

A Trusted Trustee Departs

Terra Viva – Our Soil, Our Commons, Our Future

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Soil not Oil
Seed Freedom
Instigator – Vandana Shiva
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IN THIS ISSUE

Home Run	2
Trusted Trustee Departs	3
The Unbreakable Spirit	4
Where Cancer Feasts	7
Our OND: The Good Sir	11
Poetry	
I am a Somali Woman	14
Tributes	
Man of Uncommon Courage	15
HOMEWISE	
Fighting Climate Change in the Burkina Sahel	18
Declarations/Petitions	
Chevron Petition	22
Food Sovereignty Declaration (PDF)	24
Reports	
Rising Sceptre of Oil in Uganda	27
Meet our Next Instigators	
Vandana Shiva	29
Baba Aye	31
HOMEWISE	
Terra Viva	
We need Soil, Not Oil	33
Declaration	
Maputo Declaration	37,39
Books You Should Read	38,47
HOMEWISE	
Blasting The Rocks, Blowing away our future	41



A Painful Exit

9 April 2015 is a date that will stay fresh in our memory. It was on that day that we were jolted by the passing into eternity of a member of our Board of Trustees, Oronto Natei Douglas. Words cannot capture the depth of our loss, but we nevertheless publish some tributes to this great Nigerian and global citizen. Oronto was a great thinker and strategist and he left indelible marks wherever he went and on whatever he handled. A prodigious organiser, his ideas gave birth to many civil society groups and actions here in Nigeria.

We also bring to you declarations from popular activities that we have been represented. First is the Declaration of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign and Alliance. The epochal gathering that resulted in this declaration took place in Johannesburg, South Africa at the end of February 2015.

We also bring you the Maputo Declaration, which was the outcome of civil societies meeting on the theme Seeding Climate Justice that was hosted by Justica Ambiental (Friends of the Earth Mozambique).

2015 has been declared by the United Nations as the Year of the Soil. To mark this, we bring to you an extract from Terra Viva – Our Soil, Our Commons, Our Future, a new vision for planetary Citizenship. The document was produced by a Working Group anchored by Navdanya International. HOMEf was represented by yours truly.

These two documents capture the tenor of the struggle for food sovereignty and for climate justice on the continent of Africa. These platforms offer us key perspectives as we focus our eyes on the road to COP21 in Paris in December 2015. They also show how an outcome based on inaction would mean setting the planet on fire and hugely compromising the food production capacity of the continent.

June and July 2015 are exciting months for us as we host a Sustainability Academy at the end of June and another at the end of July. In June we will be having great instigating for positive changes from Comrade Baba Aye on Health and the Extractive Sector Workers. In July we are looking forward to exciting public lecture with Vandana Shiva on Soil, Not Oil as well as on Seed Freedom matters.

And of course we bring you Books you should read and poetry as well.

Let the conversations and mobilisations continue.

Until victory!

Nnimmo Bassey



THE UNBREAK- -ABLE SPIRIT

By Nnimmo
Bassey

A TRUSTED TRUSTEE DEPARTS

My last meeting with Oronto was barely a week before his passing. He had sent me a text message inviting me over to Abuja to discuss some issues. I had been planning to visit him, anyhow and was curtailed by his tight schedule which I abhorred disrupting. It was a delight to find this open space to see him. After spending some time with him, family and friends discussing the excellent step the President had taken by congratulating General Buhari for winning the election, we retreated into his bedroom for more private conversations.

Oronto truly amazed me as he calmly talked about how Nigeria needs a strong environmental justice movement and why we must keep doing the best we can. He then went down memory lane about how we got to know each other, how we became friends and brothers. He recalled how he had to have an identity card from my architectural firm in the difficult early 1990s when being able to identify yourself in an acceptable manner could mean

walking away free or being taken into the gulag by the jackboots. Not that ID cards kept us from suffering detentions and humiliations of those heady days.

We reminisced about how we started the Environmental Rights Action (ERA) and how he first served as Chief Field Officer before stepping up into the role of Deputy Director of the organisation. Until his passing in the early hours of April 9, 2015, he was a Trustee of the organisation as well as a member of its Board of Directors. I should add here that all through his days in ERA Oronto never received even one kobo as an allowance for his work. And he did work more than many others. In fact, the organisation started on the principles that we would all live on the same plane as they people and communities we served. A strong foundation indeed.

Our conversation on ERA ended on the note that we must do all we can at all times to support and strengthen the organisation.

Then we began to talk about books. Anyone who knows Oronto will agree that he was an intellectual militant in the most positive and pure manner. Right from our early years together we had reached the understanding that the ecological struggle must be fought with knowledge and from a holistic platform – seeing that our lives are deeply woven into our environment in a complete and interactive manner. From that time onward we resolved to encourage scholarship among the ranks of activists and also to encourage writing and documentation. A few years ago we talked about how CDLF, his non-profit organisation, would build libraries across communities in the nation so as to encourage scholarship. Some months back and also last week, we talked about his plans to build a resource centre in Lagos in memory of late comrades Chima Ubani and Bamidele Aturu. How the ranks of committed activists are depleting!

One of the greatest books on the Niger Delta environment is *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta* (2003) that he co-authored with Ike Okonta. It is noteworthy that Ike Okonta is also a member of the Board of Directors of ERA. Ike went on to write the highly seminal *When Citizens Revolt – a study of the non-violent mobilisations by MOSOP and the Ogoni people*. Oronto had earlier collaborated with Nick Ashton-Jones, an ecologist and ERA Board member, and Susi Arnott to write the classic *The Human Ecosystem of the Niger Delta – An ERA Handbook* (1998).

Oronto was a man of ideas. He was a strategic thinker whose ideas you could confidently take the bank at any time. He was one of the main authors of the Kaiama

Declaration of 1998. The launching of the Declaration by the Ijaw Youth Council including the Operation Climate Change that was pursued through the ogele (an Ijaw cultural protest dance) was harshly suppressed by the Nigerian military. That repression inspired my poem *We Thought It Was Oil but it Was Blood* (1998) that was dedicated to Oronto and the youths of the Niger Delta.


His frequent counsel was: We must choose our fights. We cannot expend our energies on everything.

While his days on this side of eternity were ebbing away he was thinking of how to set things up into the future. He was a highly charismatic and inspirational leader. His ideas helped to shape and widen our campaigns and networks.

One of the last things we discussed together was his request that I find time to speak with a lady who is writing his biography. I was privileged to do that the following morning. During that conversation I was conscious not to slip into speaking about Oronto in the past tense. And we laughed over that. It was not time for speaking in that manner! I am saddened that now circumstances force me to speak of him that way.

We chatted on. Then Oronto brought up the issue of his health. His selflessness kept this aspect to the end of our private conversation that afternoon. Intermittently he would pause to apologise for calling me up from Benin City to Abuja.

My protestations that opportunities to visit with him were a delight to me did not stop him from repeating it a few more times.



As he spoke he took on a serious mien and for a moment I remembered visiting him in a San Francisco hospital years ago when he began the heroic fight against cancer. When he embarked on walking around the hospital floor, as part of his therapy, it took all my energy to keep up pace with him. He was a strong man. I recall that while on that hospital bed he kept on working and writing.

