁵ We inhabit our places on the Earth by birth and by citizenship rights. The re-sources in the territories where we find ourselves are best protected, preserved and multiplied when we use our knowledge to suitably relate to the re-sources to maintain our lives, culture, sciences, spirituality, organisation, medicines and food sovereignty. Re-source democracy requires that mankind serves as stewards over natural re-sources and not as predators.

We all celebrate and defend our right to life. While we do that, we must also realise that nature has a right to maintain her cycles and that our life can only be supported by nature when she is able to maintain those cycles. Our rights do not supersede and must not subvert the rights of nature.

Re-source democracy contextualises and integrates re-source management in a way that uses indigenous or local knowledge as a veritable base. For example, where some people see forests merely as carbon stocks or sinks, forest dependent communities see them as places of life and culture, as places where they obtain food, medicine, building materials and other non timber forest products. Communities living in harmony with nature ensure that the available re-sources are replenished and not depleted at a scale that degrades them. When non-forest community people look at forests what come to mind are possibilities of commercial logging, conversion into mono-crop plantations or securing them as carbon sinks. The idea of the forest as a carbon sink excites governments seeking foreign exchange earnings from the exploitation of natural re-sources and this excitement can get so feverish that brute force is used to expel forest communities from their territories.⁶

CHAPTER ONE

A clear understanding of our re-sources, their uses and intrinsic values is vital for their proper management. The same goes for a central need for our understanding of the harmful impacts of certain extractive activities including those of solid minerals, hydrocarbons and forest products. These, plus an interrogation of the meaning of progress and development help us to draw the line between what we can accept or reject in our environment.

Economic value cannot be the vital measure of re-source value. A clear rejection of the commodification of nature is necessary for sustainable management of our natural re-sources.

Re-sources are gifts of nature and are either renewable or non-renewable. They are found on land or in the sea. They include living species and non-living things. The exploitation or use of these re-sources can be harmful or wrong when the majority population is not considered in the decision-making matrix. For instance, when land is appropriated for cultivation of crops for biofuel and farmers are displaced or indentured, we promote machines and the comfort of the rich over the rights of the poor to a life of dignity.

As attractive as biofuels appear to some people, severe socio-economic and other impacts on vulnerable small-scale farmers have been documented. These impacts range from land grabs to poor and unpredictable income from being absorbed into a cash crop arrangement that is totally out of their control. A case in point is that of a UK company, D1 Oils in Swaziland where farmers were co-opted as sharecroppers to cultivate jathropha with the assurance that the crop would grow on marginal land without needing much input from them. As it turned out, although jathropha was touted as a wonder crop and a hardy plant that would thrive on very little water, the farmers found that the claim did not play out in reality. They needed to water the plants regularly and in an area with water stress this turned out to be a herculean task. We do not need to state that the dreams of wealth turned into nightmares and horrors and the enterprise collapsed.⁷

If re-source democracy had been in place in Swaziland, for example, the poor farmers would have been given facts and full information about what they were being drawn into. Such information would have included the uncertainties surrounding the crop and the fact that there have not been sufficient studies on jathropha as a plantation crop.

The result would have been different if local farmers had willingly undertaken to grow crops native to their locality. They would have utilised crops that are resilient to local conditions and would have drawn from local traditional ecological knowledge in nurturing them.

Development Paths

The current development path of the world sees resources as objects that must be exploited. In a heavily financialised world, resources are also seen as things to be manipulated and converted into cash. Nature and its resources are thus mostly valued in terms of money and power, sometimes totally forgetting that they have intrinsic values.

Re-source democracy recognises that a re-source fundamentally belongs to Nature and may be enjoyed by communities or peoples who have traditionally held the territory where the re-source such as a forest or grazing grass exist. It removes the obstacles erected by the politics of access and process as well as of redress. Such obstacles may vary depending on the objective of the demand or struggle. We recognise also that such struggles may be over re-source rights, environmental rights or the right to utilise available re-sources.

The alienation of humanity from nature happens in a way that is directly proportional to our proximity to desired re-sources. The alienation from nature does not only keep us from seeing the intrinsic value of re-sources, it also blinds those who see them as money-spinners to any sense of responsibility when grabbing for them. Re-source democracy connects us to our roots, to nature and calls us to re-source with Earth, our source of life.

