Rethinking
The Re-source Question

DEVELOPMENT or AMPUTATION?
The Role of Extractive Industries

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE:
A Key Strategy in the Fight for Climate Justice?

CLIMATE JUSTICE & DEGROWTH:
A Tale of Two Movements

HOW ECONOMIC GROWTH HAS BECOME ANTI-LIFE

Memories of Ogoni
Prepares us for Future Battles.
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We are looking at re-sources in this edition of our Eco-Instigator. Those who have read our Re-Source Democracy publication would have already noticed that the re-source is deliberately hyphenated to underscore the central need for humanity to reconnect with the source of the gifts of nature that we grab and degrade. We bring you voices on this concept from the streets.

Our look at re-sources also includes a critique of humankind’s continued addiction to fossil fuels and the huge climate crisis confronting the planet. You will read about our engagement with Ogoni women that ended with the formation of the Ogoni Women Ecological Defenders (OWED) Network. Still on women, we share reports from the recently held Global Greengrants Fund’s gathering of women to debate climate change in Bali.

Eco-Instigator aims as usual to challenge us all and urge us to reconsider things and concepts we may have taken for granted. Fellow of HOMEF’s Sustainability Academy, Firoze Manji, argues that the extractive sector engages in amputation rather than development. Juan Lopez reminds us of the horrors that continue to attend re-source plunder in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Femke Wildekop fittingly steps in with a look at civil disobedience and the fossil industry.

In the last edition we brought you an article on food wars by Vandana Shiva. In this edition we serve her article on the anti-life nature of economic growth. To further buttress this perspective we bring you a contribution by Tadzio Mueller, a frontline climate justice activist, as he interrogates degrowth in the context of climate justice.

An historic climate march took place in New York in 21 September. There was an amazing up to 400,000 marchers expression concerns about climate inaction. The march was followed by Flood Wall Street actions. No we are not bringing you a report from those events. We are sharing the position of the Climate Space that was endorsed by over 300 organisations from around the world—including, of course, HOMEF.

My travel piece has been thrown in to remind us of the complications to travel in West Africa caused the Ebola virus disease that has snuffed the lives out of more than 3000 persons.

The Eco-Instigator is your space and we are more than happy to publish your contributions – poems, stories, articles, reviews or photos. If you have read a great book that we should know about, do share the information also.

To stay updated with snippets of what is hot on the ecological terrain we encourage you to sign up for our monthly eco-bulletin, an electronic newsletter.

Whatever you do, instigate positive change for the people and for Mother Earth!

Until victory!

Nnimmo Bassey
Rethinking the Re-Source Question

By NNIMMO BASSEY

The 'degrowth' dialogues are occurring in the context of disasters becoming opportunities. Techno fixes and the right to grab and consume has anaesthetised humanity from ongoing and unfolding crises. It is time to rethink the re-source question. The degrowth question is not just about consuming less out of fear of hitting planetary boundaries. It requires a radical relink with nature. The narrative has to shift to a new direction hinging on the very meaning of life and what growth is.

Alternative Models For Economic Justice From The Climate And Environmental Crisis

Planetary limits force de-growth and makes it inevitable because we have just one planet earth and, as has been said, there is no Planet B. But limitless expansion cannot be desirable even if the resources were inexhaustible. Humanity's hedonism and insatiable appetite to acquire material possessions cannot reckless behaviour.

The scramble for what is left will lead to the scrapping off of the bottom and then a cannibal situation will ensure, worse than what we are currently experiencing. These situation has grown primarily because humanity has forgotten extractivism is simply the plundering of the gifts of nature. Plunder is not a sustainable path for living.

The climate and environmental crises do not call for incremental action. The essential need for justice on all fronts cannot and must not be ignored. The myths of economic growth cannot be explained away by pleading cycles of depression and explosion. Neither can mythical GDPs and all statistical illusions solve the crises. Making criminal activities contributors to GDP would never alter the reality of lives in a changing climate. The real solutions include:

a) Urgent transition from fossil fuel as energy source
b) Immediate halting of extreme extractivism, including fracking, etc.
c) Eliminate existing false solutions such as carbon offsetting
d) Saying “yes to life and no to mining”
e) Agroecological food production
f) Halting geoengineering and all related techno-fixes
g) Rethinking the re-source question
Doing these will birth a new economic logic.

**Role In Movement Searching/building Alternatives**

The climate justice struggle is more than a wakeup call. The alarm may be music to some ears. It is time to sound sirens, take the roofs off and douse everyone with cold water. It is an emergency situation that negotiations in comfortable multilateral halls will not solve.

**The Degrowth Discourse And Movement's Articulation With The Proposals From The Environmental/climate Justice Movements On Alternatives**

There are many points of convergence. These nodes intersect because today's ecological and environmental collapse are linked to addiction to growth and to neoliberal statistical mythical games already referred to. This is also connected to the debt question and the international financial institutions' structural adjustment programmes. The catching-up syndrome as a justification for climate irresponsibility presents a critical area of fusion for the movements.

In all, we must ask who brews the narrative? We have a duty to reclaim the narratives of our lives. What is life? What is living? Is it enough for polluters just to pay?

**Next Moments To Mobilize And Deepen The Process Of Building Alternatives Towards Environmental Justice**

Intensifying resource wars will pinpoint the next battle lines and fields. The struggle will shift to the crime scenes, not the conference halls of multilateral negotiations.

One of the worst consuming sectors is the military-industrial complex. Wars, insurgencies and other manifestations of violence are both driven by need to secure resources and also to consume resources. Military transport, etc. use a lot of fossil fuels and, of course, generate a lot of greenhouse gases. Who is accounting for these?

Stop wars. Fight the Climate Change, not people!

[Talking points by Nimmo Bassey at the panel on Climate Justice and Degrowth: commonalities, resistances and alternatives Degrowth Conference, Leipzig, 03 September 2014]
Walking the day away like a tree goddess
dog named purple haze.
sustainable living
land
seed
diversity
bioregions
irrigation s
footloose and ecocide free
Rockefeller
standard oil
petroleum chemical
herbicide
pesticide and fertilizer
monocultural boredom
franken foods
and tasteless earth
my hands in the earth
my nose in the dew
from farm to cooperation
from community to farm
the never-ending loop of green
infinity.

Source:
http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/footloose-and-ecocide-free/
DEVELOPMENT
or AMPUTATION?
The Role of Extractive Industries
by Firoze Manji.

However, according to Carlos Lopes, the executive secretary of UNECA, “Average net profits for the top 40 mining companies grew by 156% in 2010 whereas the take for governments grew by only 60%, most of which was accounted for by Australia and Canada.” He points out that the profit made by the same set of mining companies in 2010 was $110 billion, which was equivalent to the merchandise exports of all African LDCs in the same year. “It is fair to say therefore that the resource-to-development model puts raw materials suppliers at a significant disadvantage. The conclusion that can then be drawn from this situation is that the current resource-for-development model is not working to bring about equity or boost development.”

Nevertheless the belief endures that with proper management African countries could still benefit from opening their territories to the extractive industries. For example, Lebogang Motlana, the Director of UNDP’s Addis Ababa-based Regional Service Center for Africa claims that “The extractives sector is expected to play an important role for development in many African countries, triggering growth in new and dynamic economic sectors and industries, as well as investments in jobs, infrastructure and basic social services. ... The sector provides huge opportunities for sustainable development and poverty reduction if properly managed with the right mix of policies and enforcement systems in place.”

The contribution of extractive industries to environmental destruction and to climate change has been well documented elsewhere. The apparent profitability of these industries is due to the fact that they externalize those detrimental effects: they don’t take account of the costs associated with environmental damage.

But I believe that there is a fundamental dimension about natural resource extraction that has been ignored both by the proponents and opponents of the extractive industries.

In (almost) every instance of resource extraction, we are dealing with extraction of non-renewable resources. In such cases, the word ‘extraction’ is really a euphemism for amputation. As any dentist will tell you, once you ‘extract’ a permanent tooth, there is no natural replacement. It is amputation.

Now consider an economy in which more than 30% of the GDP is attributable to resource extraction, or more accurately, resource amputation. This is like saying: “we are going to amputate a third of your body.”
Sure, we will pay you for cutting off parts of your body and selling these on the market. Of course we will make profits from this investment, but you will benefit because we’ll compensate you with a nominal amount that will contribute to development and poverty alleviation (provided you don’t tax us too much).”

When expressed in such terms, it sounds absurd, ludicrous. Yet isn’t that fundamentally what is going on? Whatever euphemisms we might use for extraction of non-renewable natural resources, the fact remains that it is a form of amputation. It is hard to accept the argument, therefore, that such amputation leads to development. Let me cut off your leg so you can walk better?

I believe that we have to start referring to the extractive industries by what they really are – amputative industries so that we are clear about the extent to which we are giving away our future.

Looked at from this perspective, it is hard not to agree with Nnimmo Bassey’s famous saying: “Leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole and the tar sands in the land!”