Oronto informed me that on his last visit to the doctors he was told they had done all they could do. And there was nothing more for them to do. It would be a matter of weeks, they had told him.

At this point we agreed that there was a higher Physician we could hand the case over to, God. When I switched into my role as a clergy and began to assure him of the promises of God as recorded in the Bible his eyes lit up and a smile played at the corners of his lips. As I write this short piece in his honour, that is the picture of his face that I remember. Oronto's smiling face is etched indelibly on my heart. It helps to soothe the ache, somewhat. We held onto each as I prayed over the situation expressing confidence that the prognosis of the doctors could always be overturned. But things do not always go the way we desire or pray.

I confess that I felt diminished when my parents and parents-in-law passed on to eternity, but Oronto's passing hit me in a deep emotional manner that cannot be captured in words. I was visiting Lagos with my wife and we were in bed that early that morning when a call came through from Akinbode Oluwafemi, another member of the Board of Directors of ERA . Before I took the call I sensed that this could not be good news. He managed to pass the information across and said he was heading to the airport for Abuja.

My wife hugged me tightly and without saying a word it was clear that our plans for the day were to be put on hold and I had to head to Abuja myself. I am glad that

Oronto's wife has remained strong and the children will find solace in the strength of their mother and the very solid footprints that their father has left behind.

Men like Oronto Natei Douglas do not die. They may no longer be visible, but their ideas, passions and inspiration live on. He lived a truly unforgettable life. He was a friend, brother and comrade. I cherish that smile from an unbreakable spirit. ☺

A black and white portrait of Oronto Natei Douglas, a man with short dark hair, smiling slightly. The image is partially obscured by a blue diagonal overlay on the left side, which contains the title and author information.

WHERE CANCER FEASTS: LAMENTATION FOR ORONTO NATEI DOUGLAS

By Ogaga Ifowodo

For a full decade, we were in touch with each other only sporadically. I recall two of those instances: once in 2005, at Terra Kulture, Lagos, where he was part of a panel discussion and I was in the audience and it was my pleasure to give him an inscribed copy of my newly released volume of poems on the Niger Delta, *The Oil Lamp*. And then again that same year when I sought his insider's perspective on General Obasanjo's wasteful and diversionary National Political Reforms Conference.

The South-South delegates, of which he was one, had walked out of the conference when the rest of Nigeria would not countenance an increase from 13% to a mere 25% of the proceeds of the oil and gas derived from their land.

Then one smouldering Texas summer evening four years later, he called me. He had heard that I was done with my doctoral studies at Cornell and had taken up a position at Texas State University. He was in the US for personal reasons and wanted to congratulate me. In the course of our animated conversation,

he mentioned, casually, that he had recently been diagnosed with cancer and was in California for treatment. I cannot tell now if intimations of mortality were behind his impulse to call me, for surely he must have been to the US any number of times since I had been at Cornell. Nor what was for me the greater shock: the awful news he bore or the calm, oh-by-the-way, manner he delivered it? His voice was as keen and he as jovial as I could remember.

Apparently, tumour was yet to get the better of his tongue or demeanour. So stunned was I that, ironically, it was he who fell to reassuring me that he would be fine, that he and not cancer would laugh last. I wished him the best of luck and medicine and he in turn wished me a successful career in academia, adding that I shouldn't tarry too long before returning home as ³there is still work for us to do.²

And yet, our communications remained sporadic, until his father joined the ancestors and I sent him condolences. Or more precisely until July 2013 when, thinking of returning home, I began sounding out friends and close acquaintances on how best to be directly involved again in the struggle to salvage our beleaguered country. I recall him now doodling as we spoke in his office. He was delighted. He would do whatever he

could to help with any final relocation plan. Unfortunately, by this time the Big C had begun to exact a heavier toll on his health, requiring more frequent and longer trips to the oncologists.

But now we communicated more regularly, though primarily by text messaging to husband his energy for work. A man of boundless vitality, he had an infinite enthusiasm for work and good causes which brings me to the first time we met. In Benin, while I was a law student and Secretary-General of the Students Union. He had come from Port Harcourt and found a fellow nature and environmental rights enthusiast in Nnimmo Bassey, then the university's principal architect and soon to take early retirement to found a private practice.

They would soon be joined by Godwin Uyi Ojo and together be the moving spirit behind the Civil Liberties Organisation's Environmental Rights Project. In those days, the CLO was the incubator of many of the ideas that metamorphosed into specialised human rights NGOs. By the time I took over its acclaimed annual reports on human rights and began to devote a chapter to minority rights and the environmental, the need had arisen for the project's autonomy.

It was hard to let go, but I was glad to be one of the voices that spoke for the weaning of the baby, leading to what is now known as the Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Nigeria's foremost nature preservation NGO and partner to Friends of the Earth. In the beginning, Oronto was ERA's chief field officer and intellectual force.

He would team up with Ike Okonta to write the seminal *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*, an unanswerable indictment of transnational oil companies for their crimes against nature and humanity, of their unconscionable activities in worship of profit and their mindless despoliation of the Niger Delta.

All in shocking collusion with a supine, rent-crazed federal government. So prominent was Oronto in the self-determination struggles of the Niger Delta, and by extension Nigeria, that when he accepted a position in his young state of Bayelsa as Commissioner of Information and Strategy, a debate ensued in the human rights community on the propriety of rights activists serving in government when the oppressive and exploitative structure of the state remained unchanged. I had argued that to wait for a revolutionary government before good people would enter public service is literally to wait for Godot, as the master of absurdist theatre, Samuel Beckett, might put it.

That fine day might never come or come too late. Besides, when good people scorn government, who takes their place and how much better do we fare? Just one condition would do for me: that the comrade be convinced of making a genuine contribution. And leave when that is no longer possible. I should be quick to add, however, that I'm not a proponent of the idea of joining any government in power in pursuit of selfish interest carefully disguised as the call of duty!

But I'm mourning Natei, my friend, not scoring his achievements in government,

thought going by the number of men and women he brought into government, some of them occupying very important positions even now, and by the fact that virtually everyone I know who knew him well has nothing but the utmost regard for him, he did a lot of good in a very short time, my irreconcilable differences with the governments under which he served the nation aside.

Indeed, the first part of my last, unanswered, text message to him on 7 April restates that very point: ³Natei, you must be back home? And surely in better shape than when you last went to the US? Just want to say congratulations to President Jonathan for the historic act of statesmanship that doubtlessly marks a new chapter in our troubled search for nationhood.

I was one of his fiercest critics but he deserves nothing but praise for putting country first even in the hour of his defeat. History will be kind to him on that very patriotic act, as I say in effect in my column out tomorrow: *Buhari and Jonathan: Character as Destiny*.

In one of his Dispatches from Tumortown, Christopher Hitchens, another intrepid victim of cancer whom I have kept thinking of since I learnt of Oronto's death, quotes Horace Mann, an American educator, thus: ³Until you have done something for humanity, you should be ashamed to die.² Hitchens had wanted so badly to beat cancer so he might do some mighty deed before dying. Yet not many who lived longer than him (Hitchens died at 62) could boast half of his achievements.