Current dominant development modes are energy intensive and require more and more re-sources to generate that energy to keep the machines rolling and to feed the appetite of humankind for consumption and for cash. In that process we often overlook the wellbeing of the planet itself. The result of this outlook has been 'resource' conflicts and wars and extreme damage of environment through reckless exploitation. The conflict and the harm are certain to intensify as the non-renewable re-sources run out and as habitable environment for the reproduction of renewable re-sources reduce.

Wars powered by greed and faulty relationships with Nature's gifts do not end easily and it is instructive to note that nations never really win such wars and conflicts. While citizens die or lose their limbs multinational extractive companies and weapons makers/dealers simply go on enjoying their profits.

Recognition and Inaction

The dire state of affairs has not escaped mankind. However, the acknowledgement of a problem does not necessarily lead to a readiness or willingness to solve it. The notion that we have the capacity to fix whatever we break leads us to ride roughshod over nature and her re-sources. It is equally easier to be irresponsible in our handling of re-sources when we can externalise the costs and consequences to the poor and the voiceless in society.

A case in point is the fact that the world knows that climate change is propelled by dependence on fossil fuels and other actions of man and yet despite years of warnings and multilateral negotiations, nations harden positions and continue in the wrong and harmful paths. Indeed, nations insist they have a right to pollute in order to catch up with others who polluted earlier (and are still polluting) and have through polluting made achievements that the neo-polluters desire. Sadly environmental pollution is fast becoming a badge of progress.

Environmental Defence

In re-source democracy citizens are real stakeholders that work and receive benefits and not tokens or acts of charity. It provides the space for ordinary people to get together to establish rules in line with traditional as well as best available knowledge to safeguard the soil, trees, crops, water and wildlife that support their livelihoods. Re-source democracy hinges on pragmatic politics and wisdom that our relations with nature cannot be left to speculators and manipulators of market forces. It ensures the right and responsibility to participate in decisions that determine our access to, and enjoyment of Nature's gifts.

Acts of over consumption including grabbing of re-sources to meet needs of corporations and the super rich are acts of violence. When we take more than we require we are eating up the ecological space of other species and of future

generations. Re-source democracy demands that we develop the tool we need for ecological as well as cultural defence.

Our ways of life should complement and synchronise with the cycles and provisions of nature. At the same time our economic activities rely on extracting value from natural re-sources through direct use or through their transformation into goods and services. A basic tenet of defence of our re-sources is the right to prior informed consent. This includes the right to accept exploitation of re-sources in our communities/territories or to reject such actions. To aid such decisions communities must be fully involved in environmental and social impact studies before the commencement of and project. Although this is already required by existing Environmental Impact Act of 2004, re-source democracy would ensure that communities are educated and informed of the availability and uses of this tool to ensure that harmful projects are not embarked upon in their territories.

Other rights that would enhance re-source democracy are delineated in the provisions of the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act 2007.⁸

The Minerals Act ensures that companies or individuals do not ride roughshod over citizens' rights as they seek to exploit available 'resources'. The mining company cannot obtain a mining title without adequate consultation with landowners.

In cases where land is privately held and may be affected by mining operations, the Act requires that government must obtain the consent of the private owner of land before mining title would be granted. Where there is no consent the private land in question would be out of reach to the miners. This is provided for under section 100 of the Mining Act, which reads:

When an application is made for Mineral title in respect of an area which includes any private land or land occupied under a state lease or right of occupancy, the notice of the application, shall be given in the prescribed manner to the owner or occupier of the land and consent obtained before

the license is granted, otherwise the license may be granted with exclusion of the private land in question.

Section 19 of the Mining Act also makes provision for the setting up of a committee to be known as Mineral Resources and Environmental Management Committee in each state of the Federation. Communities are to be represented on such committees and part of the functions of this committee is to advise the Local Government Areas and Communities on the implementation of programs for environmental protection.

If these provisions are strictly applied citizens can effectively utilise them to defend Nature, secure that the health of their environment is not assaulted. These provisions give the right for citizens to say **Yes to Life** and also say **No to Mining**. This right is key in re-source democracy.