Experts looking at the amputative economy might argue that the problem is that we need, as Carlos Lopes puts it, to “rectify some of the initial problems that have continued to plague the management of the continent’s natural resources. At the fore of this endeavor is the capacity of governments to get the best deals for their countries during contract negotiations.” In other words, we need to be strong enough to argue for a greater share of the profits arising from amputations.

Given how much has already been mined from Africa and how much is stockpiled outside the continent, there is perhaps a case for ceasing further exploitation of our natural resources.

Real development will only be possible if these amputative industries are controlled not by transnational corporations and speculators on the stock exchanges but by citizens, for these natural resources belong to the commons. The income derived from controlled and limited exploitation can then be invested in sovereign-value-adding manufacturing and services sectors that are geared to meeting the needs of the majority.

Amputation cannot be taken lightly. Sacrifices of this kind should be made only where there are demonstrable and significant benefits that materially contribute to breaking Africa’s dependency on the North and breaking its position as exporter primary products for satisfying the need for super-profits of international corporations and financial institutions.
When we, as human beings, get a fever, we immediately get worried and take action. After all, we know that if our body temperature rises 1.5°C, let alone 2°C [3.6 °F] above average there can be severe damage while an increase of 4-6°C [7.2-10.8 °F] or more can cause a comatose situation and even death.

So it is, when planet Earth gets a fever. For the past 11,000 years, the average temperature of the Earth has been around 14°C [57.2°F]. It is now about to reach an increase of 1°C. And, if we do not take appropriate measures now to stop this fever from spreading, the forecast is that our planet will well on its way to between a 2°C to 6°C rise in temperature before the end of this century. Under such feverish conditions, life as we know it will dramatically change on planet Earth.

We have no recourse but to take action now. Not just any action but the right action and at the right time. When, for example, a human person has fever we urge them rest their body, give them a lot of liquids, prescribe the right medicine and if the fever goes up we go to the hospital and try to find the real cause of the fever, which can range from a simple infection to life-threatening diseases like cancer.

Right Prescriptions

In the case of planetary fever, the right prescription requires at least 10 actions be undertaken and applied.

1. Make immediate binding commitments — not voluntary pledges — to control planetary temperature rise to no more than 1.5°C [2.7 °F] this century by reducing global greenhouse gas emissions per year to 38 Gigatons by 2020.
2. Let the Earth rest by making binding commitments to leave more than 80% of known fossil fuel reserves under the soil and beneath the ocean floor.
3. Move away from resource extractivism by placing bans on all new exploration and exploitation of oil, bitumen sands, oil shale, coal, uranium, and natural gas including pipeline infrastructure like Keystone XL.
4. Accelerate the development and transition to renewable energy alternatives such as wind, solar, geothermal and tidal power with more public and community ownership and control.
5. Promote local production and consumption of durable goods to satisfy the fundamental needs of the people and avoid the transport of goods that can be produced locally.
6. Stimulate the transition from industrialized, export-oriented agriculture for the global supermarket to community-based production to meet local food needs based on food sovereignty.
7. Adopt and apply Zero Waste strategies for the recycling and disposal of trash and the retrofitting of buildings to conserve energy for heating and cooling.
8. Improve and expand public transportation for moving people and freight within urban centres and between cities within urban regions through higher speed rail.
9. Develop new sectors of the economy designed to create new jobs that restore the balance and equilibrium of the Earth system such as climate jobs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and Earth restoration jobs.
10. Dismantle the war industry and military infrastructure in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated by warfare, and divert war budgets to promote genuine peace.
Wrong Prescriptions

At the same time, we must also be aware that all actions are not appropriate actions and that some initiatives can worsen the situation. Perhaps our most pressing challenge is the fact that big corporations are capturing the climate agenda to make new businesses designed to take advantage of the crises. In response, we need to send a message, loud and clear, to corporations: 'Stop Exploiting the Tragedy of Climate Change!'

More specifically, we need to resist the 'greening of capital' as the solution by rejecting the following policies, strategies and measures:

- The commodification, financialization and privatization of the functions of nature through the promotion of a false "green economy" agenda which places a price on nature and creates new derivative markets that will only increase inequality and expedite the destruction of nature.
- This means saying No to REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) ... No to Climate Smart Agriculture, Blue Carbon and Biodiversity offsetting — all of which are designed to create new for-profit business for corporations.
- Techno-fix "solutions" like geo-engineering, genetically modified organisms, agrofuels, industrial bioenergy, synthetic biology, nanotechnology, hydraulic fracking, nuclear projects, waste-to-energy generation based on incineration, and others.
- Mega and unnecessary infrastructure projects that do not benefit the population and are not contributors to greenhouse gasses like, mega dams, excessively huge highways, stadiums for world cups, etc.
- Free trade and investment regimes that promote trade for profit and undercut domestic labor, destroy nature, and substantially reduce the capacity of nations to define their own economic, social and environmental priorities.

Preventative Cure

Finally, we also need to go beyond identifying right and wrong prescriptions to naming the disease that constantly causes and drives this planetary fever. If we don't take this step, the fever will keep coming back again and again in a much more aggressive way. We need to take stock of the roots of the disease in order to weather the storm.

Scientists have clearly traced the problem of increasing greenhouse gas emissions back to the industrial revolution 250 years ago while tracking the spurt that has taken place during the past century. From this analysis, it is clear that the industrial model of increased extraction and productivism for the profit of a few is the prime cause of the problem. We need to replace capitalism with a new system that seeks harmony between humans and nature and not an endless growth model that the capitalist system promotes in order to make more and more profit. We need a system that links climate change and human rights and provides for the protection of most vulnerable communities like migrants, and recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples.

Mother Earth and her natural resources cannot sustain the consumption and production needs of this globalized modern industrialized society. We require a new system that addresses the needs of the majority and not of the few. To move in this direction, we need a redistribution of the wealth that is now controlled by the 1%. In turn, this requires a new definition of wellbeing and prosperity for all life on the planet under the limits and in recognition of the rights of our Mother Earth and Nature.

In short, we need to organize and mobilize in the world to push for a process of transformation that can address the structural causes that are driving the climate crisis.

http://climatespace2013.wordpress.com/
On December 19, 2008, American student Tim DeChristopher made a decision that would change his life. He and a group of protesters had been protesting the Bureau of Land Management oil and gas lease auction of public land in Utah’s precious redrock country, not far from the famous Grand Canyon Park. Tim managed to enter the auction hall, planning to improvise and disturb the auction some non-violent way, when to his surprise he was asked the question ‘are you here for the auction?’ ‘Yes’, he replied, and was handed a bidder card. For a few moments Tim contemplated the action he was about to take and its possible legal consequences. Then he started bidding on parcels of land; in total ‘buying’ 22,500 acres of land worth 1.8 million dollar - with no intention of paying for them.

Tim was removed from the auction by federal agents, taken into custody and questioned. After two long years, in which hearings for his trail were postponed several times, Tim was sentenced to two years in prison and a 10,000 dollar fine for his act of civil disobedience, even though the US Department of the interior had canceled many of the oil and gas leases shortly after the auction because of insufficient environmental and scientific review of the consequences of such leases for the land in question. Tim was released on April 23, 2013 and has become a leader in the American climate justice movement, empowering American citizens to become voices for the preservation and restoration of the Earth.

Tim’s story, told in the moving documentary Bidder70, is a striking and quite dramatic example of how civil disobedience can be used as a tool to expose and challenge the fossil fuel industry’s unsatiatable appetite for resources and land. His act of civil disobedience drew national attention to the illegal auction of public land leases, leading to the cancellations of many of them, and sparked the creation of Peaceful Uprisings - an NGO dedicated to climate justice through non-violent action.
Other leaders in the climate justice movement, such as 350.org’s Bill McKibben and Kumi Naidoo, director of Greenpeace International, call for civil disobedience and mass mobilisation as well. The undue influence of the fossil fuel lobby on the legislator and the slow and difficult process of attaining climate justice through judicial intervention (the main problem being that the right to a clean and healthy environment is considered too ‘vague’ to be enforced in court), could mean that massive non-violent action by concerned citizens is the only way to protect our Earth.

In this article, I want to shed some light on the instrument of civil disobedience: its history, its characteristics and the possibilities for its application in perhaps the biggest social justice movement of the 21st century: the fight for climate justice.

My aim is to inform and inspire the reader and to hopefully spark a discussion and exchange of practical ideas on the use of civil disobedience in the climate justice movement.

