

Oronto Douglas

MEMORIAL DIALOGUE

In continuation of his legacies in public service,
friends of Late Oronto Natei Douglas invites you to the first
Oronto Douglas Memorial Dialogue.

Theme:

Environment and Livelihood-

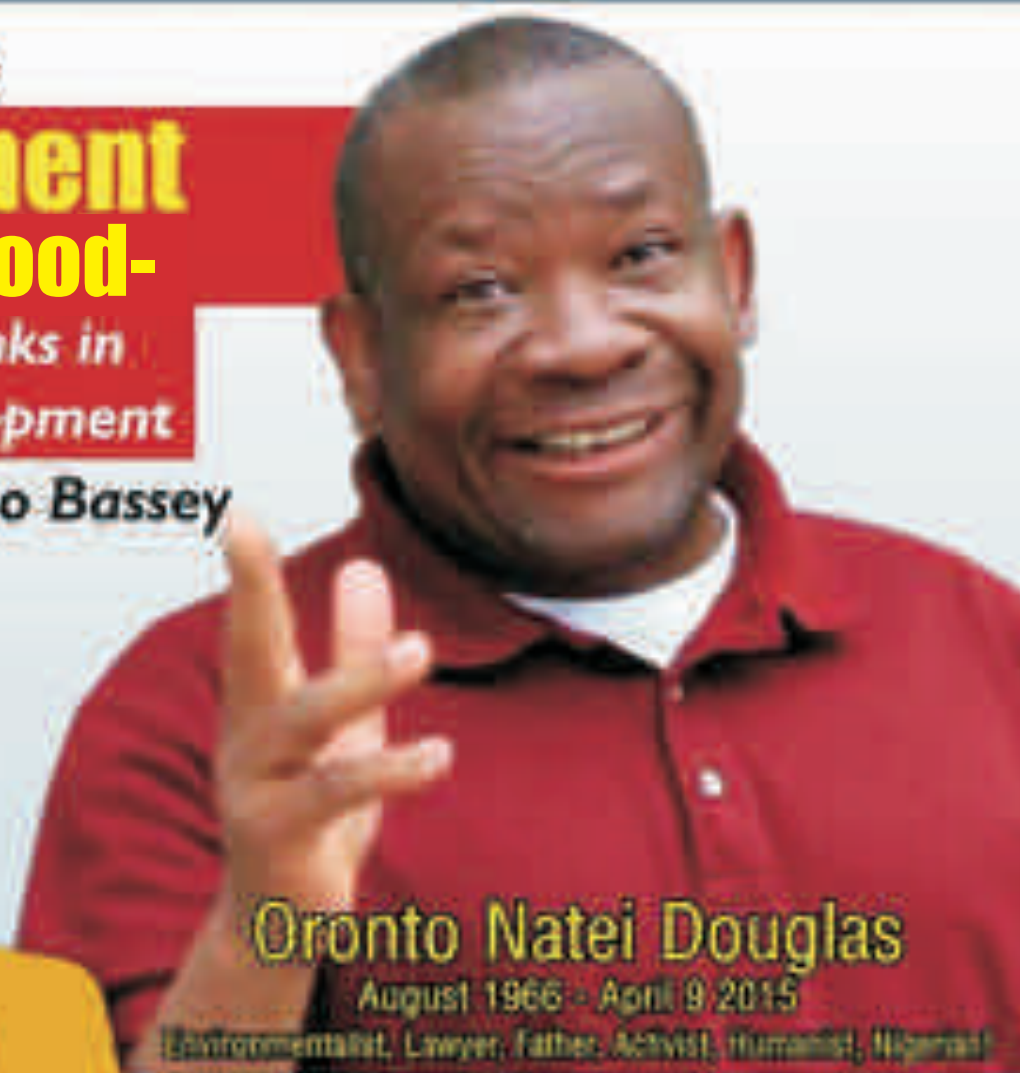
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National Development

Moderator: **Nnimmo Bassey**

Date:
9th April,
2016

Time:
5pm

Venue:
Zuma Hall
Rockview Royale,
Abuja.



Oronto Natei Douglas

August 1966 - April 9 2015

(Environmentalist, Lawyer, Father, Activist, Humanist, Nigerian)

PANELISTS:

1. Chom Bagu
2. Mahmud Aminu
3. Chido Onumah
4. Ogaga Ifowodo
5. Mohammed Bello Tukur
6. Ibiba Dan Pedro
7. Gloria Ballason
8. John Dara

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eco~ INSTIGATOR

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**DIALOGUE WITH
BULLDOZERS**
AT EKURI COMMUNITY FOREST

**COUNTDOWN TO
THE Ogoniland
CLEAN-UP**

**NIGERIANS
OVERWHELMINGLY
REJECT MONSANTO's
RISKY GM MAIZE
AND COTTON**

The Eco~Instigator is a quarterly publication of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)

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Mother Earth
Foundation

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The turmoil in the world has continued with increasing sites of environmental and political conflagrations. As this edition of your Eco-Instigator was going to bed, the world was shocked to hear of the assassination in Honduras of Berta Caceres, the outstanding, inspiring, courageous human rights and environmental campaigner, Founder of the Civic Council and Indigenous Peoples of Honduras Association (COPINH). Her murder was compounded by the shooting, and detention of Gustavo Castro, a comrade and leader of Otros Mundos, (Friends of the Earth Mexico). HOMEF joined all people of good conscience to condemn these atrocious actions, demand for justice and, of course, call for a halt to these and similar acts around the world.

Two unfolding scenarios in Nigeria are of great concern to us and we have beamed our spotlight on them in this edition. First is the resolve of biosafety regulators in Nigeria to promote the entry modern agricultural biotechnology into the country. When officials saddled with regulating a sector act as promoters of the very thing they should regulate you can imagine what the tendencies would be. Soon after a deeply flawed National Biosafety Management Bill was hurriedly signed into law by the immediate past president of Nigeria, Monsanto Nigeria Agricultural Ltd rushed two applications for field testing of genetically modified maize and the commercial release of genetically modified cotton in Nigeria. Public notices on these applications were published on 25 February and HOMEF in concert with 99 national organisations sent objections to the National Biosafety Management Agency (NABMA). A short advisory on our objections is published in this issue. We also publish an open letter sent by a collective to Nigeria's president on why genetically modified organisms should not be permitted in Nigeria.

The second obnoxious drama unfolding on our shores is Superhighway Project that is proposed to lead from a proposed deep sea port on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and cut through pristine community forests to the Nigerian hinterland. Forest communities in the Cross River axis of Nigeria where this so-called Superhighway is to be built have managed their community forests so well that a community like Ekuri has been awarded the Equator Prize for community forest management. The government of Cross River State has commenced the bulldozing of forests and farms in defiance of the fact that the project is yet to receive an approved Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the people have not given free prior informed consent as required by ILO article 169.

One of the highlights of this 264km long Superhighway is that the Cross River State government has claimed land stretching 10 km on either side of the road. A 20 kilometres right of way for an about 100 metres highway must hold the record for government land grabbing for the "overriding public interest" to satisfy deep private interests.

We serve you a menu of poetry, reports and, of course, books you must read. As usual, we like to hear back from you.

Until victory!

Nnimmo

OBJECTION! NIGERIANS OVERWHELMINGLY REJECT MONSANTO'S RISKY GM MAIZE AND COTTON



More than 100 groups representing over 5 million Nigerians, comprising of farmers, faith-based organisations, civil society groups, students and local community groups, are vehemently opposing Monsanto's attempts to introduce genetically modified (GM) cotton and maize into Nigeria's food and farming systems. In written objections submitted to the biosafety regulators, the groups have cited numerous serious health and environmental concerns and the failure of these crops especially GM cotton in Africa.

Monsanto Agricultural Nigeria Limited has applied to the National Biosafety Management Agency (NABMA) for the environmental release and placing in the market in Zaria and surrounding towns of GM cotton (Bt cotton, event MON 15985). A further application is for the confined field trial (CFT) of two GM maize varieties (NK603 and stacked event MON 89034 x NK603) in multiple locations in Nigeria.

In their objection to the commercial release of Bt cotton into Nigeria, the groups are particularly alarmed that the application has come so close after the dismal failures of Bt cotton in Burkina Faso. According to Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health of Mother Earth – one of the groups in the frontline of the resistance: "We are totally shocked that it should come so soon after peer reviewed studies have showed that the technology has failed dismally in Burkina Faso. It has brought nothing but economic misery to the cotton sector there and is being phased out in that country where compensation is being sought from Monsanto." He further asks the pointed question: "since our Biosafety Act has only recently entered into force, what biosafety legislation was used to authorise and regulate the field trials in the past in accordance with international law and best biosafety practice?"

According to the groups, former President Goodluck Jonathan hastily signed the National Biosafety Management Bill into law, in the twilight days of his tenure in office. Further worrying is the apparent conflict of interests displayed by the Nigerian regulatory agencies, who are publically supporting the introduction of GMOs into Nigeria whereas these regulators (the NAMBA) are legally bound to remain impartial and regulate in the public interest.

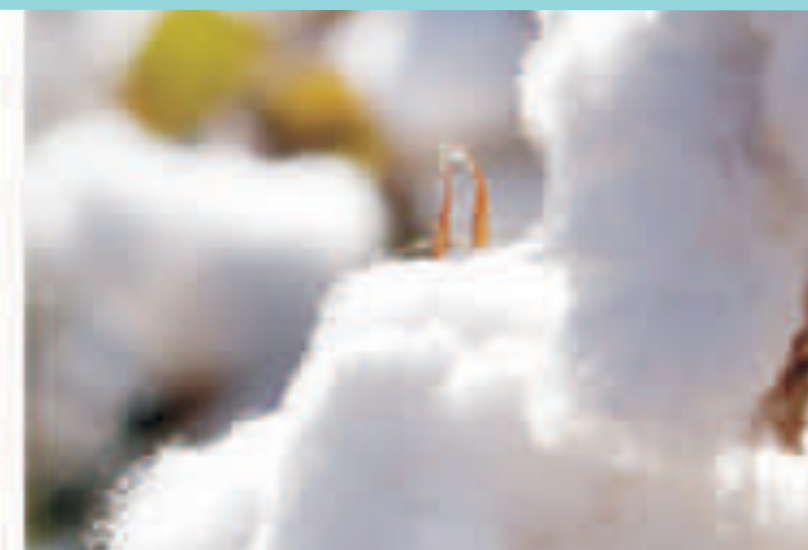
Monsanto's GM maize application is in respect of a stacked event, including the herbicide tolerant trait intended to confer tolerance to the use of the herbicide, glyphosate. In 20 March 2015 – The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the specialized cancer agency of the World Health Organization (WHO), assessed the carcinogenicity of glyphosate and concluded that glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic to humans." There is also increasing scientific evidence that glyphosate poses serious risks to the environment.

According to Mariann Orovwuje, Friends of the Earth International's Food Sovereignty co-coordinator, "Should commercialization of Monsanto's GM maize be allowed pursuant to field trials, this will result in increased use of glyphosate in Nigeria, a chemical that is linked to causing cancer in humans. Recent studies have linked glyphosate to health effects such as degeneration of the liver and kidney, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. That NABMA is even considering this application is indeed unfortunate and deeply regrettable, knowing full well about the uncontrolled exposure that our rural farmers and communities living close to farms will be

exposed to."

Monsanto's application deceitfully provides no discussion on the potential risks of glyphosate use to human and animal health and the environment. Apart from the potential of contaminating local varieties, the health risk of the introduction of genetically modified maize into Nigeria is enormous considering the fact that maize is a staple that all of 170 million Nigerians depend on.

The groups are urging the Nigerian government to reject Monsanto's applications out of hand. They note with disquiet that there is a serious lack of capacity within Nigeria to adequately control and monitor the human and environmental risks of GM crops and glyphosate. Further there is virtually no testing of any food material and products in Nigeria for glyphosate or other pesticide residues, or the monitoring of their impact on the environment including water resources.