Oronto was no Hitchens, moreover cancer made a feast of him a full 13 years sooner, but if the report that Bassey gives of his last days and hours is true, then in not being afraid to die, Oronto must have felt he had given a good account of the cruelly short time allotted him on earth. Certainly, his lifelong exertions in pursuit of a livable Niger Delta, a free and fair Nigeria, give testimony of his service to humanity at large. And he will continually call to us from the black waters of the Niger Delta creeks. 🌀

Adieu, dear friend.

OUR OND: THE GOOD SIR

IT'S NOT GOODBYE...YOUR SPIRIT LIVES ON

By Mariann Bassey Orovwuje

Dear Mentor, Leader, Comrade and Brother,

It was a pleasure to have known you and worked with you for over a decade. I cannot express how I feel, except to say I have always been exceedingly proud of you and always will be.

You were perennially positive, spreading goodwill with joyous abandon. You listened to me as though what I said really mattered—validation we rarely receive these days. Oh, The Good Sir! (as I sometimes called you), in the days since your passing, I've often wondered how many lives must have been influenced by your gentle, unassuming, profoundly intellectual mind.

Thanks to you I joined Environmental Rights Action/Friends of Earth Nigeria. You nurtured me through the years. You were always ready to support, assist, help and advise me. I recall the tips you gave me on addressing an audience and how you prepared me for Public Hearings at The EU, The Hague and the National Assembly. On one occasion, even though you were not in the country, you reached me by Skype and gave me Lesson 101 on how to go about the Hearing:

'[3:45:59 PM] Oronoto Douglas: You must ensure that all issues raised have the desired emotional backing. Note: Your best weapon in a consultation like that is EMOTION backed by the available science you can reach. Play on the survival, legacy and historic issues relating thereto.

[3:46:24 PM] Mariann Bassey: (clap)

[3:48:02 PM] Mariann Bassey: Hmmm

[3:48:13 PM] Oronoto Douglas: Be respectful. Always address the chair but do not neglect the members of the hearing committee. You can have them to your side. Where the other side is presenting arguments that want to overwhelm yours, create doubts through statements [like], "The science does not support what you are presenting!"

[3:48:30 PM] Mariann Bassey: You are ingenious! Thanks a bunch!'

The Good Sir, there were so many instances when you were there for me. I could go on and on. You were my 'passport' to places I never dreamt I could go; and I met people I could only have read or heard about. It wasn't just me. You affected people of all ages, you contributed in changing lives, you shared experiences and to me, you were an EXPERIENCE.

Your energy and lifelong dedication to improving the lives and livelihoods of people will continue to inspire generations around the world. The footprints you have left on our continent will bear everlasting witness to posterity that a GREAT MAN, a True Pan-African and a Lover of Nature, walked this Earth.

The Good Sir, your brilliance, passion and energy were the source of countless innovations that enriched and improved many lives. The world is immeasurably better because of people like you.


The world rarely sees someone who has had the profound impact that you have had, the effects of which will be felt for many generations to come. The world mourns with us and celebrates the extraordinary life of this remarkable man, who devoted his life to the service of his people. He was known throughout the globe not just for his inspirational eloquence, but also for his warmth. His passing is a loss for the people of Nigeria and the world.

My spirit is exceedingly grieved. I am numb. I don't know if I will ever come to terms with the fact that you are no longer here with us. But I've got to get up; I've got to carry on.

A few days before your passing when I saw you last, you had stuff you wanted me to do; I've got a lot assignments to do, I've got thousands of things to deal with. My body has refused to function properly but I don't have a choice. I've got to go in to work and I've got to go on, because that's what you would have expected me to do.

So despite my grief and pain, I hope that your family and our friends can see that your work has not ended with your call to Glory. Your spirit will live on in the daily acts of the tens of thousands of people who are now carrying forward your struggle to create a fairer, more sustainable world; and the beam in the LEGACY you left behind will continue to BURN!

For those of us lucky enough to have had a

chance to work with you, our magnificent visionary and embodiment of courage, it's been a Great Honour. I would MISS YOU Sir, immensely! 

Mariann Bassey Orovwuje is a Lawyer and the Programme Manager, Food Sovereignty Program for Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) and Coordinator for the Food Sovereignty Campaign For Friends of the Earth Africa

HOMEF just published two booklets that would get you thinking. And YOU can download free copies at www.homef.org.

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Re-Source Democracy

Another publication from HOME, Re-Source Democracy can be downloaded at <http://www.homef.org/publication/re-source-democracy>



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I AM A SOMALI WOMAN

By Sahro Ahmed Koshin

I am the sister of the martyr.
I am the aunt of the potato seller at the local market.
I am the daughter of the local sheikh.
I am the injured of the revolution. The protester. The jailed. The detained.
I am the tortured. The exiled. The kidnapped. The raped.
I am the veiled. The non-veiled. I am a beautiful soul.
I am a Somali woman.
My skin is of ebony and ivory. I am young by spirit. Old by experience.
I am the pregnant. The wife. The single mother. The widow. The godobtiir and godobreeb tool

forcing me into marriage as the compensation payment for another clan's peace settlement.
I am a Somali woman.
Yet I am not a victim. I am a leader.
Not a woman leader. But a leader who happens to be a woman.
I clean up the streets of my nation. I rise up the past. The present and the future generations.
I brought the Nobel Peace Prize to Somalia.
I am a Somali woman.
I speak out for my son at school.
I speak up for my daughter in the madrasa.
I pray for my ancestors and for my older son in jail. For my mother in the hospital.
I speak out for our artists whom they keep bombing in theaters and on the streets.
I am a Somali woman.
I speak out for my mind. I am the pulse of the people.

I live in the city. In the town. In the rural areas. In the suburbs. On the mountains. Along the borders.
I am in Garowe. Mogadishu. Afgoye. Erigavo. Hargeisa. Galkayo. Bosaaso. Beletweyne. Badhan. Bocame. And every corner where there is life and sound.
I am a Somali woman.
I am synonymous with strength and victory.
I celebrate sisterhood. I celebrate motherhood.
I boost the economy. I advance the technology. I give life to the community.
Do I deserve to be equal to you?
Yes I do. Because I am a woman.
A Somali woman 🌀



BY AKINBODE OLUWAFEMI¹

My last lunch with Oronto was on February 22, 2015. The venue was his hotel room on the 9th floor of Eko Hotels, Lagos. President Goodluck Jonathan was just few kilometers away making frantic consultations on his Presidential campaign. Oronto had visited the President briefly in the morning, came back and went straight for a quick nap.

Unlike before, I had planned not to discuss anything relating to the elections; we were all worried about his health. That day, he was billed to travel in the evening to California, USA to keep an appointment with his doctors. For the lunch, my wife had prepared Amala with Ewedu and Gbegiri soups; those were his favourites. With very deep Egba connections, Amala, Ewedu and gbegiri with Orisisi and Ahon menu was the routine anytime Oronto was in town since mid-last year. As we finished setting up the table, Oronto insisted that the four of us in the room that day eat lunch together.

¹Akinbode is Director, Corporate Accountability Campaigns, Environmental Rights Action /Friends of the Earth, Nigeria. He is also member of the Advisory Board of HOMEF

He resisted my protestations that I had eaten earlier and that I was full. We all sat down to eat. He took just very little and we began what was our longest chat ever over lunch.