Civil Disobedience: a Short History

"Civil Disobedience" was first used by the American writer Henry David Thoreau in his influential 1849 essay to describe his refusal to pay the state poll tax implemented by the American government to prosecute a war in Mexico and enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. In this essay, Thoreau argues that individuals should not permit governments to overrule their own consciences, and that it is their duty to avoid becoming agents of injustice by acquiescing to unjust governmental policies. Thoreau was a passionate abolitionist and strongly opposed to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which required that all escaped slaves were, upon capture, to be returned to their masters and that officials and citizens of free states had to cooperate in this law. He also objected to the Mexican-American War, which he considered an act of American imperialism. In Civil Disobedience, he writes:

"Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison...where the State places those who are not with her, but against her, [a prison is] - the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor... Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless when it conforms to a majority (...) but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible."

For his refusal to pay the state poll tax, Thoreau spent one night in jail (he was released the next day when much to his fury, a relative paid the state poll tax for him).
Thoreau's arguments impressed and influenced some of the world's greatest leaders. Mahatma Gandhi wrote a summary of Thoreau's argument for the newspaper Indian Opinion in 1907, one year into his first 'Satyagraha' (nonviolent resistance based on the force of truth) campaign in South Africa.

He saw Thoreau's essay as being the chief cause of the abolition of slavery in America and wrote that 'both his example and writings are at present exactly applicable to the Indians in the Transvaal'.

Gandhi's most striking act of civil disobedience was his Salt March in 1930 in protest of Britain's Salt Acts which prohibited Indians from collecting or selling salt. Citizens were forced to buy salt from the British, who, in addition to exercising a monopoly over the manufacture and sale of salt, also exerted a heavy salt tax. Gandhi set out from Sabarmati with 78 followers on a 241-mile march to the coastal town of Dandi on the Arabian Sea. All along the way, Gandhi addressed and attracted large crowds, and by the time they reached Dandi, he was at the head of a crowd of tens of thousands.

At the beach, Gandhi picked up a large lump of natural salt out of the mud - defying the British law - and thousands more followed his lead. Gandhi was arrested and spent nearly a year in prison. More than 60,000 Indians were jailed in the aftermath of the Salt March while millions had started making their own salt. Inspired by the Salt March, people across India boycotted all kinds of British goods, including paper and textiles and peasants refused to pay land taxes. The Salt March raised international awareness of British injustices in India and made Mohandas Gandhi into a famous figure around the world.

Martin Luther King was also greatly influenced by Thoreau's work on Civil Disobedience:

"During my student days I read Henry David Thoreau's essay On Civil Disobedience for the first time. Here, in this courageous New Englander's refusal to pay his taxes and his choice of jail rather than support a war that would spread slavery's territory into Mexico, I made my first contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. I became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good."

Civil Disobedience was a key element in Dr. King's campaign for equal rights for Afro-Americans:

"Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, these are outgrowths of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and that no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice."
A key moment in the Civil Rights Campaign was of course Rosa Parks’ act of Civil Disobedience by refusing to give up her seat for a white passenger on a public bus in 1955. Rosa Parks was secretary of the Montgomery NAACP chapter and had just attended a meeting on the strategy of civil disobedience. On her bus ride home from work, she was asked to move from her seat so a white person could sit.

She refused, and subsequently was arrested, tried and convicted for disorderly conduct and violating a local ordinance. After word of this incident reached the black community, 50 African-American leaders gathered and organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott to demand a bus system in which passengers would be treated equally. For 381 days, no African-American took any kind of public transportation in Montgomery. On November 13, 1956, the United States Supreme Court put an end to segregation on public buses.

Civil disobedience was also part of the Vietnam War Protests (1965-1972). Techniques of resistance included disrupting draft board processes by raiding local branches of the Draft Board, stealing draft cards and setting them alight in the street. It was an important element of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and included clergy marrying mixed couples against the law; sit-ins at all-white canteens; mixed race students enrolling at all-white schools, non-whites showing up at white hospitals for medical treatment and the 1989 protest march to what is now the only beach organized by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

More recently, the brave women of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace used nonviolent protest, such as a sit-in outside of the Ghanaian Presidential Palace to enforce peacetalks between president Charles Taylor and rebels in 2003, in their successful campaign to end the Second Liberian Civil War.

**Elements of Civil Disobedience**

So what is the definition of Civil Disobedience? Civil Disobedience is a public, non-violent and conscientious breach of law undertaken with the aim of bringing about a change in laws or government policies. The disputed law or policies might have been established according to the official rules and formal requirements, yet fall short to meet the requirements of justice. The laws or policies are considered 'unjust' and the protesters feel compelled to disobey these laws in order to maintain their integrity. Following their own conscience becomes a higher, more sacred duty than following the dictates of their government.

However, those who engage in civil disobedience are willing to accept the legal consequences of their actions, even if they consider the laws unjust and their breach justified. Accepting the legal consequences is an integral part of civil disobedience. It testifies to the protester's fidelity to the rule of law and their respect for the constitutional framework within which they operate. It prevents them from being labelled (and dismissed) as 'anarchists' or 'trouble-makers'. Rather than undermining the existing political and legal system in a violent way, they seek to improve it system non-violently; to signal the existence of unjust laws that are incompatible with the principles of justice, equality and freedom upon which the legal architecture of the State should be built.
As such they give the government critical 'feedback' on the quality of their laws and policies and their compatibility with nation's most cherished principles. One could even say that those engaged in civil disobedience act as the nation's conscience and are willing to sacrifice their own comfort for the well being of the collective.

But of course the purpose of civil disobedience is not martyrdom. The purpose is to spark a change in policy, to act as a catalyst for a more socially and environmentally just society. That's why the act of civil disobedience should be public: it should reach as many people as possible. In our age of internet and social media, this condition is easier to satisfy than ever. In order for the government to self-correct and change unjust laws into just ones, public pressure is essential. The general public has to become aware of the injustices that come masked as 'law'.

The aim is to have citizens consult with their own conscience and to break the spells of indifference, ignorance or feelings of powerlessness. Especially in the West, it means to break lose from merely being a consumer and to start become a citizen again, owning our roles as 'stewards' for the well being of future generations and the Earth herself.

Civil disobedience gives the public permission to think independently and critically and to measure governmental policy on the scales of justice. In a way, it is a 'wake-up' call: its appeal to morality and non-violent nature giving it a dignified character, that speaks to "the better angels of our nature". As such, it has a strong spiritual component. It's fuelled by a love for justice and a passion for freedom and equality; it's expressed in bold civic action. Perseverance, discipline, strategic thinking and solidarity are other necessary ingredients for a successful civil disobedience campaign.

**Civil Disobedience and Climate Justice**

Tim DeChristopher's act of Civil Disobedience at the gas and oil lease auction didn't take place in a vacuum. For several years now, civil disobedience is employed to protest the pollution and ecocides caused by the fossil fuel industry. According to theory, civil disobedience should be used as a 'last resort' when other means of exercising influence - using your right to vote, expressing your opinion in the public debate - have failed. This point has been reached for many activists, especially those in the United States, who feel that their government is too corrupted by the fossil fuel industry lobby to truly protect the interests of its citizens to live in a healthy and clean environment. They have decided to use a more powerful (yet non-violent) way to communicate their concerns to the world.

Some examples of 'green' civil disobedience include:

- The 'Grow Heathrow' protest against a third runway at Heathrow airport in the United Kingdom. In the past 4 years, an abandoned piece of land has been transformed into a transition town and self-sufficient community, producing fruit and vegetables, relying on solar and wind energy and offering workshops to visitors.
Their aim is to "bring to light the environmental damage and misery future airport expansion at Heathrow will bring to local residents and businesses" and develop and promote community and resource autonomy to support long-term community resilience.

http://www.transitionheathrow.com/grow-heathrow/

- Protest vigils and sit-ins organised by Peaceful Uprising to monitor and prevent tar sand strip-mining in Utah public lands. Peaceful Uprising offers trainings to local communities on how to peacefully resist tar sand mining and uses art to educate communities and promote the campaign for climate justice. "Joy and Resolve" is their motto. [www.peacefuluprising.org](http://www.peacefuluprising.org)

- Credo's pledge of resistance if the Keystone XL pipeline is not rejected by the Obama Administration. This pipeline would run from the Alberta tar sands in Canada down to the Gulf Coast of Texas, carrying tar sand oil. Almost 96,000 activists have signed this pledge: "I pledge, if necessary, to join others in my community, and engage in acts of dignified, peaceful civil disobedience that could result in my arrest in order to send the message to President Obama and his administration that they must reject the Keystone XL pipeline."

http://act.credoaction.com/sign/kxl_pledge

In February 2013, 35,000 people protested global warming and the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline during a march in Washington. These protests have continued over the course of this year. Last March, over 450 people were arrested when they knelt themselves to the White House since a wave of peacefully protesting the pipeline. Arrests have also been made after protesters put their bodies in the way of the construction of the pipeline as part of the so-called 'Tar Sands Blockade'. Canada's indigenous First Nation-people play an important role in this movement [http://www.tarsandsblockade.org](http://www.tarsandsblockade.org)

- Sit-ins organized by American students and environmental activists to stop the exports of coal from ports of the American West Coast;

- the occupation of the Gazprom's oil rig in the Arctic ocean and the subsequent arrest (and release) of Greenpeace's Arctic 30.