Re-source Democracy requires that we recognise the fact that we do not have to exploit a re-source simply because we have it. Some places must be off limits to extractive activities especially when such re-sources are found in fragile ecosystems or in locations of high cultural, religious or social significance. Lack of respect for certain ecosystems lead to the over-harvesting of re-sources and habitat loss. These in turn could lead to biodiversity erosion and species extinction. There are examples of nations that have decided against the exploitation of certain natural re-source in order to support the higher objectives of clean and safe environments ensure citizen's wellbeing. Examples include El Salvador where mining has been proscribed and Costa Rica where crude oil is left in the soil. In Nigeria the Ogoni have rejected destructive extraction of crude oil from their territory and remain engaged in epic struggles for environmental recovery.

Studies show that two species of animals and 20 species of plants in Nigeria have become extinct since 1950. This rate is said to be “unprecedented in comparison with the normal Natural History rates. They are indicative of an environmental disaster caused, presumably, by the current high rates of ecosystem modifications resulting from human activities.

As of now, 48 species of animals and 431 species of plants are endangered; 16 species of animals and 45 species of plants are categorised as rare; 30 species of animals and 20 species of plants are vulnerable; while 422 species of animals and 305 species of plants are endemic. All of these are of conservation concern to the country.”⁹

While we have laws and statutes with which to defend our environment the forces of expropriation and the pull of a global market system present such huge forces that we need robust support systems to tackle them. When we defend the Earth we are essentially defending ourselves. The Earth can go on being without us, but we cannot exist without the Earth.

Building Re-Source Democracy

Although natural re-sources are not produced by humans, their extraction and are utility are determined by human culture and needs. Our dependence on natural re-sources for livelihood and for cultural and spiritual ends are not politically neutral and the denial of rights of access and utility can be major drivers of contest between the wielders of economic and political power.

Biodiversity and other natural re-sources are central to land management strategies of marginalised communities. While such communities have seen wholesale destruction of their environment by the activities of speculators called investors, a number of these communities still harbour some of the least disturbed territories in our nations.

Political and economic neglect has paradoxically helped to preserve these re-sources where massive infrastructural developments have wiped out similar re-source wealth elsewhere.

Local knowledge and overall culture are critical to achieving re-source democracy. We note here that indigenous peoples do not see food as just a commodity to be speculated on and bought years before they are harvested. For them food “is traditionally linked to social, cultural and spiritual values, and a worldview that centres on being nourished by mother earth and nourishing her in return. Not surprisingly, indigenous women are often the bearers of precious knowledge on food and crop biodiversity that is passed down through the generations. This knowledge has so far been largely neglected outside of indigenous communities. Yet indigenous agricultural and environmental practices can be useful tools in building a global response to hunger and malnutrition.”¹⁰

Enjoying the benefits of re-source democracy may not be a given simply because it has been announced. As in all cases, for rights to be enjoyed, citizens must make a demand for such rights and stand firm to ensure that once secured they are not breached. This is so because ultimately those who 'own' re-sources and determine how re-sources are used and for what purpose must engage other interest groups in fundamental relations of social power.¹¹

CHAPTER TWO

Re-source democracy opens the space for enhancement of the roles and duties of communities in the protection and governance of Nature's gifts. It implies the recognition of their right to determine what can or cannot take place in their lands and territories in line with existing customary/traditional institutions, rules and governance systems in such communities. Their relationship with, and use of, ecosystems (including as custodians) must also bear relevance in the management of re-sources and in access to benefits accruing from the protection or utilisation of such re-sources. The benefits are not restricted to the direct access to and enjoyment of such re-sources, but also include benefits derived from the use of such re-sources.

Steps Towards Re-source Democracy

For re-source democracy to mean anything to citizens of any country, there are constitutional and legal framework steps as well as policy actions that must be taken. Above all, a very fundamental requirement is the recognition of the historical rights and responsibilities of persons, communities and territories to a safe environment wherein nature's re-sources are protected and available to support their lives and livelihoods.