He poked fun at me first about how my body frame projected “false sense of affluence” and that when he comes back, we have to “deflate” my protruding tummy. We all laughed. I gave him a few punches too. I spoke about how he was detained at an airport in Europe for traveling without any money and how he and former Honourable Uche Onyeagucha were almost beaten up by Ijaw youths on allegation that he was impersonating Oronto Douglas because the youths could not reconcile his gentle look with the name and fame. We also talked about how we were arrested in Abeokuta on our way to attend the burial of Reuben Abati's mum. We all laughed again. We ended up on a long debate about whether I am a mere “Media Strategist” or if I can also double as a “Political Strategist.” His final word was that it was time that I change my mindset from the current “conventional activism” to “governmental activism” just like he did a few years back.

By the time I checked my watch, we had spent over three hours at the lunch table. It was very unusual. As I drove back late evening that day, some surreal feelings enveloped me. It was as if the long chat and banters were a premonition of something about to happen.

Yes, I do see Oronto very often, but we never sat down for that long to chat since about a year that his health nose-dived. Not only that, I have always been part of very close associates who monitor his engagements so that he doesn't

overstretch himself. This time we had over three hours on the table merely chatting and exchanging punches—it was strange.

Anyway, Oronto left that night for California and few days after, we got very disturbing reports from the hospital. He had asked his wife and a very close friend to join him in California. Then I became very agitated.

While on his return trip back from California, another mutual friend of ours, Simon Kolawole who met him at Heathrow Airport, London where he had a stopover, called me that we needed to intensify prayers.

Then on Sunday, March 25, I got this terse SMS from him: “Can we see on Monday? Very warm regards. Come straight to the house on arrival so that you can go back immediately.”

I eventually entered his Abuja home at about noon on Monday 26th, immediately I saw him on the settee, I couldn't hold back tears. I wept uncontrollably. This was not the same man we did lunch together February 22. Simon was right after all.

He asked one of his aides to give me napkin to wipe my tears. “Don't you have faith again in God? My health is now in the Hands of God,” he said. He then asked me to seat by his side.

“Bode, you are the first person I am asking to come among all our Lagos friends because of the trust I have in you. You have been more than a brother to me. I just want you to know that from now, I will no longer be as active.....”

By this time, a stream of tears ran down my eyes. He went on to talk about his charity projects I have helped over the years to supervise and several other issues. I got his message very clear, yet I refused to accept it. Oronto was too dear to us. We just don't want him to go. No. Something will happen, he will survive it. He has always survived such. Now, I know we cannot dictate to God.

Before I got to the airport, he sent another SMS: Thanks for coming". I replied that he should remain strong for which he responded, "Thank you my brother. Your friendship is most cherished, my brother."

I went back to his house by evening of Tuesday April 7, it was very brief. "How is madam and the kids? I need to release you quickly,"he said. Little did I know it was going to be our last. By 5.40 am on Thursday 9th, I got calls from Simon and his aide Ipi Gamsi almost simultaneously on my two phones. Ipi cried: "We have lost Oga." It was heart rendering.

I first met Oronto sometime in 1998 at the Maryland home of another activist, Wale Adeoye. I have just crossed from the defunct Today's News Today (TNT) to The Guardian. He introduced himself as Abayomi Omowale. He speaks flawless Yoruba. He wore sneakers, jeans, face cap and sun shades like a yuppie just back from a foreign country. He was actually at that time one of the most wanted activists by the then military Junta. While they were searching for him in the creeks, Oronto was walking freely in Lagos. We had talked for close to half an hour before he revealed his true identity.

Oronto with another brother and great friend, Doifie Ola practically pulled me from The Guardian into ERA/FoEN in 1999. I have since journeyed with Oronto through the creeks of Niger Delta, through the days of Chikoko Movement till his last job at the Presidency. A journey that makes me a Yoruba an observer during Ijaw Youth Council congress when Ijaws and Ilajes were on each others' throats.

As an activist, Oronto remained a shining hero

17 for human rights and social justice. He was

celebrated internationally and loved by his community folks in Okoroba.

Oronto was a brother, friend, boss, a mentor and many more.

Oronto cares too much about the welfare of others. Back in the days, Oronto will give out all his money to a stranger and come back to borrow transport money from us his junior colleagues at ERA. He has a large heart and generous to a fault.

As a boss, he helps you discover your inner abilities. He will never accept that any assignment cannot be accomplished. No. "Mr Oluwafemi, Listen", Oronto will say, you just have to get the message to push the limits. That has helped many of us who worked with him at one point or the other to break frontiers.

I have been opportune over the past four years to supervise the Community Defence Law Foundation (CDLF) which he formed. With the foundation, Oronto had single-handedly built modern libraries in close to 20 communities. Obafemi Awolowo Community Library in Irele-Ekiti, my village, was the last we completed and many more are at various stages of completion. Oronto's heart for charity was legendary. He loved education. Oronto romanticized books and will do whatever it takes to lay a book on people's hands. He read voraciously.

I learnt a lot from Oronto. He will be greatly missed. He was an Akanda Omoluabi. He was a man of uncommon courage. Throughout his battle with cancer, he remained strong. I believe Oronto has fulfilled his mission on earth. He touched many lives for good. It was very hard that he has left us.

Though very heartbroken, for us remaining, we owe Oronto a duty of keeping his dreams alive.

Adieu OND!

Rest in the bosom of the Lord. 



Fighting Climate Change in the Burkina Faso Sahel

By Nnimmo Bassey

Arriving any city by air always provides a rough picture of what to expect in the ground. That is if you do not mind making an aerial survey as the plane heads down to land. And, if the weather is clear you can ascertain of the traffic pattern and if at night you may even see what parts of the city have power supply problems or if the city has streetlights and if the roads are paved and formally laid out.

As seat belt signs lit up and the cabin crew made final checks before arrival I could not resist the urge to do an aerial survey of Ouagadougou. I tried to make out the residential and business districts as well as the traffic pattern in the city. But beyond those spatial fixations my mind was rapidly overtaken by thoughts on the dreams that were aborted when Thomas Sankara was assassinated on 15 October 1987.

A number of previous plans to visit Burkina Faso failed to work out due to conflicts with other matters. This made touching the soil of the honourable people a specially momentous event for me in April

2015.

The major reason for my visit was to get to Ouahigouya in northern Burkina Faso to meet a man whose work on restoring biodiversity in otherwise barren lands has received much attention and acclaim. My task was to meet and learn from a man who has fought the forces of climate change with bare knuckles and is winning.

Before heading north it was essential to set my eyes on the graves wherein lie the remains of Thomas Sankara and those that were also felled by the assassins' bullets on that treacherous and infamous day. Understandably, those that benefitted from the death of Sankara did not take any steps to immortalize him. As great a son of Africa as he was, the idea appears to have been to brush his existence out of memory. So, while Sankara has been celebrated in other countries and has inspired hope of the possibility of revolutionary changes on the continent, one could not find even tiny mementoes in his own land.