With the climate crisis intensifying and the prospect of more ecocides to come, I expect that civil disobedience will become increasingly important in the years to come. If the basic condition of a liveable, healthy environment is no longer guaranteed by our governments, it's not fulfilling its part of the "social contract". Disobedience of unjust laws and policies is then a logical response from us, conscious citizens.

**Conclusion**

At the moment of this writing, the People's Climate March is being organised (www.peoplesclimate.org). This March will take place on 21 September during the United Nations' summit on the climate crisis in New York City, led by Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon. Tens of thousands attendees are expected. It will be interesting to see if protesters will engage in civil disobedience (for example, ignoring a lawful order to disperse) in order to draw extra (media) attention to their message. Could a massive turn-up at the Climate March and public outrage at massive arrests put enough pressure on government leaders to abandon short term, "profit-for-the-1%" thinking for a long-term vision of environmental and social justice? Such a turn-around would probably require a continuous application of public pressure.
communicated to the world through internet and social media, backed by solid knowledge of climate change and inspired by a vision of wiser alternatives to live on this Earth. Civil disobedience could be an important strategy in this 'public pressure' campaign and rests on a rich and tested tradition.

When applying civil disobedience to resist the fossil fuel industry, inspiration can be drawn from successful campaigns in other parts of the world. At the same time, the campaign should be tailored to local culture and traditions of community-based action and direct democracy for optimum effectivity. I look forward to feedback from readers on how civil disobedience could be uniquely tailored to match the needs, traditions and economic and political reality of Nigeria and hope this article sparks a broader discussion on the future of "green" civil disobedience.

Watch David Letterman's interview with Tim DeChristopher here
(12m30s): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_zSxcmDVoQ
Visit www.bidder70film.com to watch the documentary.


However, Gandhi felt that civil disobedience was too narrow a term to describe the whole nature of his Satyagraha-movement, which had a strong spiritual component - ‘love-force’, or ‘soul-force’ - at its core. Satyagraha means the force which is born of ‘truth’ and ‘love’.—King, M.L., The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr., Little Brown, UK 2000, Chapter 2: "In德en."

The Day We Added Ecocide To Our Vocabulary
by Andrew Rihn

No longer constrained to the lexicon of activists and free thinkers, the word spilled onto the barren shores of our lips. No longer content to bomb cities, blockade countries, or tell indigenous peoples theirs is only an imagined community, the guilt of our disaster attacks an entire ecosystem, from the invisible plankton suspended in the Gulf to the surprised citizens sitting at the top of the food chain in Michigan. Then came the biggest surprise that wasn’t a surprise at all. One by one we learned to name our excuses, our sour justifications: it doesn’t affect me. I’m not part of the problem.
The day we added ecocide to our vocabulary was the same day we put our erasers to work scrubbing the page clean, packing our mouths with booms of human hair. With every soft syllable we restricted our taxonomic footprint, sealed ourselves off from the disappearing species with every dome and cap available.
Our indignation closed like a fist we shook and shook for days into the emptiness. Soon enough we loosened our grip, put the key back into the ignition. The scope of our responsibility shriveled like a spider held over an open flame.

Source:
Bali is More than Paradise: It’s the Site of the 2014 Summit on Women and Climate
by Lorena Aguilar.

My work has brought me to Bali, Indonesia. When I told people that I was coming to this beautiful island, they usually raised an eyebrow and said something along the lines of: “Oh yeah, poor you, going to Bali.” But it is true. I am here at a historic moment, a collaboration between two very important funds worldwide: the Global Greengrants Fund and the International Network of Women’s Funds. The Global Greengrants Fund is a charitable foundation that makes small grants (typically $500 to $5,000) to grassroots environmental causes around the world. These funds are used to support community-based groups outside the United States and Western Europe working on issues of environmental justice, sustainability, and conservation. Since its establishment in 1993, Global Greengrants Fund has made over 5,000 grants in 129 countries, giving a total of over $20 million.

On the other hand, the International Network of Women’s Funds (INWF) is a group of women’s funds from developing countries in the south and developed countries in the north that are committed to a world of equality and social justice. INWF is part of a global women’s movement that, using a gender lens, is redefining the concept and praxis of philanthropy, one in which the most developed countries and the least are working as equals, and one in which the act of giving is not the privilege of just a few but of all. For four days, more than 100 people from these two funds have been discussing how to bring together the environmental agenda to the women’s rights approach under the topic of gender and climate change. Our role representing IUCN’s Global Gender Office has been to share our experience in this matter and guide the discussions.

Before the sun rose in the Ogoni sky, veterans of epic ecological struggles were already making their way to Bori, to the historic Finimale Sauna conference hall at the headquarters of Khana LGA. This hall lays claim to the MOSOP addresses by the Late Ken Saro-Wiwa in the early 1990s. The hall was packed full with women, young and old, who knew the critical role they play in the ecological struggle. We also could not help notice the men who hung around the windows and doors, hoping to be a part of the action. The occasion was the workshop titled Memories and Hope: Ogoni Women as Ecological Defenders organized by the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) on the 6th and 7th of August, 2014. The program was co-organized by the Federal Ministry of Environment (FMoE) and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ogoni Solidarity Forum (OSF).

It is commonly said that what a man can do, a woman can do better, but in the case of Ogoni the women seem to have been relegated to the back burner for too long.

Source:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lorena-aguilar/bali-is-more-than-paradise_b_5651842.html
Memories of Ogoni
Prepare Us for Future Battles
Reported by Cadmus Atake, Zaid Shopeju and Oluwafunmilayo Oyatogun.

Ogoniland has become the poster child for environmental problems in Nigeria, especially as a result of unscrupulous extraction activities of multinational corporations. So, even though the women of Ogoni were well aware of the problems surrounding them, the workshop provided them with an opportunity to take actively articulate the best paths to be taken if their land is to recover from years of ecological attacks. In fact, with the women as the focus of the workshop, we were not surprised to see plays, poems and other artistic renditions that helped lighten the ambience of the heavy despoliation of Ogoni environment and the much ignored UNEP report of 2011. There was also an abundance of passion and determination, qualities that have characterized the Ogoni people over the years.

The much welcomed United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP) report in 2011 on the state of the environment of Ogoniland brought a glimmer of hope to the indigenes as the detailed document spelled out clearly what was required for the government and oil polluters to do to recover the best of Ogoni. Unfortunately, three years later, the federal government has failed to respond to the recommendations of the report. The “keep off” posts erected by the Hydrocarbon Pollution Restoration Project (HYPREP) are the only visible signs of an acknowledgement of the report. The oil companies who have done major damage to the areas have successfully driven the people away from their livelihoods and the “keep off” signs only seal the exile the residents have been forced into.

With such a heavy topic of discussion, it was apt to have the humorous MC Loveday - an Ogoni indigene – as the anchor to the program. The resource persons for the two-day workshop included Comrade Celestine Akpobari, coordinator of Ogoni Solidarity Forum, Nnimmo Bassey – Director of HOMEF, Emem Okon - executive director of Kebetkache, Esther Uduak Okon – representative of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Mrs Mariann Orovwuje – Friends of the Earth Africa (FOEA), Hilda Dokubo – Nollywood Actress, Comrade Che Ibegwura, Constance Meju of The Nation and Comrade Legborsi Saro Pyagbara of MOSOP. The Finimale Sauna conference hall is no stranger to hosting such renowned environmental activists, with setting the pace in the early 90s.
Comrade Celestine Akpobari opened his remarks with his trademark saying that “to destroy a people, one only needs to destroy their environment.” He decried the rate of devastation in Ogoniland and the seeming indifference of the government to the plight of the Ogoni people.

Comrade Akpobari gave a sneak peek into old Ogoni, recalling his days as a vibrant child on the farm with his mother and the abundant harvests from the fertile, unpolluted Ogoni soils. Following his lead, the Federal Ministry of Environment representative, Esther Okon, gave her remarks and thanked the women for their courage in taking part in the Ogoni struggle.

Renowned Nollywood actress, Hilda Dokubo, expressed her feelings of insecurity about the poverty and destruction ravaging Ogoniland. “Insecurity encourages social vices and women must rise up against the causes of these insecurities”, she said. The Director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, encouraged the participants to continue in the struggle for justice. He assured participants that they could count on the full support of HOMEF in their efforts to see the cleaning up and restoration of Ogoniland.

Following the opening words from the speakers, Mrs Constance Meju and Emem Okon anchored an interactive session leading the women down memory lane. It was a lively, if sad, session listening to the women relive what Ogoni used to be prior to the devastation by oil extraction.

Once the women settled in, they were not short of words. One prominent voices during the workshop was 82-year old Comrade Che lbegwura who spoke eloquently on the place of networking in ecological defense.