Some of the key steps to be taken to ensure citizens' enjoyment of re-source democracy include:

1. Constitutional recognition of the rights of nature to maintain its cycles in support of humans and all other beings.
2. Constitutional provisions on re-source democracy ensuring the access of citizens and communities to the provisions of nature and eliminating obstacles to their enjoyment of the benefits without hampering the quality of the environment and the rights of future generations to enjoy the benefits of such re-sources.
3. Making laws and regulations to promote the defence of nature including full legal standing for citizens and the right to prior informed consent.
4. Re-source mapping at National, States and community levels, including those of biodiversity. This would in all cases not affect the right of communities to enjoy their intellectual property rights, including the right to confidentiality as may be required by customs.

5. Respect and protect local knowledge and community governance systems, which protect re-sources.
6. Empowerment of citizens with regard to having full knowledge of re-sources available in their territories and the skills to preserve and sustainably use them.
7. Preparation of action plans for the preservation and utilization of available re-sources.
8. Realisation that there are local species that are well adapted and resilient to prevailing conditions and have been preserved by local knowledge
9. Inclusion of communities in planning and management of natural re-sources including ensuring that every relevant segments are included and ensuring the utilisation of local knowledge in such plans and management strategies.
10. Inclusion of knowledge of local re-sources in educational curriculum at primary and secondary school levels and teaching ways of staying connected or getting reconnected to Nature.
11. Assuring citizens' the right to protest when access is denied or when threatened with displacement.
12. Preparing legal mechanisms for redress that ensures that compensation for ecological damage is not merely measured in terms of injury to persons but in consideration of the damage to the ecosystem.

Benefits of Re-source Democracy

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth includes the benefits that would accrue when re-source democracy is recognised in our nation. Such benefits include:

1. The right to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic or radioactive waste
2. The right to not have its genetic structure modified or disrupted in a manner that threatens its integrity or vital and healthy functioning
3. It obliges every citizen for respecting and living in harmony with nature
4. Ensuring that the pursuit of human wellbeing contributes to the wellbeing of Mother Earth, now and in the future

5. Respect, protect, conserve and where necessary, restore the integrity, of the vital ecological cycles, processes and balances of Mother Earth.
6. Establish precautionary and restrictive measures to prevent human activities from causing species extinction, the destruction of ecosystems or the disruption of ecological cycles.

The benefits of re-source democracy include elimination of conflicts, community involvement in re-source governance and protection based on knowledge and assurance of access. It ensures an integrated and sustainable use of natural resources in a manner that is fully in consonance with socio-cultural, religious and political dictates. Re-source democracy ensures that we all join together in acts of solidarity to defend the natural re-sources on which we inevitably depend for our survival. It does this by recognizing the rights of nature to replenish itself, maintain its vital cycles and do so without destructive interventions by humans.

Re-source democracy gives us rights and also responsibilities. It is an inescapable construct in an era where human greed massively damages ecosystems, depletes re-sources and threatens to exceed the carrying capacity of the earth.

Re-Source Democracy for Good Living¹²

Etiuwem is a concept in Ibibio, one of the several languages in Nigeria, which literally means good life or good living. Within it is the idea of living in harmony with nature and all peoples. It incorporates dignity, respect, rectitude, integrity, solidarity and contentment. Within this concept are the key principles of social justice, power relations and citizens' and communal ownership and control of local re-sources. It objects to speculation, exploitation, expropriation and destructive activities and, very importantly, no monetary price can be placed on life and nature. A close concept is sumakKawsay of the Kichwa people of Latin America, which is sometimes also captured as similar to buenvivir.¹³

While we are not certain that this concept can be fully equated to “re-source democracy,” we will use the term in an advised manner.

This paper proposes that what the world needs is living well in a citizens-driven participatory manner as opposed to working in the platform of so-called green economy, which in its application is a euphemism for green capitalism. The truth is that communities and civil society groups have key roles to play in shaping the necessary transition from ecologically disruptive living to one where energy and other production and consumption modes are respectful of nature. The premise for the positions outlined is that massive environmental degradation has been advanced through the subversion of the democratic space, exclusion of citizens and the appropriation of these spaces for decisions and actions favourable mostly to corporate interests.