DANGERS OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS TO NIGERIA

By Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, Ify Aniebo, Ifeanyi Ochongor, Okunade Monisade, Saratu Mamman, Buffy Okeke Ojuidu, Yvonne Iyoha, Bolanile Olatunji

Mr. President, we are worried about the surreptitious introduction of Genetically Modified Crops (GMO) into our food ecosystem and write to save the Nigerian populace, from the dangers of this invidious biotechnology.

As you are undoubtedly aware, the PDP-led government on Monday April 20, 2015, one week before the handover, signed the National Bio-safety Agency Bill into law. The Bio-safety bill empowers National Bio-safety Management Agency, NABDA, to regulate and open the country to the commercialisation of genetically modified crops.

Genetic modification as proffered by Biotech companies such as Monsanto et al, is the invasive scientific manipulation of plant or animal genes at a molecular level, to withstand unhealthy dosage of pesticides/herbicides produced by the same biotech companies. This is achieved by inserting a Bt gene acquired from bacteria into the genome of plants like

corn, cowpea, cassava, etc. This then allows the plant to survive the lethal dosage of their pesticides at the detriment of soil health, harmful pollution to the air and the poisoning of the water system.

Aside from false promises of higher yields, less pesticide use, etc, GMOs are nothing more than patented pesticide delivery systems designed to increase the sales of poisonous agrochemicals such as Roundup, Glufosinate, Bt 2,4D, Astrazine and Neonicotinids. Such chemicals are sold under dubious labels of being bio-degradable which have since proved to be false.

It is worth noting that in March 2015 the World Health Organisation (WHO) classified glyphosate, the key ingredient in herbicides and pesticides, as carcinogenic. As soon as the WHO confirmed a long-held belief in the scientific community, Sri Lanka's newly elected President Maithripala Sirisena placed an immediate ban on glyphosate as did many other countries.

. President Sirisena, a farmer and former Health Minister, stated that glyphosate is responsible for the increasing number of chronic kidney disease (CKDu) patients in Sri Lanka and added that the move would protect the Sri Lankan farming community.

These are the exact same chemicals the Director-General of the National Bio-safety Management Agency (NABMA) Mr. Rufus Ebegba is pushing to have sprayed on our farms. The manufacturers try to convince would-be regulators to ignore the toxicity of their product as seen with their product Bovine Growth Hormone in Canada as well as another scandal in Indonesia in a bid to avoid environmental impact studies being conducted on its cotton.

Mr. President, in the past four months alone, 19 countries of the European Union (EU) have banned GMOs in their countries.

These include Germany, the most powerful nation in the union. The German Agriculture Minister Christian Schmidt announced that in addition to its existing ban on GMO cultivation, it will make use of the "Opt-out" rules to stop GMO crop cultivation even if varieties are approved by the EU.

Furthermore, six of the eight most advanced countries on the planet (The G-8) have banned GMOs. These include France, Germany, Japan, Russia, England and Italy. Yet Mr. Rufus Ebegba of (NABMA), insists that we ignore all these precedents set by these great countries, as well as health risks involved with GMOs and focus on the increased revenue it can potentially bring to our country.

Nigeria's Desperate Need For Export Earnings.

As I write this, the dollar is trading on the parallel market for \$1-N330, A potential major foreign exchange earner is agriculture

but as seen above, Europe has shut its borders to GMO products, several countries in Asia have done the same e.g. Thailand. Allowing our agriculture system to be contaminated with GMO would leave our produce like our oil, largely unsold.

The second tier of this problem is exposing our farmers and agencies to the high price of these imported seeds due to the exchange rate, whilst making them dependent on foreign companies for a primary input of production (the seed). These GMO seeds have also been genetically modified so that they produce crops that are sterile, ensuring that farmers must buy new seeds for each year's planting, Thus protecting the "Patent rights" these companies claim on the seeds and locking the farmer into dependency on these foreign biotech companies for seeds every year. In doing this, a primary input of agriculture that exists abundantly is monopolised, commoditized and outsourced.

In 2015, our neighbour Burkina Faso once touted as the spearhead of transgenic cotton in West Africa by GMO lobbyist as well as Mr. Rufus Ebegba of (NABMA), abandoned genetically modified Bt Cotton crops in order to phase out inferior quality GMO crops for non-GMO crops. The issue is yields below what was promised in the contract, and the disappointing quality of cotton fiber. Besides denouncing their contract with Monsanto, Interprofessional Cotton members are evaluating the amount of compensation that they will claim, based on losses related to the cultivation of transgenic cotton since 2008. Faso's farmers, it has become clear that focus on yields alone is not the defining factor of a crop's success. The yield in Burkina Faso was higher than its neighbour Mali produced.

Yet within a few months, Mali's entire product had been sold on the international market, while most of Burkina Faso's languished awaiting export.

“What is the point in being the top producer if you can't even sell your cotton?”

On the other hand, now more than ever organic produce is in high demand with consumers willing to pay far more for such products. Countries such as Uganda are benefiting from the global high demand of organic products. Organic products can go into all markets, GMO products can only go in to specific markets. It is this prospect that informed Russia's Vladimir Putin's statement during his recent address to the Russian Parliament. President Putin proudly outlined his plan to make Russia the world's 'leading exporter' of non-GMO foods that are based on 'ecologically clean' production. He went further to say “We are not only able to feed ourselves taking into account our lands, water resources, Russia is able to become the largest world supplier of healthy, ecologically clean and high-quality food which the Western producers have long lost, especially given the fact that demand for such products in the world market is

steadily growing.”

CONTAMINATION, CROP FAILURE, PEST AND WEED RESISTANCE

A major disadvantage of this technology is the contamination of natural varieties due to the wind causing pollen drift. Farmers that utilise these products as well as agencies that would supposedly “regulate” them cannot guarantee natural varieties would not become contaminated.

The rise of virulent pest resistance and super weeds as have emerged all over America is another factor worth noting. These pests and weeds can only be eradicated by purchasing harsher and more destructive chemicals from the same company, locking our farmers into a destructive cycle.

Effect on health and the environment

In 2011, scientists in Argentina found long-term effects of GMOs where these crops are grown, such as birth defects and a higher incidence of child cancer caused by glyphosate – a herbicide sprayed on GMO crops. The industrial agricultural practices of spraying these chemicals on farms create an abundance of these toxic chemicals in the air.

This brings us to the Nigerian context. In the hinterlands where most farming in Nigeria happens, Nigerian citizens are not served water by a water corporation who consistently tests the quality of water. They go to the streams or fetch water from wells. Does the Nigerian government plan for its citizens to drink from poisoned streams and water tables?

A case study is the recent outbreak of microcephaly in Brazil, which coincided with the spread of the Zika virus, a condition in which babies are born with unusually tiny heads. Recently, several scientists have asserted that a toxic larvicide, Pyriproxyfen is most likely the root cause. Others have said it could be a combination of factors such as the introduction of GMO mosquitoes to the area, the use of larvicide and the presence of the Zika virus. These assertions serve to highlight the dynamic interactions that occur in nature and the potential disastrous effects they can have.

Despite several empirical evidence and calls from the world's leading scientists linking GMOs to diseases such as cancer, reproductive failure, stunted growth, and birth defects as seen in Argentina and many other places, Nigerian Ministry of Agriculture in tandem with NABDA have labeled these calls 'anti-science' and 'uninformed' because the producers of these products have told them that their products are safe.

In the words of David Schubert, Professor and Head of Cellular Neurobiology Laboratory at the Salk Institute of Biological Studies, La Jolla, California: “One thing that surprised us is that U.S. regulators rely almost exclusively on information provided by the biotech crop developer, and those data are not published in journals or subjected to peer review... The picture that emerges from our study of U.S. regulation of GM foods is a rubber-

stamp 'approval process' designed to increase public confidence in, but not ensure the safety of, genetically engineered foods.”

NABDA/NABMA has been created to mimic the FDA in America, for the sole aim of 'the regulated' controlling the regulatory process to ensure the easy approval of GMOs without rigorous assessment of health or environmental risks.

“Monsanto should not have to vouch for the safety of biotech food. Our interest is in selling as much of it as possible. Assuring its safety is the FDA's job.” Phil Angell, Monsanto's director of corporate communications, quoted in the New York Times, October 25, 1998.

The clear import of the above is that there is no coherent or conclusive body of evidence to guarantee the safety and sanctity of GMO foods as fit for human consumption. Why the Nigerian authorities should give legislative approval to what could be termed as “junk science” is a baffling reality to all of us.

Furthermore, there is the issue of freedom of choice. Does the Nigerian citizen not have the right to know if the foods they eat have been modified in the lab? Would these products be labelled as GMOs or will that right of choice also be taken away from the Nigerian citizens? Can we envision people buying a labelled cup of GMO cow peas from the market? Would market sellers label these products truthfully?



eco-INSTIGATOR:

Mr. President, The world is becoming health conscious; the demand for natural and unprocessed foods is at an all time high, in part to stem the rise in diseases linked to processed foods and GMOs. As president, you are undoubtedly aware of the current state of our health care system and infrastructure. Is it fair to expose our people to such a technology, knowing full well that more developed countries with better healthcare systems and independent research capacity have chosen to protect the health of their citizens as well as their environment?

Does Nigeria need this new wave of colonisation of our food system, empowered by patent laws and control of seeds which produce sterile offspring? Does Nigeria need this new layer of dependency?

Mr. President, are you aware that these foreign corporations seize intellectual property rights to African seeds, in effect attempting the theft of the entire agricultural base of all the countries in Africa? It would seem like a flashback to the colonial era, during which everyone but us knew the value of our resources and these same nations we go to ask for AID today, built their wealth on our ignorance of the value of our resources.

President Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia in his speech at the State Opening of the National Assembly for the 2015 legislative year said:“(Gambia) will never accept GM

food.”“I must emphasize here that despite our obsession with becoming a major food exporter after 2016, we will never accept genetically Modified Organisms in our agriculture. The Gambia is strictly maintaining organic agriculture for both our consumption and export. Nigeria can take a cue from The Gambia and become a major exporter of organic food, taking advantage of the global demand for natural organic food whose value is about three times the value of GMOs. History and Legacy.

In this age of information, knowledge is at our finger tips; we see the actions of Presidents prioritising the health and welfare of their citizens over corporate interests. We see the move towards healthy living as witnessed by the rising organic food consumption. Just as glyphosate has been officially declared a carcinogen by the WHO, just as DDT was declared a poison, eventually the world will come to terms with this technology, history would say President Goodluck signed the bill but President Buhari presided over the poisoning of his people and the colonisation of their agricultural system, if nothing is done to halt this clear and present danger.

The authors, members of the Working Committee, Nigerians Against GMO, wrote this as an open letter to President Muhammadu Buhari and the Minister of Agriculture Chief Audu Ogbeh.



COUNTDOWN TO THE OGONILAND CLEAN-UP

BY TIVE DENEDO

This is a countdown that should have begun in 2011 when the United Nation Environmental Report now popularly referred to as UNEP report was issued about the state of environmental pollution and resource degradation in Ogoniland. If this countdown can actually begin as events unfold in the next few weeks, then it must be an epochal moment for Ogoniland, the Niger Delta, Nigeria and the whole world.

The report says it will take up to between twenty-five to thirty years to complete the cleanup. That is the size of the damage.

A host of factors but largely the lack of political will to implement the report stalled what would have been the biggest remediation work on a polluted environment in the world.

The abandonment of the report after the usual white paper was issued dragged the process into becoming an issue and part of the campaign promises of President Muhammadu Buhari.

At the moment, the initiative for the cleanup has received a major boost from the President and the Honourable Minister of Environment Ms. Amina Mohammed not because they have trumpeted their achievements through the usual fanfares attached to matters of the state but by their body language and the precise approach of consultation with relevant key stakeholders as a prelude to dealing with the problem. The echoes from their meetings are indications that there is light at the end of the slick filled, soot packed, benzene saturated and criminally polluted tunnel of Ogoniland and the Niger Delta. These moves are stirring enthusiasm among those who understand the importance of speaking to those who are afflicted in the region.

For those who have just a flitting knowledge of the pains of Ogoniland and the Niger Delta, it is very crucial to put it in bold relief.