A truly man of the people, Sankara's life was exemplary especially with regard to gender rights, self-reliance and dignity of labour. After his assassination, his remains and that of other compatriots were buried in a nondescript cemetery in the Dagnoen part of Ouagadougou. With the help of a guide we made our way to the cemetery. As we went thoughts of touching the cold slab over his grave and taking photos that would enable me take away memories of the visit loomed large in my mind. In the past one has been privileged to visit, touch and have photos taken at the graves of Nkrumah of Ghana, Martin Luther King of the USA and Yasser Arafat of Palestine. The resting place of Samora Machel lies in a traffic intersection close to the international airport at Maputo and can be seen by all.

Today, standing by Sankara's resting place would be an epochal experience. As we approached the cemetery we noticed a

military post by the entrance. My guide explained that since the October 2014 popular uprising that led to the fleeing of Blaise Compaore from the presidential seat soldiers had to be stationed to guard against possible interferences with the graves. When we arrived there were three soldiers in the tent. Two were watching while one appeared to be having a siesta on a camp bed.

As we approached the tent, one of the officers came out to meet with us. We quickly told him what we were there for. To assure the officer that we meant no harm, my guide showed him a copy of my poetry collection, *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat*. Pointing at the drawing of a clenched fist on the cover of the collection, she told the officer that I was a revolutionary poet (how flattering) who had come all the way from Nigeria to pay homage to the great revolutionary son of Africa.

With a smile, the officer told us that the grave was off limits to visitors and that we could not even take photos of the grave - not with or by it. Strict orders. He was gracious enough, however, to allow us into the cemetery. That was splendid. So we walked in. The officer explained that the cluster of graves that were cordoned off with metal rails and ribbons were where Sankara and his comrades were buried. No photographs. We got up to a point where we could read the names on the headstones of the graves.

One grave was alone to the front while twelve others were arrayed behind it. The lone grave at the front bore the names Noel Isidore Thomas Sankara. The officer announced we could not get any closer than where we stood. He himself was not authorized to get any closer than that to the graves. We paused for moments of silence in honour of this great son of Africa, of these great sons of the soil who were sacrificed in their brilliant youth, as were Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral and others who dared to toe an alternative path from that of predatory capitalism. We paused. No photographs allowed. But the film in my heart captured this moment in a manner that cannot be deleted.

Two of the graves behind Sankara's bore the name Sawadogo. That struck a chord immediately because the farmer I was billed to meet in Ouahigouya is also a Sawadogo.

One of the first persons we met at the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development at Ouahigouya was the new director of forestry. Guess who she is? It was an exciting moment for us to find out that she is from the larger Sankara family. Dressed in military fatigues, I could not but

notice how jauntily her beret sat in her head. Just like how that Thomas Sankara's use to sit.


Simple things in this land drove home the meaning of its name – the land of honourable people. Two days earlier when I was checking into my hotel in Ouagadougou I insisted on making cash deposit to cover the room charges since their POS was not functioning. On checking out the receptionist brought out the cash I had deposited. I discovered that the cash had been wrapped up and kept in a notebook. I actually did not need to have made a deposit.

Dishonourable people could just stay in the hotel and walk away without payment since there was no form of security to ensure that bills could not be dodged. That may happen in some Hotels in Nigeria if you were a well-known customer. But here I was a complete stranger to these folks.

At our hotel at Ouahigouya we were told upfront that we could settle our bill on departure the next day.

No security. I thought about how many people would simply enjoy the accommodation and hospitality and then walk away - in other countries. Did I mention Nigeria? But then, this is “the country of honourable people” as the name Burkina Faso implies.

One interesting fact that emerged from the visit to Ouahigouya and environs was that most of the farmers engaged in using local knowledge systems to create forests in this Sahel environment all took to farming from the 1970s.

A photograph of three people in a dry, hilly landscape. On the left, a man in a white cap and orange shirt looks towards the center. In the middle, a woman with glasses and a patterned top looks towards the right. On the right, a man in a blue cap and patterned shirt holds a white envelope and looks down at it. The background shows dry trees and hills under a hazy sky.

At that time the region was largely a dust bowl wracked by droughts. Some of them had previously been immigrant traders in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea or Mali. They returned to Burkina Faso with determination to work the land and were driven by stubborn optimism and hope. They tackled the barren soils using the zai techniques of soil regeneration.

One of such farmers, Mr Kindo, got involved in a motor accident on the way back to Burkina Faso and lost an arm in the incident. Losing an arm did not stop him from being a successful farmer with local knowledge and a hoe and machete as his major tools. His 11 hectares farm produces enough to cater for his family's food needs and leaves a surplus for sale.

The method of soil reclamation is hinged on trapping scarce water, nutrients and seeds in the soil. How do they achieve this? Through zai holes, organic fertilizer and stone ridges. Keeping animals and attracting birds in their farms ensure that droppings from the animals enrich the soil and that seeds are also dropped by the animals and by the birds.

With low financial costs and with intense commitment to working with nature, these farmers reap good harvests and soils that would otherwise have gone barren are now teeming with life. In fact,

some of their forests, like that of Mr Yacouba Sawadogo whom I had gone to seek out, are considered too thick or tightly packed with trees for an ecosystem in the Sahel.

The zai farmers are connected in a continually expanding association through which they share seeds, ideas. Contrary to what happens in other west African communities where trees are slashed and burned as part of land preparation for farming, in Ouahigouya the farmers plant trees, nurture them and cultivate their crops alongside the trees. Some of them insisted they do not cut down trees, except dead ones.

Seeing the results of the agricultural practices of these farmers and considering that they have shared these ideas beyond Burkina Faso and particularly with farmers in Niger Republic, it became clear to me why southern Niger is greener than northern Nigeria where millions of Naira is spent in annual tree planting exercises to little result. The farmers in the Burkina Faso and Niger Republic Sahel are fighting climate change and showing the possibilities of what can be scaled-up and replicated elsewhere in this epic battle. 🌀

**21st of MAY, ANTICHEVRON DAY
FOR ALL THE VICTIMS OF THE EXTRACTIVE ACTIVITIES OF TRANSNATIONAL
CORPORATIONS**

**PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY
CALL TO STOP TRANSNATIONAL EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES FROM VIOLATING HUMAN
RIGHTS, SPECIALLY REGARDING THE VICTIMS OF CHEVRON IN ECUADOR AND
AROUND THE WORLD**

CONSIDERING THAT

The World has witnessed and is still witnessing serious violations of human rights and workers rights because of the extractive activities of transnational corporations.

Commonly the affected women and men are people in vulnerable conditions, with extractive operations highly increasing the risks of poverty, illness and death they have to face.

National laws are insufficient to confront the impunity structure well established at international and national levels, which operates in favor of extractive transnational companies and allows them to abuse human rights.