As he began to speak, everyone else fell silent, his poignant words reverberating through the hall: “Environment is life and we must connect with people of similar interests to defend the environment. This is networking.” He went on with the grace and wisdom that comes from his life experience, to stress that “oil companies never came to Ogoniland to develop it, they came in search of capital and with that came destruction”, to which thorough networking is the only counter-force. According to Comrade Che, “if companies have joint ventures, citizens must also join forces because pollution does not respect ethnic boundaries.” uggie.

Not surprisingly, Comrade Che was able to drive home his point using apt proverbs as he recounted the memories of Ogoni while she still flourished, emphasizing that “an animal does not know how to help another animal’s baby” and therefore we are responsible for the defense of our ecology.“The things that have dimmed our hope are deep and complex”, he said, “and memories are vital – memories of the good Ol’ Ogoni as well as memories of those who died in the struggle. Networking brought me here and once we achieve a common goal, we can decide what to do with our own land.”

As he closed, he hit close to home with some who get trapped in the capitalist mentality oil companies sell to indigenes. He said, “literacy is good, but it is just a step towards solving our problems. Don’t be afraid. Poverty is a disease. Don’t sell your land.”
Let it be a contribution to any venture anyone proposes on the land. That way you become a co-owner or shareholder and your rights, including rights of access, are preserved. Selling off our lands dispossess us because the price of land is never commensurate to the value of the land. Those who want to buy lands have their own land. Why do they want to grab ours?”

Other women had questions and contributions, some of which brought tears, others laughter and others a lesson or two. One woman, Mrs Grace Namo, brought awareness to an often ignored sector of the Ogoni economy—pottery. She said, “in the past we made clay pots as there was abundant clay to produce them. Today, we cannot produce clay pots because our soil is so heavily polluted. Our pottery industry is dead.” This bears witness to the extent of oil pollution and its far-reaching impact beyond riverine industries. Neewa Dugbon from Bane Khana L.G.A joked that “everyone in Ogoniland is sick, suffering from one disease or the other except the Ebola virus disease”, making reference to the current epidemic in the sub-region. While this brought a few laughs, it struck the audience with the stark reality of the effects of oil in the region.

After a few hours, it was apt to inject art to the session as art lightens up any soul. Hilda Dokubo, a renowned Nigerian actress coordinated a skit which demonstrated many of the issues going on in Ogoni. The skits covered the ordeals as they now experience poor crop yields, declining health, poor fish harvest (or poisoned fish), lack of potable water and increased miscarriages, community conflicts and death. Many in the play also linked their loss of livelihoods directly to Shell’s actions in Ogoni. Their heartfelt plea to the government is the same as it was many years ago. It was as if Ogoni was frozen in time. If a march was called up at that second, our women were ready – they had been charged for so long with all the atrocities that Shell had committed against them and they were continually seeking means of staying adequately informed on how to make the struggle more effective.
On the second day, more emphasis was placed on the content of the UNEP Report published in 2011. It is a pity that such a comprehensive report reached the government and Shell and made no impact. Whatever impact may have been made is comparable to water running off a duck’s back. Apart from the cosmetic “keep off” signs mentioned earlier, the UNEP report seems to be a forgotten story.

Comrade Celestine Akpobari was able to communicate in-depth the expectation of the UNEP towards Shell and the government in Ogoniland. After his words, Nnimmo Bassey encouraged the people to protect their resources keeping in mind that their livelihoods depend on having a safe environment.

Speaking on the topic Re-source Democracy, Bassey stressed the fact that what we call natural resources are actually nature’s resources and should be treated as gifts from nature and not as objects to be plundered. According to him, the people must have the primary say about what happens in their environment including who extracts what, for what purpose and for whose benefit. He suggested that the UNEP Report should be published in local languages so that the people can further understand its contents and demand implementation.

As in any quality session, there was no shortage of questions from women — some of which they had been yearning to ask for years. Gilbert Nwiluka Manna of Wijiyaajara in Khana LGA asked “how do we as a people overcome our differences and achieve unity as a result of our common struggle?” This question was particularly important because it is a common joke that every square mile in the Niger Delta is a different ethnic group yet the issue of environmental devastation is only one of the many common threads these areas share.

The workshop facilitators were quick to highlight some of the other commonalities and encourage communities to unite and avoid divisions. Others like Ledum Kukelg were concerned about adhering to legal and political boundaries, and lamented that authorities have refused to
respond to the youths' requests for permission to monitor devastations in their environment. However, communities do not require permission to monitor their own environment and any such restrictions are a cause for alarm. Some issues should draw the attention of medical researchers such as complaints of early menopause, incessant miscarriages and unusual stomach pains from the residents.

On individual developments, Constance Meju and Hilda Dokubo shared with the women on the importance of exercises for their daily upkeep. More topics discussed included “Networking for Ecological Defense” by Comrade Che Ibegwura, “Impact of Pollution on the Elderly” by Constance Meju and “Impact of Pollution on Women” by Legborsi Saro Pyagbara, the MOSOP president. It is also striking how invested the women participants were in their current situation as was evident in the nature of their questions and the eagerness to share experiences and to learn more. One of the most inspiring aspects of the workshop was the field visit to Goi community - one of the most oil-damaged communities in Ogoni.

The community welcomed the participants warmly, gladly volunteering information about their lifestyle, history and ongoing challenges. Chief Mene Tomil lamented the contamination of Goi Creek, stating that “only 30 percent of our livelihoods are land-based, the other 70 percent depends on this creek.” Chief MB Dooh and Madam Bia Dooh Koda – all from the Goi community – reinforced their commitment to continue to pursue environmental justice in their homeland.
After two days of consultations, paper presentations, drama, poetry and songs, the women resolved and demanded the following:

1. The immediate and full implementation of UNEP Report including the scrapping of HYPREP, establishment of an Ogoni Environment Restoration Authority, Ogoni Environment Restoration Fund as well as a Centre of Excellence for environmental monitoring and remediation.
2. Immediate provision of safe drinking water to all impacted communities.
3. Immediate commencement of cleanup of the Ogoni environment as well as other polluted areas in the Niger Delta.
4. Halting of all oil exploration, further contamination and compensation for inflicted harm.
5. Creation of employment opportunities and establishment of a specialist health institution in Ogoniland to address the health impacts of the pollution in the land.
6. The creation of a network of Ogoni Women Ecological Defenders (OWED) to network with other community based organizations in Nigeria and to monitoring of environmental justice in Ogoniland. OWED will also monitor and regularly review actions taken with regard to the UNEP recommendations for the restoration of the Ogoni environment.

You can leave Ogoni physically, but the agony of the ecological devastation there can never be forgotten. Participants noted that 2015 will mark the 20th anniversary of the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni patriots. They all agreed that it would be a case of criminal neglect if the fourth anniversary of the UNEP report arrives in that landmark year without a serious start up of the cleaning up of their environment.

On the 14th of August, 2014, The Right Livelihood Award Foundation published the much awaited documentary – “Take Part” in which the director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey was interviewed on his struggle for environmental justice around the world. Nnimmo Bassey was awarded the 2010 Right Livelihood Award for revealing the full ecological and human horrors of oil production and for his inspired work to strengthen the environmental movement in Nigeria and globally. In this interview, Nnimmo Bassey’s journey is revealed and he also discusses his influences from Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. to South-African classmates during the time of Apartheid South Africa. You can’t miss it!

Excerpts from the documentary:

“The fossil-fuel industry is dangerous: polluting, harmful, destructive, and war-mongering and should be stopped.”

“The government of Nigeria is very rich but the people of Nigeria are not rich and that disconnect is the problem in confront in my daily work.”

“When I started my work as an environmental justice activist, Nigeria was under military rule and it was very rough. I and my colleagues were often incarcerated, detained or harassed.”

“If you are an environmental rights activist, there’s a limit to how much you can defend yourself...truth is the best defense.”
The treatment of indigenous and tribal peoples, the world's largest minority, is a major humanitarian issue. It shapes world history and raises profound questions about what it really means to be human. This book refutes criticisms of tribal rights and answers about every question you might have about them: how they live; their history; what they want; and what they have given the world. Governments will hate it.

'Eradicating Ecocide highlights the need for enforceable, legally binding mechanisms in national and international law to hold account perpetrators of long term severe damage to the environment. At this critical juncture in history it is vital that we set global standards of accountability for corporations, in order to put an end to the culture of impunity and double standards that pervade the international legal system. Polly Higgins illustrates how this can be achieved in her invaluable new book.' Bianca Jagger, Founder and Chair of Bianca Jagger Human Rights Foundation

Eradicating Ecocide is a crash course on what laws work, what doesn't and what else is needed to prevent the imminent disaster of global collapse. Eradicating Ecocide provides a comprehensive overview of what needs to be done in order to prevent ecocide. It is a book providing a template of a body of laws for all governments to implement, which applies equally to smaller communities and anyone who is involved in decision making.