It may be a very depressing engagement if the gory details can sink in for an outsider. It is even more disturbing where the place you call home has a highly placed position in the ignominious list of the most polluted place in the world. The Niger Delta is the second most polluted place on earth after Norilsk, a city in Russia above the Arctic Circle which is home to the world's largest metal smelting complex. It is agonizing to know that of the one hundred and ninety-five countries in the world the Niger Delta is one of the most dangerous places on earth to be born, to live, earn a living, raise a family and to grow as a human being.

In Africa, the Niger Delta is the most polluted place in all of the fifty three countries. The depth of the damage and destruction in Ogoniland is devastating and dehumanizing. The Niger Delta and Ogoniland got to this position with the gradual poisoning of the waters, vegetation and agricultural land of the region through oil spills which occur during petroleum operations. Since the discovery of oil in

Oloibiri in 1958 all that successive governments and oil operators have been concerned with is to extract oil, make and spend money and not to control any of the consequences especially the environmental problems associated with the industry. Here is a list of some of the chemicals that people in Ogoniland and the Niger Delta are likely to be exposed to during their lifetime; carbon dioxide which is high in methane, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, volatile organic compounds like benzene toluene, xylene and hydrogen sulphide as well cancer generating agents like benzaprene, and dioxins. Humans exposed to such substances can suffer from respiratory challenges. Some of these chemicals can cause asthma, lead to breathing difficulties and pain, as well as chronic bronchitis. Benzene is known to be a cause of leukemia and other blood related diseases. Aside the loss of right to health, there is no access to food, clean water, and an ability to earn a living. In saner climes the gas is usually used through re-injection.



There are about four causes of oil spillage in the region; Pipeline and Tanker accidents which contributes about half of all spills, sabotage which is due to the handiwork of those looking for the “promises of government” in the pipelines and is said to be about twenty eight percent of all spills, oil production operations which accounts for twenty-one percent of spills and a not too negligible one percent that is due to inadequate or non-functional production equipment. In all these spillages have massively ruined the Niger Delta and put the people living in this 70,000 square kilometer land space in peril.

In a 2010 Baird report it was estimated that between 9 million and 13 million barrels have been spilled in the Niger Delta since 1958. One source even calculates that the total amount of petroleum in barrels spilled between 1960 and 1997 is upwards of 100 million barrels. What this amounts to is to make the Niger Delta a killing field littered with corpses of oil. Beyond oil spills, another cause of pollution is the gas flare that has made portion of the region the land of no night. Niger Delta is a flaming cauldron where more natural gas is flared than any other place in the world. With the flared gas Nigeria 'burns' about US\$2 billion every year.

As the initiative for the new phase of the cleanup is about to begin, it is important that few issues which are essential to the background are reflected upon. Some that are particularly striking are suggestions from Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation. Bassey spoke of the need to appropriately name the agencies that shall supervise the clean up exercise. He said “the agency should be named Hydrocarbons Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) or Hydrocarbons Clean-up Project (HYCUP). Better still, the body should be renamed as Ogoni Environment Restoration Agency as recommended by UNEP. If the

idea is to pave way for an agency that serves the entire Niger Delta, the needful thing to do, while having a specific project for Ogoniland, would be to rename the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC) as Niger Delta Environment Restoration Commission.” Certainly, government is not planning to restore pollution as the name Hydrocarbons Pollution Restoration Project (HYPREP) given to the agency by government implies.

A few or more people will snicker about what a name has got to do with the process. Oh! There is so much in and to a name. Names are significant and symbolic. Names can be signifiers and identifiers. Most times, names are indicative, sometimes descriptive and at other times declarative. A name empowers and for an individual it is one of the sweetest of sounds to the ear on a daily basis. For organizations, institutions and countries, a name is a powerful means of identity. The name can clarify positions and standards by which they operate and by which they can be held accountable for their successes and failures. There is need for the right name to mark the direction that must be followed in the restoration and remediation of Ogoniland and the Niger Delta.

Another issue to carefully consider by people and institutions involved in the process is the need to modify and alter attitudes about the cleanup. There should be no feelings, beliefs and demands that should be cast in stones. It is only the values that will ensure a win-win situation for the comprehensive cleanup that should be primarily sustained.

All other issues should and can be negotiated and made to orbit around the main objective of cleaning the mess of over five decades of oil-related pollution. Old forms of engagements that did not work should be thrown away and new ones that will usher in solutions brought to the table and dispassionately examined for the gains that are inherent in them.

Joy has a very slender and delicate body which can be broken with just a few wrong steps as even as the countdown commences on this onerous task of bringing a fresh lease of life to many people and communities in Ogoniland and in the Niger Delta. It is a long thread that will touch the lives of many of those living and many yet unborn. May the joy not be crushed and broken again as all parties are moving along the polluted pathways of the Niger Delta.

Feedback

The texts that I read from Eco-Instigator were both inspiring and bar-raising. The Paris event was a disappointment, or more like the praising of the decisions made there in the media was disappointing. Didn't have much hopes but I guess there are other points of value in the event and people meeting around these themes.

- Juho Viitala
Tampere, Finland

UPCOMING EVENTS

Field Monitors Training – Ogoni, May

Fashioning a Just Biosafety Path - Conference – Abuja, 24-26 May

Forest Town Hall – Abuja, 6 June

**Sustainability Academy: Youths and COP21 Post Mortem
– Lagos, 17 June**

UNEP REPORT: "WE WILL IMPLEMENT IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS" -FG

By Fyneface Dumnamene Fyneface



President Muhammadu Buhari on Friday, March 4, 2016 in Ogoniland reiterated his commitment to commence the implementation of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Report on Ogoni before the end of first quarter 2016. It would be recalled that the Federal Government had on Thursday, January 7, 2016 in reaction to a 30-day ultimatum issued by Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) through the Director General of the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) in Abuja said the implementation of UNEP Report on Ogoni would commence in first quarter 2016.

Addressing the people of Ogoni at a consultative meeting on March 4, 2016 held at the Ken Saro-Wiwa Peace and Freedom Centre, Bori-Ogoni, the Minister of Environment and head of Federal Government Delegation to Ogoniland, Ms. Amina Mohammed told a crowd of Ogoni people that Federal Government would implement the UNEP Report on Ogoni released on August 4, 2011 in the next few weeks. The Hon. Minister also said the people of Ogoni can be certain that the planned implementation of the report is a new dawn. "... People of Ogoniland today, we are in celebration because, this is the beginning of the end of struggle. It is also one of hope for the people of Ogoniland as it also marks a new dawn for the people of Ogoniland.... The report has highlighted much. Since we came to office, the one thing that has kept us busy around is the UNEP Report and we commit that it is the UNEP Report that we will begin to implement in the next few weeks," Ms. Mohammed said.

UNEP REPORT IMPLEMENTATION AND THE NIGER DELTA QUESTION

By Uche Igwe

“We believe that a fair, thorough and holistic resolution of the crisis in the region will have tremendous impact on the democratic aspirations and yearnings for good governance. We have however taken upon ourselves the patriotic task of bringing to a close this rather sad

and embarrassing chapter in our quest for stability, prosperity and good neighbourliness.”

-Former President Goodluck Jonathan

I stumbled on this quotation while I was taking a voluntary historical excursion into the issues of the Niger Delta. I like the soundbite from it. Do not ask me how far the person who was quoted contributed to actualizing what he said. He re-echoed the sentiments of many of us. At least, we must admit that he acknowledged how embarrassing that chapter of our history is and the urgent necessity to end it. Fair enough. Former President Jonathan actually

made this statement while he was still Vice President. Some argue that as soon as he became President, either he became too overwhelmed with the events in the polity or he had other priorities apart from the Niger Delta. Now you know the rest. Even the East West road- that most important road in the region was not finished in five years of Jonathan Presidency. That is all in the past now.

Earlier in his address, the President of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) Legborsi Pyagbara thanked the Minister and President Muhammadu Buhari for the efforts they have made to clean up Ogoniland but noted that the implementation of the report has been over delayed. Speaking further, Mr. Legborsi called on President Muhammadu Buhari to declare a state of emergency on Ogoniland and immediately inaugurate the necessary mechanisms for the clean up to take off as continued delay is causing needless tension in Ogoniland. “I also call on the federal government to declare Ogoni wetland a Ramsar site in line with UNEP Report recommendation,” Mr. Pyagbara said.

In a presentation by Social Development Integrated Centre (Social Action), its Research/Project Officer, Energy and Climate, Mr. Fyनेface Dumnamene called on the Federal Government to commence the implementation of the UNEP report on

Ogoni immediately to avert further deaths and for the report implementing agencies to be sited in Ogoniland. Mr. Fyनेface also tasked the Federal Minister on Environment to use her good offices to push for the release of Ken Saro-Wiwa Memorial Bus confiscated by the Nigerian Customs Service since September, 2015.

Some of the dignitaries at the event which was postponed on February 23, 2016 for security concerns after deadly clash between ex-militants and the Nigerian Army that left over 6 persons dead included Rivers State Commissioner for Environment, Prof. Roseline Konya, Secretary to the Rivers State Government, Kenneth Kobani, Prof. Ben Naanen, Senator Magnus Abe, Senator Olaka Wogu, His Royal Highness King Suanu Baridam, His Royal Highness Steven Kpea, Celestine AkpoBari, National Coordinator of Ogoni Solidarity Forum (OSF) and many others.



But seriously, it is important to carefully review and understand what went wrong with that region. We should somehow unpack and comprehend the undercurrents to the history of the neglect and try to decipher the reasons behind it. The fact is that unless and until we understand these issues, many other well intentioned interventions may just go the way of others. Like many issues in Nigeria, it appears to me that the challenges of the Niger Delta have been well studied and fairly well understood right from the onset. However, there is a national attitude or creating an us-and-them dichotomy, fuelled by virulent ethnicism that seem not to allow many of us bother when other regions are concerned. There are probably more reports about that region more than any other region in Nigeria so I cannot pretend to present anything near exhaustive. Starting from the Henry Willinks Commission Report on the Fears of the Minorities in 1958 up till date. There was the General Ogbemudia Special Security Report on Oil Producing Areas in 2001, the National Political Reform Conference Report of 2005, Belgore Report, the Poopola Report and the later day Niger Delta Technical Committee Report of 2008. What about Ogoni Bill of Rights of December 1990 and even the Kaiama Declaration of 1998. The same issues kept re-occurring but everyone concerned conveniently looked in another direction and this is where we landed.

Curiously all these documents both official and unofficial ones highlighted the utter neglect, suppression, marginalization, ecological devastation and need to cleaning up the oil polluted environment. I was touched by the reference that the unabated damage to our fragile environment and to the health of the people due to the uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas by the Kaiama Declaration. Imagine something that has

been on since 1958! How come all of us kept quiet while the Niger Delta was going in flames? Why? How come all these reports were basically saying the same thing and no one found it important to act? How come it was sustained for this long? How come we only see conflict and fragmentation as the only legacies in most of the communities that brought revenue that fed our nation right from independence till date? How come every effort that has been made to remedy the situation keep failing? Who are those that benefitted from this neglect? Where are they? What lessons can we learn from all that has happened so far?

These questions keep bothering concerned citizens as we expect the federal government to resume the clean-up of the region. From such a chequered historical background, the first response will be that of scepticism and suspicion. It is only natural to ask. Will this ever happen? Is this another public relations stunt by the Buhari government in collusion with the international oil companies?

Will it not end up as one of those projects that remain in the pipeline for so many years? Will it be added into the list of white elephant projects that managed to get off the ground but remain abandoned as a drain pipe to guzzle and embezzle public funds? Shall we not be drawn into another arena for bitter partisanship and ethnic brinkmanship? The truth is that there is a lot of suspicion and a need for a counter narrative.