Market fundamentalism has been enthroned at the highest policy making levels as the unbending creed for progress and environmental protection. This has elevated the widely disputed platform of the green economy, sometimes interpreted by environmental justice advocates as the greed economy. Market environmentalism insists that the basis for nature can only be preserved when it is assigned monetary value. This position is sold as green economy and fits well into neoliberal constructs - presenting speculators with opportunities to reap profits



CHAPTER THREE

from ecological destruction originating from, but not limited to, extractivism, land grabs, genetic manipulations and a number of techno-fixes that ensure the reign of monopolies.

It is as if the markets were invented by capitalism and the concept of the possibility of markets operating on the basis of solidarity is completely frowned upon and thus the creed demands competition, speculation, subjugation and exploitation. The obvious failures of markets (such as the carbon and financial markets) driven on these principles and the players behind or in front of the scenes are ignored while the stakes keep getting higher by the day. Market based decisions and actions do not recognise the Earth's limits. They often do not respect communities' rights as they are focused on deriving the highest levels of profits.

Corporate focus on profit and political myopia of provide the potent mix needed to solidify a greed economy where progress is measured by factors that are more fictional than real. In the book *The Rights of Nature*,¹⁴ Maude Barlow writes in the chapter on "Nature: A Living Ecosystem From Which All Life Springs," that, "many in power now use the term [green economy] to essentially protect the current economic system that promotes more growth, production and global trade."

The implication is that the environment can be beaten to submission at the altar of markets. Except in fringe cases, the green economy as currently formulated can only operate outside the confines of participatory democracy. It is rigged in favour of corporate interests and lopsided power relations and this explains why a United Nations track that was originally conceived to ensure sustainable ecological balance is now fusing with another track whose work is inexorably contributing to catastrophic climate change. We are here referring to the Earth Summits and the Climate Change negotiations.

A look at the multiple crises confronting us today shows a worrying pattern of denial of the climate issues confronting us and that has ultimately resulted in the creation of a sort of mafia-like breed of power brokers who gang up to block any progress with regards to solving the climate crisis. From the financial crisis to the food crisis, climate, water and others - the rule appears to be that whatever meets the short-term needs of those who cause the problem must take precedence over the needs of the planet.

This pattern has held thus far because there has been an enforced rupture between citizens and governments through the closure of spaces and linkages between the people through political participation spaces. A clear way to tip the scale is to recover the sovereignty of the people and to ensure that environmental defence is built on popular political participation. Without this, it is difficult to see how the interests of ecological destroyers will coincide with the interests of citizens who live and depend on the environment desired by external interests. Environmental pollution assures higher profits for corporations because they can operate in irresponsible ways and simply externalise the costs of their negative actions. In addition, polluters are cheered on by the tokenistic polluter-pays principles; payments that seek to foolishly put a discounted price on nature rather than to dissuade them from engaging in irresponsible behaviour.

Ecological living with respect to all beings or re-source democracy would demand that polluters stop polluting and not simply pay for polluting because the environment does not only provide the support for human life but does so for every other living thing. If we extend the concept of 'living thing' to include things that change over time and can be adversely affected and even annihilated by external actions, it becomes hard to classify anything as non-living thereby raising the stakes.

The green economy idea that environmental services can be monetised and paid for, makes the planet one huge market and those that can pay for these services become the 'true' owners of nature, even as the majority of citizens are relegated to the role of mere customers. Water purification, pollinators and of course carbon absorption capacities of soils all become items of merchandise in very brazen displays of commodification of nature. Everything becomes a candidate for exploitation and humanity is made to believe that whatever they need can be manufactured and whatever is broken can be fixed.

This false notion can be credited for the rise and rise of the allure of techno-fixes or what can be termed technological fundamentalism. Under this train, extreme extraction and the new kid on the block called fracking, are gaining serious momentum in the USA; tar sand exploitation in Canada as well as the tentative steps being taken to break up polar glaciers in order to drill for oil in the Arctic region.

The historic pollution of the Niger Delta and the Ecuadorian Amazon by oil companies are already record-breaking obnoxious realities.