These concerns have been deeply studied and have lead to concrete global actions against the extractive actions operated by transnational companies worldwide; that even, initiatives have been settled on a global basis within international organizations in order to dismantle the power of transnational companies and avoid their continuous violation of human rights

The undersigned, Nobel Peace Prize winners, organizations and personalities defending human rights or protecting the environment, indigenous people and workers, make a call:

a. For investors of transnational companies to demand transparency in the transactions of companies and corporations. We exhort them to oppose the violations against human rights and the environment, committed by the companies where their capital is deposited. Not doing this makes them accomplices of crimes and atrocities.

b. For governments, in countries where extractive industries are active, to compel the companies to comply, firmly and resolutely, with all the technical norms, the national court orders from every country and the fundamental precepts of human rights, that is to respect the rights of populations on their land and to protect the rights of future generations.

c. For governments, in countries where the extractive companies have their headquarters, to compel the companies to fulfill their social responsibility, within and outside their national territory. Otherwise, to guarantee that legal bodies will be enabled to operate freely, without any kind of interference and pressure.

d. For international and regional agencies to assume their role of protection towards the populations and workers affected by extractive companies, to guarantee their due rights and process of law, both in their member states and through the international mechanisms settled to dismantle the impunity the companies enjoy.

e. For civil society organizations to remain vigilant and demand respect for the people living where transnational companies have their activities, that is their human rights.

g. For judges, prosecutors and lawyers to act so that they guarantee the application by transnational companies of human rights and the rights of the environment. If damages are caused, as it is the case of Chevron Corporation in Ecuador, the due reparation must be guaranteed.

h. For judges, prosecutors, lawyers and States to ensure the rights of the affected people, in order to avoid that corporations criminalize social protest and struggle.

i. For the international community to create international bodies and instruments to judge environmental crimes, so that victims may access justice without discriminations, that is to say on equal terms with corporations

As the claim from the peasants and indigenous people against the oil company Chevron in Ecuador is an emblematic case for the world, we express our support to justice being made to these affected persons. For these reasons, we appeal to:

The investors of Chevron Corporation to require justice for the 30 000 peasants and indigenous people of the Ecuadorian Amazon, who after 21 years of legal struggle have proven the guilt of the oil company. In spite of having been sentenced to pay to repair the damages caused, Chevron uses all the possible means to avoid complying and to delay ad finitum the execution of the sentence for environmental restoration, thus still generating death and destruction

The justice systems worldwide, especially in the United States of America, to prevent abusive and dilatory legal proceedings to favor the power of transnational companies; to not tolerate this kind of actions, aiming at silencing the victims and the persons and organizations supporting them; to respect the justice of other countries and the plaintiffs' right of a due law process

The justice systems from countries where formalities are taking place for the homologation and execution of the sentence to act under according to the laws in the respect of human rights, without obeying to external pressures launched at all levels by the oil company Chevron

The social organizations around the world to remain vigilant on the resolution of this case, which has unveiled the impunity structure benefiting transnational companies, allowing them to violate human rights. This case has also brought to light the possibility for affected populations to exercise their rights against one of the biggest multinational on the planet, which could represent an international precedent for victims of transnational companies fighting to obtain justice.

In the same way, as awareness has been raised on the behavior of Chevron in the several countries where it operates, we encourage the governments, the investors of the company, the environmental and human rights organizations, to create a warning system to force the company to fulfill its social responsibility and to comply with the norms and standards guaranteeing the respect of human rights.

Declaration of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign and Alliance

At a historic Food Sovereignty Assembly, from 28th February till 1st March 2015, over 50 organisations representing the hungry, the landless and the exploited of our country – involved in agrarian, water and land transformation, environmental justice, small scale farming, cooperatives, the solidarity economy movement, waste pickers, the unemployed and activists campaigning against increasing food prices – gathered in Johannesburg to plan the initiation of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign and Alliance.

We came together at the Assembly through our shared understanding that we have a crisis-ridden corporate and globalised food system that is responsible for worsening social, health and climate challenges, and which is coinciding with increasing state failure in relation to regulating our food regime and ensuring much needed agrarian transformation.

Moreover, the climate crisis is worsening, without any genuine solutions coming to the fore from the South African state, the corporate-controlled food system and the United Nations. Climate shocks are already impacting negatively on our food system with volatile food prices, droughts, heavy rainfall and flooding. This necessitates advancing food sovereignty, to ensure our food and water needs are not compromised and ordinary citizens have the means to meet food production and consumption needs on their terms in the midst of the climate crisis.

South Africa is also experiencing food riots often times linked to 'service delivery

protests', 14 million citizens experiencing hunger, malnutrition, obesity, desperation by aspirant small scale farmers, claims for justice by the landless, increasing precarity of farmworkers, and restricted marine rights for small scale fishers.

The Food Sovereignty Assembly affirmed the need to directly confront these challenges through a unifying national campaign. Such a struggle-driven national Food Sovereignty Campaign is unprecedented in the context of South Africa and has drawn inspiration from local food sovereignty practices and from the rising international movements and alliances championing food sovereignty in different parts of the world, in particular La Via Campesina and the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa.

Our campaign seeks to unify struggles on the ground and progressive social forces to ensure food sovereignty is placed on the national agenda and is an alternative way forward for our food system. We are not simply calling for technical solutions for households to access food as encapsulated in the government's recently proposed Food Security and Nutrition Policy and Implementation Plan.

We reject the latter and instead are calling for the deep transformation of our food system by breaking the control of food corporations, repositioning the state to realise the Constitutional right to food and as part of creating the conditions and space for the emergence of food sovereignty alternatives from below. In this context mass popular power is essential and hence we welcome the message of support from the NUMSAlled United Front.

Attack The Failing Corporate Controlled Food System and Agrarian Structure

The campaign will challenge the current unjust, unsafe, and unsustainable food system that is dominant in South Africa. We will be guided by a programme of action consisting of phases of rolling action to confront the key contradictions of our food system, namely rising food prices and corporate control, declining nutrition, increasing use of GMOs and corporate control of seeds, lack of land, water, and agrarian reform, destructiveness of industrial agriculture, labour exploitation on farms, and lack of finance for small scale farmers and cooperatives.

To build food sovereignty we need to

- (1) challenge the country's unequal agrarian structure;
- (2) call for land audits at local, provincial and national levels;
- (3) secure land allocations for food sovereignty in villages, towns and cities;
- (4) win society over to the idea of one farmer one farm;
- (5) end the conversion of agricultural land to game farms for the rich;
- (6) call on churches that own large amounts of land to make it available to the landless
- (7) struggle against chiefs that stand in the way of land usage, distribution and food sovereignty; and, linked to this,
- (8) push for and affirm the rights of women to land, the people who produce most of the world's food.

We will address various demands to capital and the state and we will use our power in our communities, in our farming enterprises, cooperatives, in the streets, and through international solidarity.

We will:

- use symbolic tactics such as public tribunals to spotlight corruption and unfairness in providing finance for small scale farmers and cooperatives, expose greed-driven food price increases and unhealthy food;
- consider dumping rotten produce at

government institutions to expose the rot and corruption in such institutions and the failure to address the needs of small scale farmers and community traders;

- march against bread corporations, boycott GMO foods, unhealthy foods and corporate food retailers that persist in selling these foods;
- promote occupation of idle and unused land for agroecological food production;
- demand that 10% of GDP is spent on food sovereignty development;
- demand that the media stop advertising unhealthy foods and show its commitment to healthy and nutritious food for South Africa;
- demand consistent inspections and penalties for labour violations to ensure decent working conditions for farmworkers.