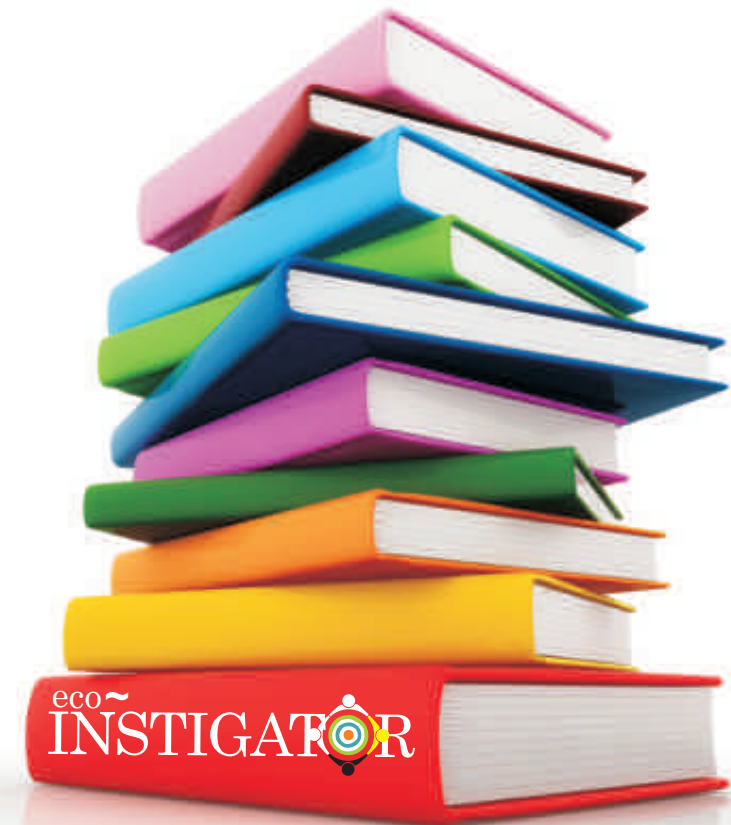
The announcement of the project is a commendable one only if the federal government will learn to do things differently this time. Just a few days ago during his official trip to Kenya, President Buhari reiterated his commitment to clean up the hydrocarbon polluted sites in Ogoni land.

However, many people have complained of his slow pace of action in fulfilling his electioneering promises. Could this be one of those? While we continue to applaud him, many citizens are beginning to get anxious and curious when and whether the project will get off the ground promptly. Nigerians are yet to see the framework that will be used to ensure that the recommendations of UNEP report are implemented quickly but thoroughly such that the livelihood of these fragmented communities can be restored? It needs to be part of an overall development strategy for the Niger Delta region. How will government mobilize the required humongous funding under the current economic turbulence? How will they manage the multiplicity of stakeholders who may see this as another opportunity to siphon public funds? Finally, if the FGN manages to get the project off the ground, how do they ensure continuity and insulate the project from the vagaries of political manipulation?

We all know that the Niger Delta was a population predominated by fishermen and farmers before oil was discovered. The uncountable creeks and streams have in the past provided habitat for wide variety of fish and aquatic life. With abundant rain and fertile soils, agriculture flourished. However, with the level of man-made oil pollution in the region those occupations can no longer be practiced. If the ultimate objective of the clean is to restore the environment fully then there is hope that those farmers who abandoned their farmlands can one day return to their farms and fishermen can resume fishing. More so with the global oil prices coming so low, the resource will one day dry up forcing us to seek alternatives. Will this ever happen in our life time?

President Buhari clearly observed in Nairobi that the devastation caused by oil spill has destroyed many livelihoods and is clearly one of the many reasons people in the Niger Delta region lost faith in government and resorted to many criminal activities that we are seeing in the today. If he is right, then it means that the clean-up of the Niger Delta region may be the best way to achieve and everlasting closure to this history of pain and ecological catastrophe. For me, President Buhari has a historic opportunity that he cannot toy with. By cleaning up the Nigeria Delta, history will capture our President in gold as someone under whom the vision of Kaiama declaration and the Ogoni Bill of rights were actualized. It is such an important step that must not be allowed to fail. We must all now come on board to give him all the necessary support to do it quickly.

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HOST COMMUNITY

NETWORK OF EXTRACTIVE IMPACTED COMMUNITIES:

Uniting extractive host Communities In West Africa

By Cadmus Atake Enade

The Host Community Network of Extractive impacted Communities gathered in Accra, Ghana, for a strategic planning meeting on the 16th of February 2016. They aimed to develop an organized network of Mining communities in West African thereby uniting extractive impacted host communities under one platform so that they could share ideas, have stronger voice and to stand in solidarity against the damage done by extractive industries operations in West African region.

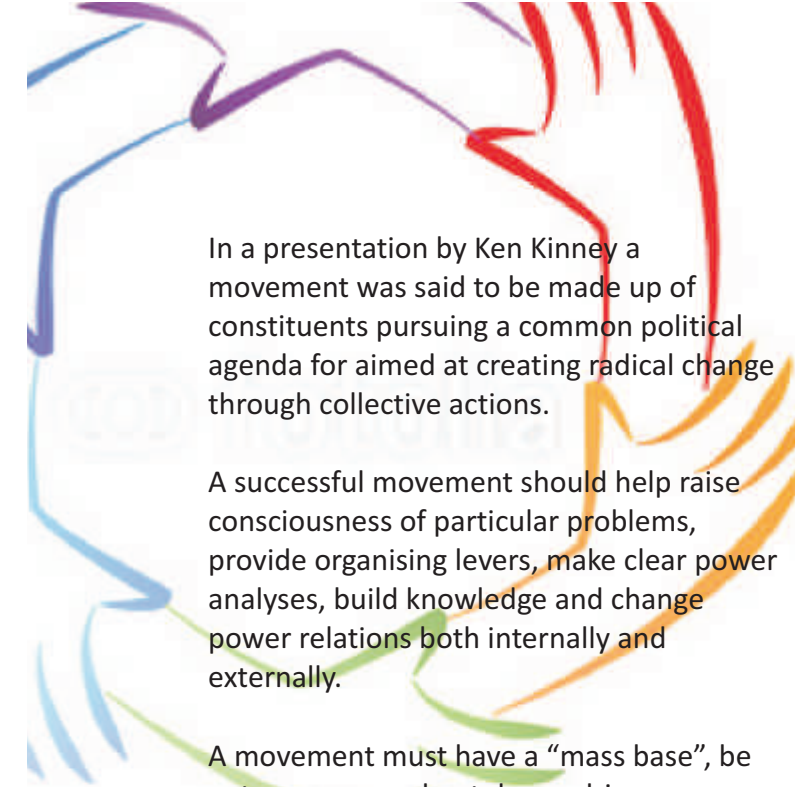
The meeting hosted by Oilwatch Ghana had participants from community based organisations, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the media including Third World Network Africa, Oilwatch Ghana, KARIOS, Canada, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Ghana and HOMEf –Nigeria. Others were from The African Challenge, The Development Institute, CODHREH and Daily Trust, Ghana.

Noble Wadzah of Oilwatch Ghana said the

meeting would deliberate on tools that would aid functional values in movement building for enhanced networking. This would fill a gap in the region caused by a lack of such grass-root network of communities. A network of communities would help raise coherent and effective responses in the struggles for environmental and social justice in West Africa.

Participants reviewed the performance and success stories of the flagship National Coalition on Mining (NCOM) established in 2001 to tackle the problems emanating from mining activities and operations in Ghana which has impacted community.

NCOM started with three organisations, but is now a large coalition with many organisations cutting across mining communities. The coalition has become effective at both grassroots and national levels.



In a presentation by Ken Kinney a movement was said to be made up of constituents pursuing a common political agenda for aimed at creating radical change through collective actions.

A successful movement should help raise consciousness of particular problems, provide organising levers, make clear power analyses, build knowledge and change power relations both internally and externally.

A movement must have a “mass base”, be autonomous and not donor-driven or aligned to a political party or patronage group and have clear and transparent leadership. They must have clear political agendas, change goals and targets. Challenges facing movements include the pressures to slide towards NGO-isation and resorting to narrow, issue- or service-focused approaches that often lack broader political analyses. Resource constraints and co-option into reactionary social groupings could also pose serious problems in movement building but such are surmountable when approached from the spirit of sacrifice and a clear set of goals.

It was noted that critical thinking is needed to drive the agenda of building a movement that critically looks at the ills of the extractive industries in our various regions including in the area of environmental costs related natural

resources exploitation. An instance was cited of the pollution from a phosphate factory in Togo where the waste emptied directly into the ocean, while the people still fish in the polluted water.

The need for building critical knowledge among CSOs especially with a focus on the youths and community people was emphasised.

Participants heard of the HOMEf approach of using the tool of Sustainability Academies and Community Dialogues to drive a similar agenda. Practical knowledge from such encounters have lead to formation of ecological defence teams and networks across communities.



THEY DON'T CARE IF WE EXIST -

Crude Oil Spill Impacts At Forcados

BY NNIMMO BASSEY



L4th February was celebrated as Lover's day across the world, but in parts of the creeks of the Niger Delta it turned out to be a tragic day. While lovers dressed with a touch of red, Forcados communities were braced for the unknown with the threat of having their water ways coated with crude oil rose by the hour. On that day, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC or Shell) announced that there was an oil spill from their 1.2 metres (48 inches) export line and that they were investigating the cause. The point of leak lies under 4.5 metres of water.

To be sure that the right thing was done, that the environment was protected and that communities were not left in limbo, the Minister of Environment, Amina Mohammed and the Minister of State for Environment, IBRAHIM Usman JIBRIL, visited the Forcados Terminal to see things for themselves. They forsook the luxury of getting there on a chopper and took to the boats to get there through the choppy, and at times, treacherous waves. Their move sent a strong signal that the business of ecological defence in these parts was taking a necessary curve.

We should also say here that since taking office, these ministers have toured the environmental crisis hotspots in Nigeria – including those polluted by oil and industrial activities, those impacted by desertification and loss of wetlands and those facing the menace of gully erosion. They have also been in constant consultations to ensure that the implementation of the UNEP report on Ogoni environment is not only implemented but that other parts of the Niger Delta would not be left on the lurch.

The trip to Forcados was all business. Forcados in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria hosts the second oil export terminal in Nigeria besides the one at Bonny in Rivers State. There was no media announcement and no paparazzi. Government officials on the visit were John Nani - the Commissioner for Environment, Delta State and Dan Yingi - Chairman of the Environment Committee of the Delta State House of Assembly. The other officials were Mrs Akutu -the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry and Idris Musa of the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA). And then there were three of us from the environmental justice constituency: Emem Okon, Monday Itoghor and yours truly.