A leading voice in the struggle for global justice, Vandana Shiva is a world renowned environmental activist and physicist. In Earth Democracy, Shiva updates the struggles she helped bring to international attention — against genetic food engineering, culture theft, and natural resource privatization — uncovering their links to the rising tide of fundamentalism, violence against women, and planetary death.
A peaceful protest by indigenous women in Indonesia shows the power of grassroots activism to tackle climate change.

By Megan Darby When the government of West Timor gave mining companies permits to exploit resources in the forest, one woman was determined to stop them. Aleta Baun endured violence and threats in her efforts to drive out miners. She was ultimately successful and won a Goldman Environmental Prize. Now Mama Aleta, as she is known, sees an opportunity to use UN funding to protect the forest, which helps reduce the impact of climate change. But she is concerned the government that handed out mining permits might not use that money wisely. Mama Aleta speaks through an interpreter from Bali, where grassroots women and environmental activists gathered for a conference this week. Organised by the International Network of Women’s Funds and the Greengrants Alliance Fund, the summit aimed to give women community leaders a voice on climate change.

With a budget of just over US$6 million a year, the Greengrants Alliance Fund operates at a much smaller scale to development banks and UN green funds. - See more at: http://www.rtcc.org/2014/08/08/meet-the-weaver-who-stopped-miners-destroying-her-forest/#sthash.knlKey59.dpuf
Yet by empowering activists like Mama Aleta, who directly confront big business, it can have a major impact on the economy and the environment.

Mama Aleta has been resisting forest destruction for nearly 20 years. She is from the indigenous Mollo people, who believe plants have souls and must be protected. The forests also provide natural dyes that the Mollo people use in their traditional weaving. Mining started across the Indonesian island of Timor in the 1980s, leading to deforestation, water pollution and landslides. Villagers were not consulted on these developments.

In 1996, when the companies moved in with plans to quarry marble from the Mollo’s sacred mountain, Mama Aleta decided she had had enough. She organised a protest that culminated in a year-long camp at the marble site. Some 150 women from the community took looms to the mine’s entrance, so they could continue their traditional weaving as they demonstrated. It was a peaceful protest that got an aggressive response. “I was terrorised, I was beaten up,” says Mama Aleta. “I had to flee from my house, because it was no longer safe. I had to be separated from my husband and children.” She filed a police report but it was not taken up. “They said the struggle of these people is against development.

The government feels like we are at fault.” In 2007, after a long struggle, four mines in the area closed for good. Attention turns to building up the community’s economic power in sustainable ways, so it can resist the lure of mining jobs. REDD The UN has a programme called REDD to prevent deforestation and the carbon emissions that go with it. It stands for ‘Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation’. The idea is to pay developing countries to preserve their forests. That removes the temptation to let business interests clear the trees for farming or mining. It can also be a cost-effective way to mitigate climate change. However, the programme has struggled to raise funds amid concerns over the poor governance records of some would-be recipients. The recipients need to be able to monitor huge areas of trees and show they are effectively preventing damage.

It is a controversial issue among indigenous forest communities, too. Some are concerned REDD will hand control of their lands to outsiders. Mama Aleta’s community has started planting trees to try and rehabilitate the forest. She is seeking to raise money for the Mollo people to map their lands and assert their rights.

This could put them in a position to receive REDD funding, but only if the UN is prepared to look beyond the government. “REDD can be an opportunity for the community to rehabilitate the forest that was damaged,” says Mama Aleta. “But if the government keeps giving permits to other commercial activities then the solution is not through them.”
The UN and grassroots movements are two worlds that rarely collide. Terry Odendahl, executive director at Global Greengrants Fund, perceives the UN attitude as “big problems need big solutions”. In contrast, she says many of the solutions to climate change are local solutions, both in adaptation and mitigation. “So much money from the UN is flowing to the larger organisations and in East Africa, say, you see a series of villages where women are in charge of the agriculture,” says Odendahl. “They are working with new forms of irrigation and at the same time they have got solar panels on their thatched roofs.” Working with women’s groups, Odendahl wants to give grassroots leaders a greater voice on climate change. The UN is backing efforts to raise US$15 billion as starting capital for the Green Climate Fund.

Odendahl thinks “some of that money could come our way”. If not, she adds, “that money is going to flow into government and yet the indigenous people, who have done a lot of work stewarding [the environment], are less likely to get it”. Mama Aleta has shown what can be achieved on a minimal budget by a few resolute women. Any UN strategy that ignores the power of the grassroots is missing a trick.

An obsession with growth has eclipsed our concern for sustainability, justice and human dignity. But people are not disposable – the value of life lies outside economic development.

Limitless growth is the fantasy of economists, businesses and politicians. It is seen as a measure of progress. As a result, gross domestic product (GDP), which is supposed to measure the wealth of nations, has emerged as both the most powerful number and dominant concept in our times. However, economic growth hides the poverty it creates through the destruction of nature, which in turn leads to communities lacking the capacity to provide for themselves.

The concept of growth was put forward as a measure to mobilise resources during the second world war. GDP is based on creating an artificial and fictitious boundary, assuming that if you produce what you consume, you do not produce. In effect, “growth” measures the conversion of nature into cash, and commons into commodities.

Thus nature’s amazing cycles of renewal of water and nutrients are defined into nonproduction. The peasants of the world, who provide 72% of the food, do not produce; women who farm or do most of the housework do not fit this paradigm of growth either. A living forest does not contribute to growth, but when trees are cut down and sold as timber, we have growth. Healthy societies and communities do not contribute to growth, but disease creates growth through, for example, the sale of patented medicine.

Water available as a commons shared freely and protected by all provides for all. However, it does not create growth. But when Coca-Cola sets up a plant, mines the water and fills plastic bottles with it, the economy grows. But this growth is based on creating poverty – both for nature and local communities. Water extracted beyond nature’s capacity to renew and recharge creates a water famine.

Women are forced to walk longer distances looking for drinking water. In the village of Plachimada in Kerala, when the walk for water became 10 kms, local tribal woman Mayilamma said enough is enough. We cannot walk further; the Coca-Cola plant must shut down. The movement that the women started eventually led to the closure of the plant.
In the same vein, evolution has gifted us the seed. Farmers have selected, bred, and diversified it — it is the basis of food production. A seed that renews itself and multiplies produces seeds for the next season, as well as food. However, farmer bred and farmer saved seeds are not seen as contributing to growth. It creates and renews life, but it doesn't lead to profits. Growth begins when seeds are modified, patented and genetically locked, leading to farmers being forced to buy more every season.

Nature is impoverished, biodiversity is eroded and a free, open resource is transformed into a patented commodity. Buying seeds every year is a recipe for debt for India's poor peasants. And ever since seed monopolies have been established, farmers debt has increased. More than 270,000 farmers caught in a debt trap in India have committed suicide since 1995.

Poverty is also further spread when public systems are privatised. The privatisation of water, electricity, health, and education does generate growth through profits. But it also generates poverty by forcing people to spend large amounts of money on what was available at affordable costs as a common good. When every aspect of life is commercialised and commoditised, living becomes more costly, and people become poorer.

Both ecology and economics have emerged from the same roots — "oikos", the Greek word for household. As long as economics was focused on the household, it recognised and respected its basis in natural resources and the limits of ecological renewal. It was focused on providing for basic human needs within these limits. Economics as based on the household was also women centered. Today, economics is separated from and opposed to both ecological processes and basic needs. While the destruction of nature has been justified on grounds of creating growth, poverty and dispossession has increased. While being non sustainable, it is also economically unjust.

The dominant model of economic development has in fact become anti life. When economies are measured only in terms of money flow, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. And the rich might be rich in monetary terms — but they too are poor in the wider context of what being human means.

Meanwhile, the demands of the current model of the economy are leading to resource wars oil wars, water wars, food wars. There are three levels of violence involved in non sustainable development. The first is the violence against the earth, which is expressed as the ecological crisis. The second is the violence against people, which
is expressed as poverty, destitution and displacement. The third is the violence of war and conflict, as the powerful reach for the resources that lie in other communities and countries for their limitless appetites.

Increase of moneyflow through GDP has become disassociated from real value, but those who accumulate financial resources can then stake claim on the real resources of people – their land and water, their forests and seeds. This thirst leads to them predating on the last drop of water and last inch of land on the planet. This is not an end to poverty. It is an end to human rights and justice.

Nobel prize winning economists Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen have admitted that GDP does not capture the human condition and urged the creation of different tools to gauge the wellbeing of nations. This is why countries like Bhutan have adopted the gross national happiness in place of gross domestic product to calculate progress. We need to create measures beyond GDP, and economies beyond the global supermarket, to rejuvenate real wealth. We need to remember that the real currency of life is life itself.