Advance Food Sovereignty From Below

In response to the contradictions of the food system, as manifested in our widespread hunger, we have answers! We believe that small scale farmers, cooperatives, community markets, as part of the solidarity economy, can feed our people, and through the campaign we will promote and highlight practical examples of this.

We will highlight and promote the building of seed banks and the defence of local seed systems to ensure that we as farmers and communities control our seed, and therefore life. Through our experiences we will show that agroecology rather than industrial agriculture can feed our communities and country, and nourish our environment. We will highlight, promote and celebrate existing agroecology production that is happening in the country, and conduct learning exchanges to these sites. We will experiment with and develop alternative forms of finance that are controlled by small scale farmers and cooperatives themselves, including solidarity economy funds and localised saving schemes for productive investment in food sovereignty alternatives.

We will champion farmworker rights and models of worker cooperatives in production and consumption to develop worker control in agriculture and the food system. We will uncover, revive and highlight traditional, indigenous and healthy nutrition alternatives that are grounded in local ecologies, cultural tastes, and diversity. A recipe book will be developed to promote these nutritious alternatives.

We will map and link small scale farmers, cooperatives and communities to bring about agrarian transformation and build critical mass. Social media like a food sovereignty app and the Food Sovereignty Campaign webpage will be utilised in this regard to mobilise societal support.

By mobilising local networks we will engage in popular awareness-raising about food sovereignty and the need for organisations and communities to publicly declare their commitments to food sovereignty. We will capture these declarations in a national directory and as part of an ongoing campaigning thrust to build food sovereignty spaces. We will harness community media, online social media, popular education resources, and face-to-face meetings for commitments to food sovereignty.

We will hold food sovereignty festivals to celebrate our local practices of seed sovereignty and preservation, indigenous plant varieties, arts, crafts and culture, local foods and produce from cooperatives, solidarity economy enterprises and small scale farmers. Such festivals will also serve as socialised markets, learning spaces, and communication tools in our society.

To affirm the Constitutional right to food in our society and to shift state power in favour of food sovereignty and to regulate capital, we will champion a Food Sovereignty Act that can

control food prices, provide protections to small scale farmers and cooperatives, ensure a socialised market space in the national economy (through, for example, labelling food sovereignty products and proper

nutrition labelling of all food), create participatory mechanisms for food producers and consumers to shape the food sovereignty system, deconcentrate the agrarian structure of South Africa, ensure one farmer one farm, enforce nutrition standards, protect indigenous seeds, plant varieties and the free sharing of seed, and ensure South Africa becomes GMO free by banning GMOs. We will challenge the property clause to ensure access to land. In addition to the Act, we will pursue the implementation of local government regulations and policies to promote the development of food sovereignty. To achieve this we will research international experiences, draft and champion these instruments from below.

We will champion disciplined and commonly agreed actions that coincide with:

- Human Rights Day: 21 March
- International Children's Day : 1 June
- Passing of the infamous 1913 Land Act: 19th June
- International Food Day: 16th October
-

Coordinating Committee and Alliance

The FSA elected a representative coordinating committee from the various sectors championing food sovereignty. This committee will coordinate the campaign, facilitate grassroots-driven actions, build capacity and communicate the message of the campaign. The coordinating committee will work in accordance with the principles agreed to at the Assembly and in a manner that builds the Alliance across the country, in various sectors and in communities in a bottom up and democratic manner.

We give a mandate to the coordinating committee to develop and finalise the programme of actions for the priority campaign themes for 2015, namely high food prices and lack of land and agrarian reform, with input from grassroots Alliance partners.

Issued by the Food Sovereignty Campaign Coordination Committee



THE RISING SPECTRE OF OIL IN UGANDA

By Ukpono Bassey

A one-day conference hosted at Entebbe, Uganda by the National Association Of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) aimed at informing youths about the impacts of oil extraction and dependence on fossil fuels on climate change. The conference also focused on the impact of fossil fuels extraction on food and agricultural production. It held on 14 May 2015.

The speaker at the conference was Nnimmo Bassey, Director of HOMEF. My mum and I accompanied him to the event that happened at the end of our short vacation in that beautiful country. This conference gave me the opportunity to learn several issues in relation to our environment. The meeting was well attended by youths around. I will describe briefly below the different aspects discussed in the meeting. Participants at the conference were mostly members of the Pan African Youth Club drawn from various tertiary institutions. There were also other civil society persons and a few politicians.

Members of Parliament that were expected to comment on presentations during the event did not show up. However, the chairman of UPC, one of the major political parties in Uganda was in attendance and made some good comments after each presentation.

At the beginning of the meeting, participants shared their expectation which could be generally grouped as:

- To learn how Uganda can extract oil better
- To know whether good oil field practices can help avoid the resource curse.
- Roles of citizens at all levels
- Challenges and hazards of oil extraction
- How citizens would benefit from oil

NAPE opened the meeting with a video presentation as an introduction to the challenge of oil. It showed the issues of oil in Niger Delta, Nigeria elaborating on the pollution of the environment and the poverty that in the oil field communities. It also showed the issue of corruption. It then showed how Botswana made their resource to be a blessing. Then finally, it showed how people of Uganda hope to see their nation in the future.

TALKING ABOUT OIL

Nnimmo Bassey started off by complimenting the video but made participants aware of the fact that there are things that can be questioned though. Snippets from his presentation include that "the issue of climate change is a marathon" with the interpretation that it requires both long term and immediate actions. He mentioned that African resources are extracted for export and the

hunger for foreign exchange has opened the continent to reckless exploitation.

"Life worth's more than oil." Sometimes there is a big gap between the government and the people and this always possess a big problem. He stated that whether we are willing to break the oil addiction or not, oil will be history in just a couple of decades to come.

Uganda should brace up for heavy pollution of Lake Albert and other oil producing areas and be ready for losses from reduction in the tourism sector as crude oil extraction in Nature Reserves will take a toll.

Two Solutions:

- Leave the fossils in the ground
- Change from mental slavery

Oil Production Pollution and Food

Oil extraction activities have serious impacts on the environment and on food production. Coupled with climate impacts these may lead to catastrophic situations. Seismic exploration and pipeline laying cause biodiversity losses including deforestation. Oil spills, drilling wastes and gas flares seriously affect the quality of agricultural land as well as fisheries.

The tendency to think that techno-fixes can solve the problems, for example through the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and geo-engineering only pose more hazards for Africa, a continent that has least contributed to the climate crises but is nevertheless one of the most vulnerable regions. GMOs work best on an industrial agricultural model that includes monocultures and dependence on herbicides and other toxic inputs. If allowed to spread on the continent, GMOs will deeply harm the African agricultural systems, lead to more land grabs and possibly culminate in food colonialism.

Vandana Shiva

Dr. Vandana Shiva is a world-renowned environmentalist, physicist, philosopher, feminist, activist, and author.

Born in 1952 in Uttarakhand, India, her parents were staunch supporters of Mahatma Gandhi, and Gandhi remains a profound influence on her thought.

She earned her PhD in nuclear physics on “Hidden Variables and Non-locality in Quantum Theory” at the University of Western Ontario. Rather than pursuing an academic career, she chose instead to dedicate her life to the protection of nature and defense of small farmers' rights and the rights of people to nature's resources – forests, biodiversity, water, and seeds and land.