Arrival at Forcados Terminal was an hour's bounce on the waves in a convoy of military boats. On the way we passed solitary boats

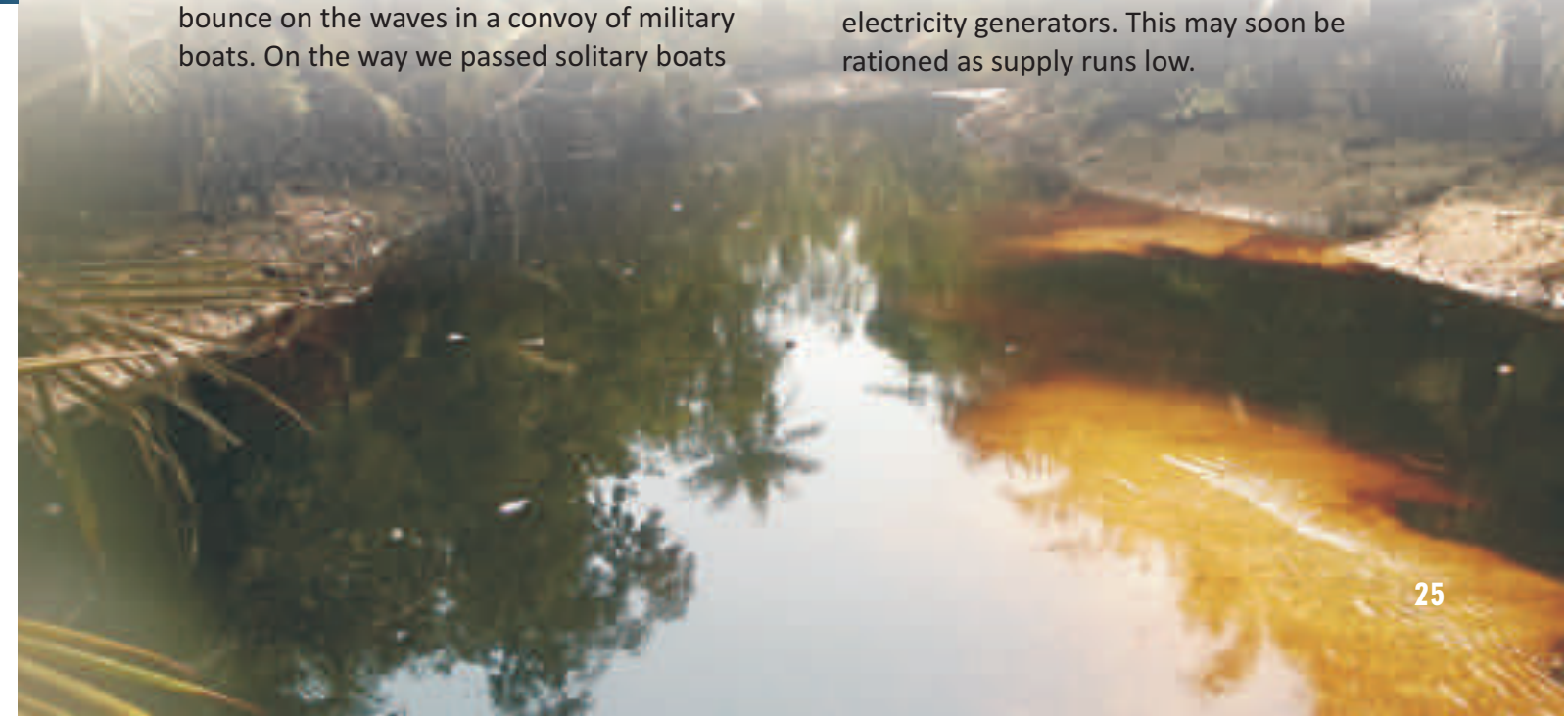
with stoic fisher women and men hoping for a catch, and obviously at home with the boisterous waves around them.

On arrival at the Terminal, the visiting team was given a presentation on the incident by Shell officials. Before zeroing in on the incident, they went on a history tour of developments on the Terminal as well as on past incidents.

SPILLS REMEMBERED

The terminal commenced operations 1971, that is 45 years ago and had a major upgrade in 1998. Shell noted that the incident of 14th February 2016 was almost on the 10th anniversary of an 18th February 2006 militant attack on the pipeline. They also mentioned an attack on their 36 inches produced water pipelines in 2006. Produced water is dumped into the creeks and rivers of the Niger Delta after treatment by the production companies.

The company provides constant electricity from gas turbines to the two major communities in Forcados, Ogulagha and Odimodi. Shell has 36 power generating turbines here and only needs 2 to power their operations at the Terminal. Since the shutdown power is supplied from diesel run electricity generators. This may soon be rationed as supply runs low.





Shell also informed that on 4th March 2014 there was a third party interference on their export line at a depth of 8 metres and that this was a through a sophisticated theft point that only professionals could have done.

The current spill happened 5km off the coast and led to a shut in of 300,000 barrels a day of crude oil from government owned Shell, Nigerian Petroleum Development Company (NPDC) and a Nigerian company, Seplat Petroleum Development Company.

CHRONOLOGY OF A SPILL AND RESPONSE

The loading of a vessel, MT Yamuna Spirit, commenced from 10:00 am on 12th February 2016. Loading was suspended at 0:20 am on 14th February when the spill was noticed. Seplat and NPDC were informed to stop pumping crude oil to the Terminal at 5:41 pm on 14th February. Shell deployed booms at 9:35 am on 15th February to curtail the spread of the crude and a specialised surveillance aircraft arrived from Ghana at 10:30 am on 17th February to join the effort. By the time of

the visit, they had deployed 27 skimmers and plastic tanks for collection of recovered crude. They also stated that community people were recruited to join the clean up effort.

When the Minister asked what actions had been taken to protect and assist the impacted communities, Shell officials informed that so far they had recovered 25 barrels of crude and had mobilised relief materials such as rice, beans, vegetable oil and water to the major communities.

Tellingly, Shell would not disclose how many barrels of crude oil has been dumped into the sea, creeks and the lands from this incident.

CAUSE OF INCIDENT

Although investigations by the Joint Inspection Team –made up of company and government officials, as well as community representatives- have not been concluded, Shell insisted that the spill was caused by a third party interference. How are they so sure of this? They displayed thick concrete pieces collected from the sea bed at the point of leakage. The pipe is protected by being encased in concrete reinforced with wire mesh.

The second point that they claimed provided irrefutable proof was that some communities people informed them that they heard a big bang at a time that coincided with when the spill occurred.

On being questioned by the Minister of Environment, they agreed that they would have to wait for the conclusion of the investigations and further expert examination, before drawing any conclusions about the cause of the spill.

My note here was that even if the exact time of the rupture of the pipe was known, hearing a loud notice from the community could not rigidly prove that a third party interference had occurred on the pipeline at a point 5 km out at sea. That sounds like one “hearsay” taken too far!

The Minister of Environment appreciated the fact that Shell notified her ministry of the spill on 15th February. She told them that President Buhari is determined to ensure a clean up of Ogoniland as well as the entire Niger Delta. She noted that whether the present incident was caused by equipment failure or by third party action, the government was concerned that the communities, the environment and the economy should not suffer.

THEY DON'T CARE IF WE EXIST

After the Official presentation it was time to visit some of the impacted communities. We headed towards the open sea, but after about 15 minutes in choppy waves and heavy salt water sprays, it was obvious that it was not the right time to proceed in that direction using the boats we had. So back to the Terminal we returned. From here we went to Oseigbene village (also called Okutu) right at the edge of the Terminal to see things for ourselves.

Shell had tried to say that the spill was

being contained and kept from hitting the shoreline, but the visit to this village showed very extensive crude oil pollution of the community, especially their creek, the major source of potable water. There were booms and skimmers deployed by Shell here, but these were clearly rudimentary and ineffective. The crude oil simply coursed beyond the feeble booms while the skimmers whirled and skimmed what they could.

The mangrove forests were heavily impacted. Dead crabs and fish littered the shoreline at the village. It was a river of oil as far as we could see. The effort to put up a clean-up show for the visiting Minister did not quite pan out as they may have expected.

Community women spoke up. They told the Minister that Shell does not appear to care whether they existed or not. That no one cared if they were humans. They had no road, no electricity and no water. They had no jobs and were not engaged in the clean up processes. They had also not received any relief materials. Their children were sick as a result of the spill and some were in hospitals receiving treatment. After the visit the oil company officials said they were not aware of any illnesses arising from the spill.

The Minister assured the community that her visit was to ensure that their situation was handled properly and that their environment would be cleaned up. She also noted that the women and children bore special impacts from incidents like the present one and that something would be done to assist them. A short helicopter overflight of the spill point showed efforts being made to curtail the spread of the spill. Again the booms deployed out there did not appear to far any better than the ones seen at Oseigbene.

This is the story of oil and the Niger Delta.

The phrase: 'Strong Oil Shows' do not mean a discovery

Tullow has plugged and abandoned the new field wild cat Cheptuket-1 in Block 12A onshore Kenya.

The well, drilled by PR Marriott Rig-46, had "good oil shows", a way of saying it is non-commercial. But Tullow and its partner, Africa Oil say the well wasn't drilled for commercial success.

The companies refrained from using the term 'Discovery', because the well didn't encounter a single commercial pool of oil. However, by claiming that Cheptuket-1 had 'strong oil shows', a phrase unknown in exploration lexicon, they led the energy media to interpret it as a discovery. Read what Tullow and Africa Oil said about the well: "The objective of the well was to establish a working petroleum system and test a structural closure in the south-western part of the basin. The strong oil shows(emphasis ours) encountered in Cheptuket-1 indicates the presence of an

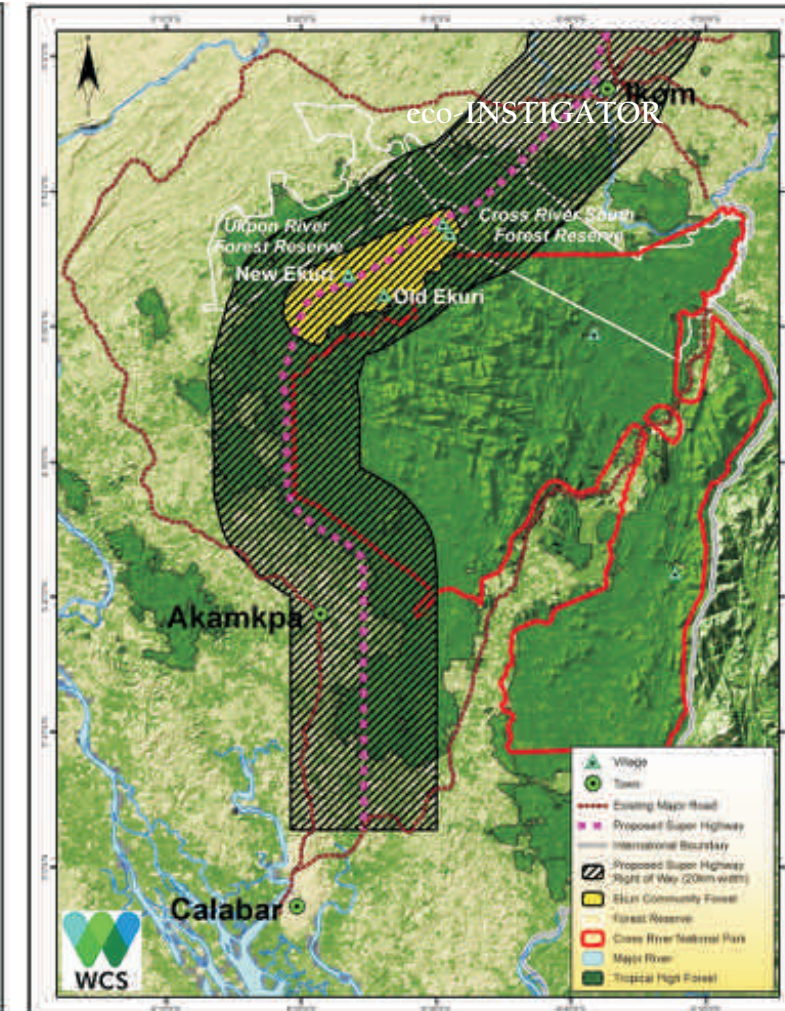
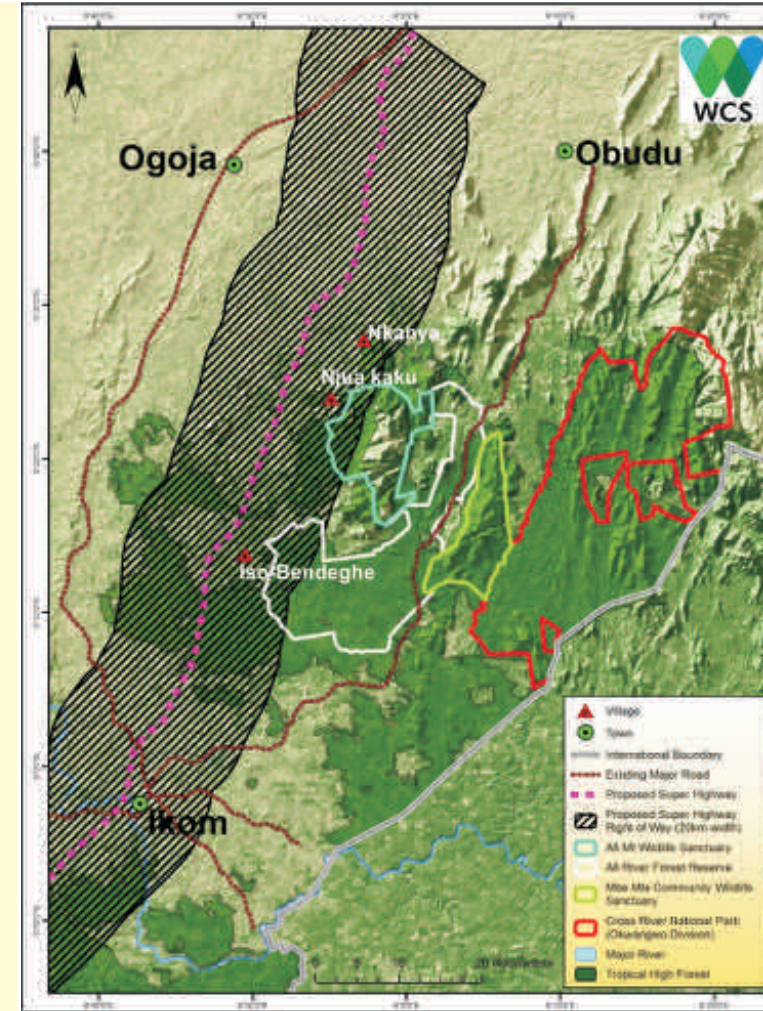
active petroleum system with significant oil generation and represents the most significant well result to date in Kenya outside the South Lokichar basin. Post-well analysis is in progress ahead of defining the future exploration programme in the basin". Cheptuket-1 is the first well to test the Kerio Valley Basin and was drilled to a final depth of 3,083 metres".