Source:
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/01/how-economic-growth-has-become-anti-life
Over the past weeks, in the run up to the 'Ban Ki moon summit' on climate change, there has been a recurring headline, an attempt to once again establish a particular meme in the mind of global elites as well as wider populations: friends, the line goes, you’re right to worry about climate change, but – say the reports by, on the one hand, the International Monerary Fund, and on the other, the New Climate Economy Project (in essence a second Stern Report) – what you really, really shouldn't do, is start believing that worrying about climate change should make you worry about trying to end economic growth.

Economic growth, so the story goes once again, can in fact be made to work very nicely with climate protection, if only it’s done the right way. Whereas Naomi Klein reminds us forcefully in her new excellent book that this, climate change, literally “Changes Everything”, folks like the almost irrepressibly optimistic Paul Krugman actually manage to lump the climate denialist Koch Brothers together with those parts of the climate movement that, basing themselves in sound evidence and strong theoretical argument, point to the fact that reducing greenhouse gas emissions to safe levels requires structural changes to the world economy, rather than just a bit of carbon pricing.

The battle, it seems, has been joined: in the run up to the umpteenth climate summit in Paris (yes, there’s one in Lima before, and important things will no doubt happen there, but it's pretty much going to be ignored in the public debate) the world is once again debating the question of how to drastically reduce emissions, and once again the prophets of 'decoupling' – i.e. decoupling economic growth from environmental destruction – are banging their drums.

Which raises the question of whom, or what, they are trying to drown out? Well, you see, alongside the stop and go debate about climate change, there's a discussion that's been developing in the shadows of the global media landscape, particularly in the global North, Europe and Canada, to be precise: a discussion about how insane it is, on a finite planet, to have an economic system that is premised on infinite growth. And about what an alternative to this might be, a still fairly vague conception alternatively (and with slightly differing emphases) referred to as degrowth, post growth or décroissance.

Now, it appears from the force of the push to convince us – against most available evidence, mind you – that economic growth and climate protection are compatible, that the hope in the liberal mainstream is to avoid this critical debate on degrowth, which may in fact constitute a movement, joining forces.
with the climate justice movement to push even more forcefully for the structural changes we know to be necessary. The concern is understandable. After all, both ‘movements’ have in common a tendency to be strongly critical of capitalism, and to focus at least parts of their critique on capitalism’s twin tendencies of overproduction and overconsumption, and an alliance between them would be eminently desirable.

This, then, was one of the many important questions that were raised at the “4th International Conference on Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity” that took place in Leipzig in early September – short: the degrowth conference. What, the organizers had asked, might the relationship be between the degrowth-‘movement’ (let’s call it that for now) and other social movements, in particular the climate justice movement. Precisely because an alliance between these two movements would be so desirable, I thought it useful to start on something of a note of discord: there are in fact significant differences between the two, and without first recognising these, it will be all the harder to overcome them. Kind of the way it is in any good relationship. So before we jump straight into bed, let’s talk about our differences, ok?

As I see it, there are three crucial differences that we need to be aware of.

The first difference is that while degrowth is a story that is largely articulated in the global North, a story that speaks from and to sensibilities that exist largely in the North, climate justice is a movement and a story that it articulated and led by folks in the global South.

When Nico Paech, a well-known German degrowth-theorist and (in the best sense of the term) propagandist, suggests that one of the issues facing us is the need to “protect oneself against a veritable deluge of consumption opportunities”, he is clearly pointing to a problem that does not affect the majority of the world’s population, but rather one that is largely experienced in the global North, and even there it is an issue that properly belongs in a middle-class discourse. In turn, climate justice as story and movement is based on the experiences of the broader environmental justice movement(s) that arose in the US in the 1980s among communities of colour – i.e. the South in the North – in general, and indigenous communities in particular.

The argument then was that environmentalism was largely a movement of white, middle-class people, for white, middle-class people. Their entirely understandable demands not to have their communities’ air polluted and children poisoned by dirty chemical and power plants had an unfortunate effect: rather than these plants actually being shut down and dismantled permanently, they were in effect simply moved – away from wealthier white communities, into poorer communities of colour.
Thus, by not looking at seemingly environmental problems also as social problems, by not being aware of the way a particular dirty factory is embedded in broader social structures of domination and exploitation, liberal environmentalism didn’t solve the problems it arose to tackle, but merely displaced them a few steps down the ladder of social power.

Whether intentional or not, this 'NIMBYism' (Not In My Back Yard) amounted not to environmentalism, since ecological problems weren't actually being solved, but in fact to a new form of environmental racism. In the mid-1990s, as the Kyoto-Protocol with its various 'market-based mechanisms' was being formulated – mechanisms that, as we know today, do little to solve the climate crisis, but continue to displace indigenous peoples from the ancestral lands they have occupied for so long – this story was once again taken up, and against what might be called the 'climate racism' of carbon offsets and other measures, a US-indigenous leader, Tom Goldtooth, first articulated the call for climate justice, around which, since then, a diverse and inspiring global movement has sprung up.

The reason to go into this history, and the different points from which the stories are articulated, is not to bash 'degrowthers' over the head, tell them to 'check their privilege' and shut up about things, but rather to point to the dangers inherent in the degrowth-story, namely the danger of a new global environmental racism along the lines of: 'hey, you lot in the global South, stop growing!', or indeed an environmental classism: 'hey, you poor lot in the North, we all need to tighten our belts', and we all know who usually ends up tightening their belts in such a situation.

Because of this danger – and just to be clear again, I am not accusing the degrowth-movement of environmental racism, I am pointing to it as a danger that arises precisely if and when the degrowth-debate becomes more widespread and gains media space – it is incumbent upon degrowth to take the global justice dimension into account more than this has so far been the case. This in turn requires the degrowth-movement to leave behind its two favourite aggregate states, that of scientific debate on the one hand, and marginal niche-project on the other, and to think in strategic terms, in terms of struggles, demand and opponents, and in terms of global efficacy. Would a demand like 'leave it in the ground' (where 'it' is fossil fuels and other finite resources) not resonate well with a degrowth-movement? But more on that later...

The second difference is that, while climate justice is rooted in specific struggles – those of frontline communities and their allies fighting against resource extraction, industrial agriculture, megaprojects and the effects of climate change – and therefore also identifies agents of change, even if those agents sometimes appear insufficiently powerful to achieve their desired outcomes, degrowth seems to precisely not be rooted in specific struggles, but rather starts from a conceptual critique, from an idea. From a movement perspective, this lack of a base is problematic, insofar as it means that the degrowth movement cannot (yet?) answer the question I consider to be central to any social movement: who would fight for your goals (in this case degrowth) and why?

Do these agents have the interest and the capacity to change the existing state of affairs? Because it lacks a social base and isn’t rooted in struggles, because it is rooted more in a widespread sense of cultural unease (with Freud, an 'Unbehagen in der Kultur', a sense of unease that pervades an entire culture) the degrowth-movement necessarily has a hard time identifying fields of collective transformative practice for those whom it politicises.

But there is also a third difference, one that is probably in some ways a result of the first two outlined above: degrowth is a frame, a story that strongly resonates in parts of Europe and the global North, whereas our efforts, at least in Germany, to establish a CJ-movement here have fallen pretty flat. Exhibit a: the very fact that the 4th degrowth conference managed to gather some 3,000 people in the Eastern German city of Leipzig,
whereas no social movement that I’m aware of here could pull off much more than 2,000 people even if they met in the much more easily accessible capital – let’s just say that a conference on climate justice would struggle to draw even 1,000 participants.

To be sure, this success was in no small part due to the organisers’ truly amazing efforts, but was at the same time indicative of the fact that the story of degrowth resonates far beyond the circle of usual suspects at movement events (this was also highlighted by the fact that many participants had never been to a social movement conference).

Exhibit b: from 2011 to 2013 there was a major (if politically somewhat ineffectual) parliamentary inquiry into questions of growth, well-being and quality of life, showing that the critique of growth ‘infects’ even conservative and liberal cultural milieus.

And finally, exhibit c comes from my own experience: if I try to convince my conservative grandfather of the CI-story, of the fact that the wealth accumulated in the global North in fact constitutes a massive debt we owe the global South, he usually ignores me; if I point out to him what is probably the absolutely central point in the degrowth-argument, namely that ‘there cannot be infinite growth on a finite planet’, he is forced to agree and based on that we can actually start a conversation that is critical of capitalism.

And in this story, my grandfather is simply a stand-in for many people in the global North, who have little truck with ‘climate justice’, but who share the unease that the degrowth movement has managed to articulate.

**From differences to commonalities**

So here’s the point I’m trying to make: yes, there are significant differences between the degrowth movement and the movement for climate justice but in a way, they are actually complementary differences. What degrowth lacks (a base in struggles, and a conception of global justice), climate justice can bring to the relationship, and what climate justice lacks (a frame that resonates in the North), degrowth can bring. And beyond this strategic point, there remains the fact that scares Krugman and others so much, that the two movements are necessarily related because degrowth in the North is a necessary (albeit insufficient) condition for global climate justice, seeing as that economic growth is so closely tied to greenhouse gas emissions, and that Southern countries retain what is frequently referred to as a ‘right to development’.