Right relationship of re-sources and citizens would include the right to refuse access to their territories, as is the case with some indigenous peoples in the Amazon; and the right to refuse dangerous extractive activities in their territories, as in the case of Ogoniland in Nigeria. A right relationship requires the full consent (or rejection) and involvement of peoples whose re-sources, or on whose territories re-sources are found, are desired to be extracted or transformed.

Undemocratic and sometimes certified exploitation often transfer ownership and management of re-sources from citizens and communities to private hands led by corporations. Production of re-sources and the labour exerted in such exercises often also exclude the local communities and people, reducing their input to that of mere bystanders in the entire processes of ownership, decisions, production and use of outputs.

An economy driven by greed ultimately destroys the social fabric of peoples; replacing wholesome food with unwholesome varieties, eroding genetic re-sources, promoting bio-piracy and replacing healthy re-sources with toxic ones. It is this economy that permits poisoning of whole communities through dumping of wastes, as a viable economic objective. It is violence personified.

It is time for citizens of the world to urgently reclaim their sovereignty and not helplessly watch while political-corporate powers ride roughshod over everyone and everything. We cannot afford to carry on with a system where we find plastic delights in plastic dreams: "In the paradise promised to all and reserved for a few, things are more and more important and people less and less so. The end has been kidnapped by the means: things buy you, cars drive you, computers program you, and Television watches you."¹⁵

It is time to drastically realign production and consumption through clear policies promoting socio-economic justice as well as climate justice. It is time to reclaim our food systems through food sovereignty. It is time to halt the externalisation of environmental costs through reckless exploitation, displacement of peoples, and dumping of toxic wastes. We need a new mindset, a new logic based on an understanding that the planet is not about humankind only.

The actions to bring about the needed change must be hinged on an energy system that is not hooked on finite fossil resources. The fossil path has since fossilised and dangerous scrapping of the fossil barrels will only hasten cataclysmic environmental changes while temporarily pacifying the insatiable greed of the exploiters.

This energy system has driven prodigious consumption, wastes, re-source grabs and wars. The brunt has been borne by the oppressed of this world that are being pushed to wall and are increasingly finding less and less space into which to retreat. This is a potentially explosive situation that only a recovery of power by the exploited and injured peoples of this world will defuse. The force is already building through social and ecological spaces. Support should be channelled there. The clarion call is for a halt to the rape of Mother Earth.

We must remind ourselves that the Earth does not belong to us. We are stewards and living in a way that ensures that Nature's vital cycles are not disrupted is the only way we can hope to bequeath an acceptable heritage to future generations and other Earth species. Re-source democracy empowers us to live in harmony and solidarity with one another, reconnects us to Mother Earth and eliminates divisive instincts and such dispositions that tend to lead to seeing Nature as something to exploit. The need for all peoples to reconnect organically to Nature and to work for our collective best interests has never been more urgent than it is now.

Endnotes

1. See Vandana Shiva's books 2005, **Earth Democracy; Justice, Sustainability, and Peace**, South End Press, and 2008, **Soil Not Oil**, South End Press
2. Earth Jurisprudence recognises the Earth as source of law. The seminal works of Thomas Berry (**The Great Work**), Brian Swimme (**Universe Story**), Cormac Cullinan and others.
3. See <http://www.gaiafoundation.org/earth-centred-law>
4. Earth Democracy <http://www.navdanya.org/earth-democracy>
5. Evo Morales Ayma. April 22, 2009. *The Earth does not belong to us. We belong to the Earth*. Speech made on the occasion of the declaration of the International Day of the Mother Earth in the UN General Assembly, New York.
6. There are several examples of displacement of forest communities. The Sengwer and the Ogiek communities in Kenya offer recent examples. In Nigeria there have been consistent complaints from forest communities like those in Iguobazuwa insisting that they were dispossessed of their forestlands without adequate compensations.
7. See *Jatropha – Wonder Crop? Experience for Swaziland* at www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/jatropha_wonder_crop.pdf
8. See Social Development Integrated Centre (Social Action)- 18-19 July 2013: **Communities and the Petroleum Industries Bill – Memorandum to the Joint Senate Committee on the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), 2012.**
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