It is clear that Tullow and Africa Oil's geoscientists are trying to say that the result of this well has given hints on better prospects elsewhere in the Kerio Valley, but there's not even a guarantee that it has significantly de-risked the basin, otherwise the partners would have said so. The report on Cheptuket is, geologically misleading.

Akinosho is the publisher of Oil + Gas Report
See this report also at
<http://africaoilgasreport.com/2016/03/oil-patch-sub-sahara/tullow-plays-word-games-with-sub-commercial-probe-in-kenya/>

TULLOW PLAYS WORD GAMES WITH SUB-COMMERCIAL PROBE IN KENYA

By Toyin Akinosho



HALT THE ASSAULT ON THE EKURI COMMUNITY & OTHER FORESTS — HOMEF DEMANDS

Some of the best preserved rain forests in Nigeria - the Cross River National Park and the Ekuri Community Forest all in Cross River State, Nigeria, are under serious threat of being destroyed to make way for a Super Highway that can easily be re-routed to preserve our communities as well as enormous biodiversity including rare and endangered species.

The 620 Km Super Highway is planned to lead from a proposed deep sea port at Esighi in Bakassi Local Government Area run through the Cross River National Park and up to Katsina Ala in Benue State, Nigeria, at a cost of N700 billion or about \$3.5bn.

With a dramatic and outrageous

appropriation of a massive 20-kilometre-wide track over 620 kilometres length, the Super Highway is a project of monstrous and needless proportions. A Public Notice of Revocation signed by the Commissioner for Lands and Urban Development and published in a local newspaper on 22nd January 2016 decreed, among other things, that:

"all rights of occupancy existing or deemed to exist on all that piece of land or parcel of land lying and situate along the Super Highway from Esighi, Bakassi Local Government Government Area to Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State covering a distance of 260km approximately and having an offset of 200m on either side of the centre

line of the road and further 10km after the span of the Super Highway, excluding Government Reserves and public institutions are hereby revoked for overriding public purpose absolutely."

This is clearly unacceptable under any kind of highway design.

In a petition to the Governor of Cross River State, dated 13th February 2016, the Chiefs and people of Okokori Village of Obubra Local Government Area saw the revocation of the right to their lands including settlements, farmlands and community forest as a calculated attempt to extinguish them as a people. They concluded that "Since the revocation of all our lands for a Super highway have damning consequences on us and our environment, we are compelled not to welcome this project as the ulterior motive of your government is to grab our lands and make us worthless, ignoring the fact we voted overwhelmingly for you to better our lot but not to punish us unjustifiably."

In an earlier petition dated 7th February and addressed to the Governor, the Ekuri Traditional Rulers Council stated, among other things, that "The right of way for the Super Highway measuring 400 metres wide (200m on each side of the road from the centre line), being the width of four standard football fields, is too large and will destroy our forest and farms that we have laboured to conserve and cultivate crops...The further 10KM on either side of the Super Highway from the 200 metres ends totalling 20km width is appalling, meaning that the whole of our Ekuri community forest totalling 33,600 hectares, all our farms and community settlements would have been revoked leaving is landless."

Firmly rejecting the routing of the Super Highway through their forest, the Ekuri

chiefs added that "Our forest is our wealth and the beacon of our hopes and aspirations"

Many things are wrong with this planned routing of the Super Highway. First, if allowed to proceed along the path that has been planned, it would destroy the aforementioned forests and equally impact other forests and communities. See the attached maps of the northern and southern ends of the proposed Super Highway.

"We find it unacceptable that a project of this magnitude is pursued without regard to the law and in defiance of the rights of communities," says Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation. He states further "Although the President conducted a ceremonial ground breaking exercise on 30th October 2015, that cannot be construed to mean an approval for the project to proceed without meeting the requirements of the law, particularly that of Environmental Impact Assessment. Moreover, as required by law, an EIA cannot be claimed to have been conducted if there are no consultations with citizens that would be impacted by the project."

Observers think the project may be a cover for land grabbing, illegal logging and poaching and the destruction of habitats in the forests and reserves that are protected by law and preserved by custom. They question why a project of this nature would reportedly enjoy contributions from Nigerian banks without requisite preliminary surveys, plans and approvals.

The affected communities inform that "besides the fact that the proposed route was going to cause untold damage to the globally important park, it also demonstrated that the route had been selected without looking at a contour map, let alone having an engineering survey."

HOMEF calls on the Government to

1. Comply with the laws of the land including by conducting Environmental Impact Assessment, other relevant assessments and consultations as enshrined in ILO Article 169
2. Halt the rampaging bulldozers that are already destroying farms at Etara/Eyeyen and are continuing in the towards Ekuri and Okuni forests/communities.
3. Reroute the Super Highway along a less damaging path and away from Community forests and the National park
4. Reward and support communities that protect our forests rather than penalize and dispossessing, displacing and impoverishing them.

HOMEF also calls on all peace loving Nigerians and citizens of the world to join the call to rethink this project and work to preserve the tranquility that has reigned in this forest before the threat of the bulldozers.



DIALOGUE WITH BULLDOZERS

AT EKURI COMMUNITY FOREST

(BULLDOZERS, SUPERHIGHWAY & EKURI COMMUNITY FOREST)

BY NNIMMO BASSEY

Bulldozers and forests are not friends. Neither are highways or super highways, as the people of Ekuri Community are learning. [The Ekuri Community Forest](#) in Cross River State, Nigeria, is an acclaimed example of how communities can sustainably manage their forest. Now, this forest is under threat from the State Government that has embarked on the construction of a 260 Km, 6 lanes dual carriage super highway through their forest, using the highly controversial Land Use Act of 1979 as a cover for dispossessing the people of their land, forest and patrimony.

When the ground breaking ceremony for this project was conducted by President Muhammadu Buhari on 30th October 2015, the Ekuri Community thought that having an all-weather road pass by their community would bring to an end their perpetual struggle to secure access to the

outside world through the earth road they had built by community effort. This thinking was shattered by a Public Notice of Revocation signed by the Commissioner for Lands and Urban Development and published in a local newspaper on 22nd January 2016 decreeing, among other things, that:

“all rights of occupancy existing or deemed to exist on all that piece of land or parcel of land lying and situate along the Super Highway from Esighi, Bakassi Local Government Government Area to Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State covering a distance of 260km approximately and having an offset of 200m on either side of the centre line of the road and further 10km after the span of the Super Highway, excluding Government Reserves and public institutions are hereby revoked for overriding public purpose absolutely”.

LAND GRABBING

The community studied the “Notice of Revocation” and the line profile and found that some of the coordinates show that their forest, community lands and settlements would be taken up by the Super Highway and the extraordinary right of way of 10 Km claimed by the government - beyond the 200 metres right of way allowed from the centre line on each side of the road. Little wonder the community characterises this usurpation as a case of crass land grabbing. This sort of grabbing tends to suggest that this part of Nigeria is Tarzan country or simply a no-man's land.

Before this, some critics of the Super Highway project such as the Rainforest Resource Development Centre (RRDC) had stated that “the BLUE PRINTS of such a huge 260km 6 lanes Super Highway project running across the entire Cross River State of Nigeria was not made public before the commencement of construction at the ground breaking event. Significantly also, the blue print of the said project has not been made public till this moment. This is a contravention of the Freedom of Information Act, 2011 of the National Assembly as well as other related legislations...”

Other significant issues raised include the fact that no credible Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) have been conducted before the taking off of the project. The project threatens the Cross River National Park as the highway traverses the buffer zone of the forest.

In its [press briefing](#) of 6th November 2015, the RRDC expressed the fear that contrary to the requirement of the Land Use Act, no schedules of compensation (including the names of beneficiaries) had been made public. “The risk is that this project could

end up escalating rural poverty if the issues of compensations are neglected. This is so because the affected indigenous people and communities of Cross River State of Nigeria who own these resources could end up losing their sources of livelihoods, income and wellbeing, as well as their natural heritage and territories.”

HERITAGE DESTRUCTION

What RDDC feared is unfolding before the eyes of the Ekuri people and the world must not keep a blind eye to this.

The Ekuri Community through a petition, dated 6th February 2016, reminded the Cross River State government that they had “for centuries conserved and managed our Ekuri community forest for its rich biodiversity and ecosystems services not only for our sustainable development but for the entire world. Since 1992, we pioneered formal community forestry in Nigeria and established the Ekuri Initiative (an NGO registered with the Federal Government) with a mandate in forest conservation, sustainable forest management, community development and poverty reduction. Since its inception, we have recorded inspiring successes. We have developed and implemented a land use plan which we jealously adhere to, a flagship community forestry project in Nigeria (a credit to Cross River State), the largest and best community managed forest in West Africa totaling 33,600ha.

We received the UNEP [Equator Award in 2004](#) for our outstanding passion, commitments and efforts to reducing poverty through the conservation and sustainable use of our biodiversity. We have been visited by several communities from Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique and a host of researchers to learn from our experiences.

Our activities have been replicated by international development agencies and local NGOs and has brought fame to Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole. The planned destruction of our community forests which we have labored so hard to protect and conserve is not a welcome development. The resolve of our forebears to conserve our forest must be continued in perpetuity being a bequest and legacy to all the Ekuri people living and yet unborn."

DIALOGUE WITH BULLDOZERS

With the level of dispossession staring them in the face, the Ekuri Community decided to reject the passage of the Super Highway through their forest and demand a realignment of the road. According to community sources, their petition received a quick but shocking response:

"At the receipt of the Protest Letter, the Governor has quickly sent a bulldozer this morning to Ekuri to begin the destruction of the Ekuri community forest in the name of the Super Highway. This is to show power and strength against poor communities and in defiance of the dictates of the rule of law."

If the world keeps quiet and allows the bulldozers to have their way, they would not only bulldoze the future of the Ekuri people, the act would entrench impunity, satisfy the lust for capital, promote deforestation in one of the last remaining pristine forest in Africa and blunt our collective hope for tackling global warming. This is a challenge, not just for Ekuri Community but for the entire global community.

THE UNIQUE EKURI PEOPLE AND THE PRECIOUS CROSS RIVER RAINFORESTS

The people of Ekuri live in Cross River State, deep in the heart of one of Nigeria's last surviving rainforests. Their forest is sandwiched by the Ukpon forest reserve to the north and Cross River National Park to the east and south and to the west by the Iko Esai community forest.

Their rainforests are spectacular and are home to a number of rare and endangered wildlife species including Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee, some of the last forest elephants in West Africa and forest buffalo.