But new movements, or coalitions between movements, are not built simply on having the right arguments, they arise out of struggles that are fought in common. So on the one hand, there is a movement the global climate justice movement that after the obvious, repeated, impossible-to-ignore collapse of the UN climate negotiations as well as of civil society strategies that focus on these negotiations, is still looking for common points of convergence: points of attack, in other words.
And on the other, there is a potential movement degrowth that is casting around for fields of collective practice and action that would allow it to challenge the madness of eternal capitalist growth in ways that are more effective than the frequently rather marginal, often individual practices of transformation that currently make up much of the field of degrowth.

What struggle might they have in common? The answer is really quite straightforward: the struggle against fossil fuels, against fossil fuel extraction, against fossil fuel finance, against fossil fuel corporations. Why? First of all, it is no secret that fossil fuels are the core fuel of the engine of eternal capitalist growth, such that we are living in what German Marxist Elmar Altwater referred to as ‘fossilistic capitalism’. To be sure, we can imagine a capitalism based on renewable energies, but really existing capitalism has, for the last 200, 250 years been driven by fossil fuels.

And at the same time, the contribution of land-use changes to climate change notwithstanding, the burning of fossil fuels is also the key cause of human-driven climate chaos. So whereas it seemed to me during the conference that the degrowth-movement was more or less ‘speed-dating’ other movements (kind of proving the point that the degrowthers were trying to open up new fields of collective practice for themselves, there were plenty of workshops along the lines of ‘degrowth and X’, where X might be feminism, climate justice, care movements, etc.), Christopher Laumanns, one of the organisers, suggested on the closing plenary of the event that, rather than speed-dating each other, degrowth and climate justice are actually married to each other. So if that’s the case, let’s put rings on each others’ fingers, and let’s go fight those fossil fuel corporations: we couldn’t do much better to further our respective, and our common, agendas.

Nnimmo Bassey Receives National Honour for Environmental Rights Activism

Our Leader Nnimmo Bassey, has been honoured as a Member of the Order of the Federal Republic (MFR) in Nigeria. The recognition comes for his long term commitment to environmental justice.

One of Africa’s leading advocates and campaigners for environment and human rights, Nnimmo has tirelessly stood up against the practices of multinational corporations, particularly the impact of oil in Nigeria. Most recently, Nnimmo is one of the founding partners of the global Yes to Life, No to Mining movement, which will be launched alongside The Gaia Foundation this October. The movement seeks to connect mining affected communities around the world, elevating their voices and seeking greater justice against the destructive and indiscriminate impacts of the extractives sector.
NNimmo is the Founding Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), and Chairman of both the Board of Environmental Rights Action and Friends of the Earth Nigeria. He is also the former Chair of Friends of the Earth International.

NNimmo Bassey has already won several awards, including being named as Time magazine’s Heroes of the Environment Award in 2009; being specially honoured by the Benin Monarch, Oba Erediauwa for his contribution to environmental sustainability in Nigeria among others in 2010. In 2010 he went on to receive the Right Livelihood Award, popularly referred to as the "Alternative Nobel Prize". "...for revealing the full ecological and human horrors of oil production and for his inspired work to strengthen the environmental movement in Nigeria and globally."

In 2012 NNimmo was awarded the Rafto Prize a human rights award in recognition of his long-term fight for people’s right to life, health, food and water in a world affected by complex and threatening climate change and mass environmental destruction.

Every year, the Nigerian president confers national honours on Nigerians and friends of the country who have displayed exceptional service in their areas of expertise, for the benefit of the nation. This year, 305 Nigerians were selected to receive the awards in a befitting ceremony in the nation’s capital, Abuja.

Much like the British honors system, Nigerian National Honours are a set of orders and decorations conferred upon Nigerians and friends of Nigeria every year. They were instituted by the National Honours Act No. 5 of 1964, during the Nigerian First Republic, to honour Nigerians who have rendered outstanding service to the benefit of the nation.
3 Years After UNEP Report: Ogoniland Remains In Valley Of The Shadow Of Death

Monday August 4th, 2014 marks the 3rd year anniversary of the damning report of the assessment of Ogoni environment conducted by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) at the request of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The comprehensive report unambiguously confirmed our fears and anxiety that Ogoniland was a ticking ecological bomb.

Reacting to this unpalatable milestone, Nimmo Bassey, the director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) regretted that after three years a situation that required the declaration of environmental emergency was yet to elicit any serious response.

"We are deeply shocked that we are marking three years of inaction on a report that clearly showed that our peoples are walking and living in the valley of the shadow of death. We are scandalised that we are not marking three years of concrete actions to salvage what is left of the Ogoni environment," Bassey said.

Ogoniland has become a metaphor for unconscionable ecological ruination that petroleum resource extraction has wreaked on the Niger Delta. Despite the fact that oil extraction activities was forced to halt in Ogoniland in 1993 following the expulsion of Shell by the Ogonis people under the leadership of the late Ken Saro Wiwa, Ogoniland remains arguably one of the most polluted areas of the world.

"There are no tenable reasons for government and Shell to fold their arms and watch our people wallow in a chronically polluted environment all through their lives. Why should anyone have to drink water containing benzene, a known carcinogen, at levels over 900 times above the World Health Organisation (WHO) guideline and 1000 times above Nigerian drinking water standards?" Bassey asked.

"The Niger Delta is tragically the most severely petroleum impacted ecosystem I have seen anywhere in the world and I have seen many. The extraordinary environmental and social damage has continued for over 50 years now, and continues to this day. As has been said by many, Nigeria is an iconic example of the oil curse", said Professor Richard Steiner a conservation biologist with the Oasis Earth in Anchorage Alaska.

The peaceful but consistent cries of the Ogoni people against this wholesale destruction of their environment have gone unheard by Shell and the Nigerian Government. We recall that Ogoni people issued the Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990 and categorically demanded for environmental, political and socio economic justice and protection.
Regrettably, despite a formal presentation of the document to the government nothing have been said or done by the way of response or engagement.

It is unacceptable that 3 years after the UNEP report was released, no structure has been set up that would indicate any serious process for transparently tackling the ecocide that has been visited on the Ogoni environment.

"It is regrettable that rather than setting up a process of remediation with full popular participation in setting goals and targets, the best we have are politics of pollution signposts from the government and arguments by Shell over who should warehouse US$ 1 billion they are allegedly ready to place on the table for the clean up," said Celestine Akpobari of the Ogoni Solidarity Forum.

The demands made by HOMEF at the second anniversary of the UNEP report sadly remains appropriate one year after. We call on the government to:

• Declare Ogoni land an ecological disaster zone and invest resources to tackle the deep environmental disaster here.

• Urgently provide potable drinking water to the people across Ogoniland
• Commission an assessment of the entire Niger Delta environment. An assessment or audit of the environment of the entire nation should equally be on the cards urgently. As recommended by the UNEP report, establish a Centre of Excellence for Environmental Restoration in Ogoniland for learning on pollution and clean up actions across the Niger Delta.
• Ensure that those who have committed crimes against the people and the environment are brought to book and made to pay for their misdeeds. Blame for oil thefts must go beyond the diversionary focus on the miniscule volumes taken up by bush refiners. The major crude oil stealing mafias must be uncovered. Crude oil and gas volumes must also be metered as a basic requirement for transparency and accountability.
• Engage in dialogue with the Ogoni people as to the time scale and scope of actions to be taken to restore the environment. Issues highlighted in the Ogoni Bills of Rights and the UNEP report provides good bases for dialogue. This should be extended to the whole of Niger Delta.
• Ensure that the actions to tackle the ecological disaster in the Niger Delta is not use as a job patronage for cronies or the boys; rather the UNEP should play a principal oversight role in area of finance, ensure quality, build confidence in the process and most importantly tackle corruption.
• Scrap HYPREP and set up an Ogoniland Environmental Restoration Agency to be domiciled in the Ministry of Environment and should not by any means be under the polluting Petroleum Resources Ministry. Equally set up an Environmental Restoration Fund for Ogoniland, as recommended by the UNEP report.
• Order Shell to urgently dismantle whatever remains of their facilities in Ogoniland along with toxic wastes dump in the territory.
• Order Shell to replace the Trans Niger Delta pipeline that carries crude oil from other parts of the region across Ogoni territory.
• Require Shell to fully implement the UNEP report.

Announcing Upcoming HS05

GMO Free Nigeria with The Young Environmentalist Network, TYEN
November 12, 2014
Benin City.

RLC Lecture and Workshop at UNIPORT Details coming soon!
Watch out!

Have you signed up for our HOMEF Monthly E-Bulletin yet?
You can always catch up on all the juice of what’s going on with us. It’s free and full of insightful information on hunger, oil politics and environmental justice all around the world. Also, you can find out about all our workshops and programs first from our e-bulletin.

To subscribe, send an e-mail to media@homef.org.