However, all of this is about to disappear forever due to the construction of the Cross River State Superhighway which will destroy the ancestral lands and forests of the Ekuri people and thousands of others along the proposed 260 km route

The villages of Old Ekuri and New Ekuri (popularly called the "Ekuri Community") are located in Akamkpa LGA, in the buffer zone of Cross River National Park. These are two of only five villages in the whole world that speak the Lokoli language. These two villages between them jointly own 33,600 ha of community forest. This is probably the largest community owned forest in all of West Africa.

For hundreds of years, the Ekuri people have relied completely on their ancestral lands and forests for everything.

CROSS RIVER SUPERHIGHWAY DESTROYS THE FOREST AND LIVES OF THE EKURI PEOPLE AND THOUSANDS OTHERS



The forest provides the people with fruits, vegetables and a wide range of other valuable forest products. It also provides fertile farmland, their medicines and shapes their unique culture, language, and identity.

These forests are so important to the Ekuri people that in the early 1990s when they were approached by two logging companies offering to build them a road in exchange for logging their forest, they said NO instead they asked the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature and the UK's Overseas Development Administration (now the Department for International Development (DFID)), to help them set up a forest management organisation called the Ekuri Initiative. This community-run body has been instrumental in managing the Ekuri forests and also successfully brought development benefits to their villages including the construction of a 30 km road to the villages and the establishment of a health centre. This was so successful that in 2004, the Ekuri Community received the highly prestigious Equator Initiative Award from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for their outstanding contribution to biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction.

The forests of CRS are globally recognised for their international importance as one of

the richest sites for biodiversity in Africa. The World Wide Fund for Nature and other NGOs have documented the fact that they harbour an enormous diversity of plant and animal species almost unmatched anywhere else in the world. In recognition of this, the UK government invested millions of pounds into the Cross River State Forestry Department in the 1990s. WWF also invested millions of pounds into the establishment of Cross River National Park over a period of 7 years. More recently, the UN established the UN-REDD programme in Nigeria with Cross River State as the first pilot state in which to establish structures to channel carbon credit funds from the world to reward the State for actions to protect these globally important forests. It is hoped to expand this programme across Nigeria. *But now this forest and the entire Ekuri way of life, is threatened with destruction.*

Outcry after highway route announced but launched by President Buhari eventually

Last year, the newly elected Governor of Cross River State, Senator Ben Ayade announced the construction of a 260 km superhighway to go from a planned deep sea port in Esighi in Bakassi Local Government Area northwards via Obudu to Katsina-ala in Benue State.

The superhighway was to be toll road to be built at the cost of US\$3.5 billion and was to be constructed by a company called Broad Spectrum Industrial Services Limited (BSIS) who are based either in Israel, Germany or Port Harcourt depending on various newspaper articles.

When a map was released by the state government showing the proposed route of the superhighway, it showed it passing through the mountainous Oban Division of Cross River National Park. Besides the fact that the proposed route was going to cause untold damage to the globally important park, it also demonstrated that the route had been selected without looking at a contour map, let alone having an engineering survey!

This led to an outcry from the National Park authorities, the Federal Ministry of Environment and many Nigerian and international NGOs. The NGO community was so outraged by the threat of the superhighway to the National Park and to the forest communities that they got together to write a letter to the Governor. The letter dated 20th October 2015, was written and signed by the Friends of the Earth Nigeria (FoEN), Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), Zoological Society of London (ZSL), Birdlife International, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Heinrich Boell Foundation and was copied to President Buhari and the Federal

Minister of Environment. These letters received no reply.

Nevertheless as a result of the outcry from various quarters, the Governor then directed that the road should pass around the park. When the highway was first announced, the Governor had made it clear that he wanted the President to flag off the construction. Due to the outcry, President Buhari initially decided not to open the superhighway. However, once the road was diverted around the Park, this seems to have allayed his fears and he eventually visited Cross River State to launch the superhighway on the 20th October 2015.

The route was still far from ideal, so questions started to be asked

While the route around the National Park was a better outcome than the initial route, it was clear that the road still passed too close to its boundary and right through the Ekuri forests and protected forest reserves. It is well known that any road can open up a trail of destruction in the form of logging, hunting and farming and soon the forest within at least 5km of any road is totally destroyed. So it was clear that the road, even with the new route, would still cause huge damage and destruction to the National Park and the forest communities it passed through including the 33,600 ha Ekuri forest.

At this point, people in Cross River State began to ask questions about the superhighway:

What kind of company is Broad Spectrum Industries Limited? Many efforts have been made to investigate the background of the Company to find out what its track record was in highway and infrastructure construction. However its website indicates that the Company based in Port Harcourt is relatively new and has no experience in road or port construction.

How could such a huge project of this nature be handled by a company that no one has heard of before? Who is on the Board of the Company, what are its credentials and what was really its interest in the project?

Questions around the funding and the economics of the project: It was alleged in the press at the time that BSIS was going to invest billion Naira US billion in the deep sea port and superhighway. However it is unclear where this staggering sum of money is meant to be coming from. It was rumoured that the funds were potentially coming from Germany or the UK or Israel but all efforts to find out more about the alleged funding for the superhighway construction project have proved futile.

There are also reports of contributions from Heritage, Skye and Zenith banks. Do the funds for the construction of the highway actually exist? What kind of company would spend US\$3.5 Billion on the construction of a port/superhighway if the port will only pay back US\$30 million a year? This would thus take over 100 years to pay back and that's not including a discount rate! What kind of company would invest such large sums of money with such bad returns? There has been no transparency on this

aspect of the Project.

Questions about the engineering feasibility of the Project. It is notable that there do not seem to have been any engineering studies carried out to inform the design of the Project. If there have been engineering studies they have also been kept secret. The communities along the proposed route all attest that there have been no engineers surveying on the ground. Without such surveys how can one even determine the cost of the superhighway? How would one know, for example, how many substantial bridges are required or how many millions of tons of rock and soil have to be moved to pass through the hilly terrain? However, it is clear from contour maps that the terrain of the proposed route passes through some of the hilliest terrain in the entire country. This is slightly better than the mountainous route that was originally proposed through the heart of the National Park but such lack of basic research calls into questions the seriousness of the actual plan to build such a highway. How can a scheme of this size not be based on any field-based engineering surveys?

Why has there been no Environmental Impact Assessment or public consultation on the route? The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act of 1992 specifies that any construction project that is likely to have a significant impact on the environment or on people MUST have an EIA carried out and must receive an environmental permit from the Federal Ministry of Environment (FMEnv) BEFORE forest clearance works of any sort take place. Such an EIA must involve documented consultation meetings with a wide range of affected stakeholders before the final project design is concluded and approved.



So, given the huge impact this Project will have on one of Nigeria's last surviving rainforests and the impact on the lives of thousands of people, how can such a scheme go ahead without an EIA which is made publicly available? **If an EIA has been carried out who was consulted?** Certainly none of the many communities or environmental NGOs have been consulted about the route. Reports from the villages say the superhighway construction has been awarded to several local contractors who are able to hire bulldozers. The local contractors have been apportioned 10 km each to bulldoze. How can clearance of the forests for the route commence be allowed without an EIA permit from the Federal Government?

Why not upgrade the existing Calabar-Ikom-Obudu highway? The existing Federal Highway from Calabar through Ikom to Obudu already serves all the purposes that the government wants the super highway to achieve. It links Calabar with Benue State and provides the route for trade. Communities and trade routes already exist around this road, whilst the super highway would necessitate new feeder roads, which would cut more into the rain forest. Furthermore this would be much less costly and will do far less damage to the State's forests and communities.

The announcement in the newspapers of the 20km revocation of land rights. For a number of months after President Buhari launched the superhighway, everything went quiet and it was suspected that the highway might no longer happen. Then on 22nd January in *The Weekend Chronicle* the State Government announced that a 1 km setback of land would be compulsorily acquired by the Government in the over-riding public interest along the entire 260 km from Bakassi to Katsina-Ala.

As one can imagine, the forest communities were absolutely horrified to read this. The Ekuri people immediately knew that the superhighway would rip through the heart of their forest, opening it up to farming, logging and hunting on a massive scale. It was shocking that, in this unprecedented massive land grab, the Governor has seized all the ancestral land of thousands of forest dependent villagers, for 10 km either side of the 260 km superhighway. This now means that all the forest communities along the superhighway route including the Old and New Ekuri are effectively landless and homeless!

A new Campaign has now kicked off to stop the superhighway construction

On the 7th February the Ekuri people wrote to the Governor of Cross River State copying President Buhari and the Federal Minister for Environment demanding that the construction of the superhighway be stopped until a new route could be found and they made it clear they would protect their forests through determined non-violent protests. The letter was copied to a wide range of organisations including the UN, British Government, Norwegian Government and many national and international NGOs. This letter was successfully delivered but, to date, there has been no reply from the Governor or Federal Government. This letter was followed by another to the Governor this time written by the neighbouring village of Okokori also copied to same recipients but again there has been no reply from the government.

At the same time, an international internet petition has been launched around the world demanding that the superhighway be stopped and that a new route can be found that will not cause incredible destruction to

to the forests of the State and to the lives of thousands of people. The campaign has already received hundreds of signatures and is directed at President Buhari, Cross State Governor Ben Ayade and Federal Minister for Environment, Amina Mohammed.

Website:

https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/The_Governor_of_Cross_River_State_Nigeria_and_Minister_of_Environment_Stop_the_construction_of_the_Cross_River_State_Sup/edit/

But it is worrying to report that the forest destruction has already started. In spite of all the letter-writing and campaigns, it is terrible to report that at this very moment, the bulldozers are heading to Ekuri to start ripping up the forests. The Ekuri community have already told two bulldozers to leave until the government responds to their letter but who knows how long they can hold off the destruction.

Technically according to the law their land has been seized by Government and they are already homeless. We have just heard that two bulldozers that left Ekuri are now working in Etara. Eyeying neighbouring communities of Ekuri, destroying farms and forest. There women and children are lamenting over their lost farms but the bulldozers carry on. Apparently the two bulldozers are working in different directions one towards Ekuri and the other towards Okuni. The people are absolutely helpless. Why hasn't the Federal Government stepped in to stop this

destruction?

With the international campaign, governments around the world have started asking questions. This comes at a bad time for Nigeria struggling with the fall in oil prices and the country needs all the international financial support it can get. It also makes the government look bad at a time when Nigeria is supposed to be stamping out corruption. Who has ever heard of a road project of this scale, passing through some of the most sensitive rainforests on the planet, threatening the lives of thousands without an EIA permit? How can this be allowed to happen in our so-called 'democratic' Nigeria?

The Ekuri people and concerned stakeholders are calling on the Federal Government to:

- Suspend immediately all forest logging and clearance already commenced without an EIA permit from the Federal Ministry of Environment of Nigeria and rescind the related revocation of community land along the superhighway Right of Way.
- Examine all alternative routes for the so-called super-highway that avoids destruction of the Ekuri community forests and other forested parts of Cross River State.
- Carry out a thoroughly participatory and transparent review of the ecological, socio-cultural, economic, financial and reputational impacts of the so-called super-highway before it precipitates a man-made disaster for Cross River State and Nigeria.

ENVIRONMENTAL NGO AND COMMUNITIES CALL FOR IMMEDIATE STOP TO SUPER-HIGHWAY - BULLDOZER DESTRUCTIONS IN AKPABUYO AND BAKASSI LGA IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA. - COMRADE EDEM EDEM,

Communities in Akpabuyo and Bakassi cry out over the wanton destruction of their ancestral properties and economic trees estate for 'SUPER HIGHWAY' by Cross River State Government.

Over 20 communities in Akpabuyo and Bakassi LGA of Cross River are already counting their loses over what they termed as gross violation of their fundamental human rights.

The mobilisation of the bulldozers by the Ben Ayade-led Government of Cross River state into the hinterlands of Akpabuyo and Bakassi LGA has left untold hardship on the community people. The affected communities are on the Esighi, Atimbo-East and Edem Odo flank of the local government area. The bulldozers have destroyed over 20,000 stands of healthy palm trees including other economic trees, grave yards and community forests and

sources of water.

The untold hardship and gross violation is coming at the time the country and its citizens are experiencing some economic hard times.

The people demand as follows:

1. That Cross River State Government halts the destruction immediately in line with the Stop Work Order issued by the Federal Ministry of Environment on 11 March 2016.
2. Immediately STOP the BULLDOZERS from destroying our heritage, grave yards and artefacts in the name of SUPER-HIGHWAY project.
3. That the CRSG conducts a transparent and participatory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on the Super Highway Project
4. That the Super Highway project should not traverse our forests and farmlands with consultations and prior informed consent as required by law and by convention.
5. That all destroyed properties of the people and communities should be valued and paid for in line with international acceptable standards and laws.

Edem is Founder/Board Member

POETRY

VOICES FROM THE CREEKS

Hear the voices from the creek
Silenced with the rumblings
of the crude in the iron
passage
on their way to dodan
barracks

Hear more voices from the creek
muffled by the roaring heat
from drums of flames
beaten with frenzy
by the forces of gas waiting
to exhale

Hear the new voices from
the creeks
They are strange sounds
Rattling off like a thousand
dane guns
Shaking the earth
It is the voices of victims
Crying for help in the creeks
Hostage taking is the new
art

- Tive Denedo

THE REVOLT OF MOTHER EARTH

I cry and weep!
Natural endowment in me milked
out
Feel very sick
Oil cabals suck out my blood without
mercy
Spill it all over the fertile soil

Shade of trees gone
Pollination Butterflies disappear
Canopy in the atmosphere
destroyed
Deaf and Dumb refuse to protect
me
I come quickly in a great force
I will pay back
The guilty and innocent will share
from the boomerang

Listen to my environmental prophets
They talk about my agony
Turn away from environmental
injustice
Stop environmental exploitation
without remediation
The earlier the better
Those who have ears let them
hear

OCHECHE S.GARUBA - secretary,
Urban Rural Environmental
Defenders (U-RED)

BEAT THE DRUM OF VICTORY

The struggle has just begun,
And we started fighting
against the system
People from Africa, be aware
that our natural resources
are been looting,
Come and join us in the
battles, bring new mind set
to fight capitalism and
imperialism,
For long time we have been
taught that Africa is poor, its
need to be developed
They want Africa without
Africans, they grab our land
the don't care about you and
me
Come and join us in the
battles, the victory is near,
together we shall overcome
Don't be afraid, the power is
ours, a people united can
never be defeated
The night is long, but the day
is coming
Freedom for Africa,
freedom! Yes the drum of
victory is nearly to be
beaten!

- Kwami Kpondzo

POETRY

OILFIELDS OF UGHELLI

Long before the farmlands where ploughed
into oilfields
we sucked honey from palm fruits.
it was here that we danced
to the initiating drums of puberty
with valour and thighs like iroko
and the young women swing bossoms
of enticement for the men of their dreams

Then cassava would sprout in dozens
and yam tubers were sufficient dowries
the rivers welcome the water pot of the maiden
who ask for a wash and a drink
when the drummer fish will tap a tune
and the tilapia would joyfully dance into
the udje with the crocodile

It was here that we wrap our dreams in
peace
with the night sky for a blanket
the moon was the motivator for folk lore
that runs into the early morning
of a life filled with pleasant tales

Alas from the oilfields of contention
we reap the bitter fruits of strife
where burst pipes are monuments
and castles built on gossamer dreams
with vandalized villages

and haunted hamlets.

Our ears are drowned in the cries of nature
acid rain is the drink for the forest
as the crude creeps through creeks
gasoline is the buffet for the soil
and at every turn a life dies
of the young, the old and unborn

Behold the farmlands are impotent
fried from the air with blazing flare of gas
and the fluids eternally dried
with castration of iron pipes
running zigzag in their bowels
in a frenzy to serve the mammon of
commerce

We used to have a say in what to plant
and have our way when to reap
but the Shell leave sprouted
next to our yams and vegetables
as the oilfield replaced the farms
where we are given poverty
for our biodiversity

Eerie tunes echoes from the oil fields
the drums and the flutes are silent
and the maiden can strut her beauty no more
neighbours are against neighbours
just to be counted worthy in the loot
from the oil fields of Ughelli

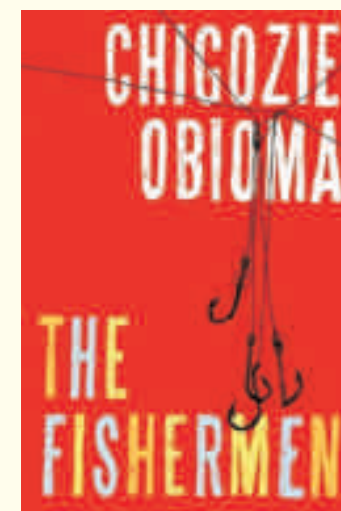
- Tive Denedo

BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ

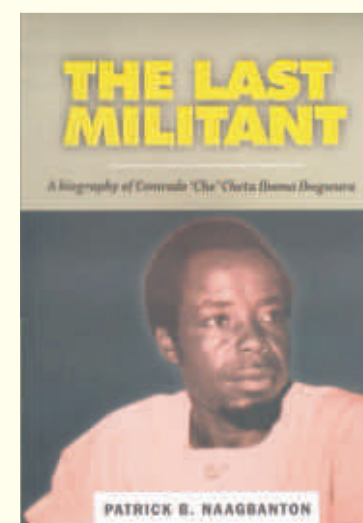


In the oil-rich and environmentally devastated Nigerian Delta, the wife of a British oil executive has been kidnapped. Two journalists—a young upstart, Rufus, and a once-great, now disillusioned veteran, Zaq—are sent to find her. In a story rich with atmosphere and taut with suspense, *Oil on Water* explores the conflict between idealism and cynical disillusionment in a journey full of danger and unintended consequences.

As Rufus and Zaq navigate polluted rivers flanked by exploded and dormant oil wells, in search of “the white woman,” they must contend with the brutality of both government soldiers and militants. Assailed by irresolvable versions of the “truth” about the woman’s disappearance, dependent on the kindness of strangers of unknowable loyalties, their journalistic objectivity will prove unsustainable, but other values might yet salvage their human dignity.



In a Nigerian town in the mid 1990's, four brothers encounter a madman whose mystic prophecy of violence threatens the core of their close-knit family. Told from the point of view of nine year old Benjamin, the youngest of four brothers, *The Fishermen* is the story of an unforgettable childhood in 1990s Nigeria, in the small town of Akure. When their strict father has to travel to a distant city for work, the brothers take advantage of his extended absence to skip school and go fishing. At the ominous, forbidden nearby river, they meet a dangerous local madman who persuades the oldest of the boys that he is destined to be killed by one of his siblings. What happens next is an almost mythic event whose impact—both tragic and redemptive—will transcend the lives and imaginations of its characters and its readers. Dazzling and viscerally powerful, *The Fishermen* never leaves Akure but the story it tells has enormous universal appeal. Seen through the prism of one family's destiny, this is an essential novel about Africa with all of its contradictions—economic, political, and religious—and the epic beauty of its own culture.



Patrick Naagbanton, a man of many parts – journalist, environmental/human rights activist, poet, etc. – has just added two important books to the Nigerian literary scene. One is a collection of poems titled *Fury of the Fisher Woman* and the other is *The Last Militant* – A biography of Comrade Cheta Ibama Ibegwura – and the struggles for workers' rights in Nigeria, justice and self-determination in the Niger Delta region.

ARRIVAL OF THE LAST MILITANT

The word militant elicits a certain meaning in Nigeria and like the word insurgents people often link it with violence. Another word that has taken on peculiar meaning in Nigeria is restiveness – a descriptive word assigned to agitated Niger Delta youths totally radicalised by fossil fuels extraction pollutions and unwilling to stay civil in the face of oppressive injustice.

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Furious Fisher Woman

The poetry book is loaded with anger, death and defiance. Poignantly, except for when the writer mentions “other unsung

comrades (dead or alive) whose stories are not yet told,” both books are dedicated to persons who have departed from the physical plane. They nudge you to closely study Nigeria's tragic post colonial history – an history that current political leaders would rather sweep under the carpet.

Writing for the victims of the Umuechem massacre of 1st November 1990, the poem titled *The Script* opens with these lines:

*Distress marches
Clad in black on the precarious pipelines
Demanding to drink from it along the
Bash paths of Umuechem*

On the sad day on which Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni 8 were murdered, Patrick wrote under the title *Hangmen*:

*Their banter of blood shall soon end
And I shall sing our funeral songs
They shall weep as we are weeping
With the troubled tribe*



Militant to the core

As Patrick states, “the story of Cheta Ibama Ibegwura, popularly called 'Wati' and later 'Comrade Che' is the story of Nigeria.” And the book, “The Last Militant, though a biographical work, also takes us through a whole range of issues such as the histories of great organizations and movements—their successes and failures in Nigeria.”

One is tempted to ask: why Patrick chose to label Comrade Che a militant? Synonyms for militant include: activist, confrontational, aggressive, radical, revolutionary, belligerent, combative, pugnacious. Within the array of words, the closest in meaning to the legend we all know as Comrade Che would be radical and revolutionary. He is a gentle, uncompromising militant. At 83 years, Apostolic Comrade Che remains resolute in the struggle for human and environmental justice as well as for community rights.

Through the book we learn of his militancy in political actions, pro-democracy activism and in inspiring trade union consciousness. A freelance revolutionary, as Patrick terms him, he continues unwaveringly in the pursuit of militant causes.

Comrade Che before Comrade Che

Here is an extract from the foreword I wrote for the book:

This is a story of courage, love, commitment and passion. It is a story that shows the triumph of the human spirit even in the most hazardous situations. It is a story of a survivor. He indeed survived many detentions, false imprisonments and assassination attempts. He admired his late friend, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and the Ogoni people for 'being true to the struggle in the

naked face of mass arrests, killings, government and crude oil induced bribes.' Unfortunately, he could not say the same for the organising ability and fidelity to causes by his own immediate people.

Apostolic Comrade Che, as I call him, is a very inspiring man. His simplicity is unpretentious. He is a man of ideas and is always willing to share such ideas. This book reveals much that is not readily known of this great man. I have known Comrade Che and benefitted from his friendship and fatherly counsel, from the mid 1990s. However, reading this book brings me face to face with him as though I only just knew him for the first time. In fact, until I read this book I always thought that Cheta Ibama Ibegwura was named Comrade Che after the famous Argentine internationalist. Behold, he was already Comrade Che before he ever heard of the other Comrade Che.

Not a Book Review

This review is also a tribute to my mentor and teacher, Comrade Che. It is also a thank you note to Patrick for penning these powerful books. The books published by CreekTown Books (Lagos) will be presented at a public event in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, on 5th March 2016. Get the books and review them yourselves!

Nnimmo Bassey



Lekki Urban Forest and Animal Sanctuary Initiative (LUFASI) is an urban forest park that sits on 20 hectares of land on the Lekki - Epe Express Way. This area was a patch of pristine coastal rain forest that has been protected since the Lekki Peninsula development started over 25 years ago. It contains some of the last populations of the endangered Ekki "Iron Wood" tree (Lophira Alata), the critically endangered Hooded Vulture (Necrosyrtes Monachus) and the Great Hornbill (Buceros Bicornis).

LUFASI offers great relaxation centre for adults with a fully equipped play park and football pitches for youngsters. Visitors can enjoy horse and donkey rides through the picturesque natural environment.

The LUFASI Education Center provides interactive climate change and conservation workshops to schools and organisations and Green Rangers Club Program.

Other features include; LUFASI Nature Park, Picnic area and play ground, Education center, Nature fitness Rescued animal and pet animal sanctuary, Animal Hospital (still under construction). Lake Nora, Ekki Forest Adventure, Rocky(Red mangabey monkey) and Becky Show Lots More!

Join our Selfie Contest and win N50,000! Simply take a selfie at LUFASI Nature Park, upload it to www.lufasi.com, campaign for likes get the highest number of likes and win. The contest ends on May 1, 2016.

**LEKKI URBAN FOREST
AND ANIMAL
SANCTUARY INITIATIVE**
(L U F A S I)

www.lufasi.com