Alarmed by the threat to biodiversity posed by agri-business interests and biotechnology, she founded the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology in 1982 dedicated to independent research to address the most significant ecological and social issues of our times. In 1991, Dr. Shiva founded Navdanya (which means 'Nine Seeds' in Hindi, www.navdanya.org) a national movement to protect the diversity and integrity of living resources and the rights of small farmers. In 2004 she founded 'Bija Vidyapeeth, the Earth University, an international college for sustainable living in Deradhun, India and in 2011, Navdanya International in Florence, Italy.

MEET OUR INSTIGATORS

She is a long-time defender of the freedom of farmers and of seeds, working to prevent the patenting of life itself. "I don't want to live in a world where five giant companies control our health and our food." She is a vocal critic of industrial agriculture and a global model which exploits the world's natural resources and desertifies earth's soils and land, and believes the only way forward is to create a new paradigm which puts ecology at the centre of a new economic model as solution to climate change chaos and the world's food security. She is an advisor to numerous governments on sustainable development for the solutions she offers to some of the most critical problems posed by the effects of globalization and climate change on the poorest and most populous nations.

Time Magazine has identified Dr. Shiva as an environmental "hero" and Asia Week has called her one of the five most powerful communicators of Asia.

She is a prolific writer and author of numerous books. Among her awards are the Right Livelihood Award - also known as the "Alternative Nobel Prize" in 1992, the Sydney Peace Prize in 2010 "For courageous leadership of movements for social justice – the empowerment of women in developing countries, advocacy of the human rights of small farming communities and for her scientific analysis of environmental sustainability" and the Fukuoka Prize in 2012, bestowed by the Fukuoka city government, Japan to people who contribute to academia, arts, and culture in Asia.

Her books include: *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (1988), *Ecology and the Politics of Survival: Conflicts Over Natural Resources in India* (1991), *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Ecological degradation and political conflict in Punjab* (1992), *Monocultures of the Mind: Biodiversity, Biotechnology and Agriculture* (1993), *Ecofeminism, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva* (1993), *Biopolitics* (with Ingunn Moser), (1995), *Biopiracy: the Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (1997), *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (2000), *Patents, Myths and Reality* (2001), *Earth Democracy* (2005), *Manifestos on the Future of Food and Seed*, editor (2007), *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis* (2008), *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (2010) and *Making Peace With Earth* (2013).



Comrade Baba Aye

Baba Aye was born on Tuesday, October 12, 1971, in Lagos. He had his elementary education at; Rose Cottage Nursery & Primary School, Akoka Primary School and CMS Primary School. His secondary education was at; Howell's Memorial Grammar School Bariga, Federal Government College Odogbolu, Ikeja High School, Anwar Ul Islam College Agege and State College Isolo. He subsequently attended; University of Ilorin, University of Lagos, University of Nigeria Enugu Campus, University of Kassel, University of Campinas and the Berlin School of Economics. He has a BSc in Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, and an MA in Labour Policy and Globalisation, from the Global Labour University.

He is a consummate activist, becoming convinced of the need for struggle to bring to birth a better world, when he was 13 years old. Realising that struggle is collective and thus requires organisation, he has been a unionist since his university days when he served at different periods in several capacities from the hall/departmental level to the national platform. Some of the positions he served in were as; Speaker of the Students Parliament (at both Unilorin and Unilag) and Public Relations Officer of the National Association of Nigerian Students.

Baba Aye has edited several other periodicals over the years, including Cuba Si, the bulletin of the Nigeria-Cuba Friendship and Cultural Association, which he introduced as the National Publicity Secretary of the Association in 2002. He currently serves as a Contributing Editor of the Review of African Political Economy journal, and has written extensively on topical issues of national and international concern in leading daily newspapers in the country. He is equally a contributing editor of Amandla!, the radical South African periodical. He served as a member of the editorial board of Workers World published by the NLC in 2010 to 2012 and is currently a member of the editorial board of the NLC's Labour Post.

Some of Baba Aye's recent publications are: 'Musical Chairs on the Sidelines: the Challenge of Social Transformation in Neo-colonial Africa' in Pradella L., and Marois T., 2015, Polarizing Development: Alternatives to Neoliberalism and the Crisis, Pluto Press, London, pp: 214-225; 'Limits of the Game of Masks: Class, Ethno-religious Identities, and the Rise of Salafi-Jihadism in Northern Nigeria', 2013, Socialism and Democracy, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp: 104-128; 'Trade Union Services and Benefits in Nigeria (with Hauwa Mustapha), In Kalusopa T., Otoo K. N. and Shindodola-Mote H. 2013 Trade Union Services and Benefits in Africa, Africa Labour Research Network, pp: 295-323; 'Denuding the viscera of State-Oil Capitalism and Patriarchy: Post-Capitalist Alternatives and Women's Resistance in the Niger Delta', In Xhafa E., and Serrano M.R, 2012, The Pursuit of Alternatives, Stories of Peoples' Economic and Political Struggles Across the World, Rainer Hampp Verlag, Munchen, pp: 159-79; Era of Crises and Revolts: Perspectives for Workers and Youth, 2012, Solaf Publishers, Ibadan, and; The State of Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations Practice in Nigeria's Export Processing Zones, (with Muttaqa Yusha'u), International Labour Organisation, Geneva. He is currently working on a number of book chapters with other activist-scholars (on migrant workers, and on precarious work) as well as a forthcoming book on the struggle for a living wage.

Baba Aye is a fulltime trade unionist. He has worked for the past 17 years with the Medical and Health Workers' Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) as organizer, research officer and for the past dozen years (which included a 1 and half years deployment to the NLC at the request of Congress), he has been the Head of the union's Education, Planning, Research and Statistics Department. He has utilized this office and his being a member of the NLC National Education & Training Coordination Group to help a number of sister-unions build and staff education departments or capacity for these where they already have such. He also served as the Chairperson of the NLC Lagos State Council Caretaker Committee in 2003 where he helped midwife the emergence of a new leadership out of a moment of crisis.

As a socialist, Baba Aye is resolute in fighting against all forms of oppression and degradation of humanity and the earth. This is the point of departure for his activities as radical feminist and environmental rights activist. He was thus active in Women in Nigeria (WIN) in the '80s and has made wrote several articles in defense of the earth against capitalism in the '90s and early 2000s. Several articles and interviews of Baba Aye on a diverse range of issues have been written or translated into the following languages: German, Spanish, Italian, French, Greek, Turkish and Swahili.

Baba Aye blogs at: <http://solidarityandstruggle.blogspot.com> where a number of his writings from 2008 can be found. He is happily married to Lola. They have four lovely children, and all live in Abuja

TERRA VIVA

Our Soil, Our Commons, Our Future
A new vision for Planetary Citizenship

THE CHOICE TO MAKE

For the first time in human history, our common future as a species is no longer certain. "e continuing cycles of ecological, economic and political crises have put humanity on red alert. Climate catastrophes, hunger, poverty, unemployment, crime, conflicts and wars seem to be hurtling us towards social collapse.

The soil, the very basis of our life on Earth and our humanity is under threat.

This threat to soil is linked to the multiple crises we face. Our common survival demands that we make a transition from vicious cycles of violence to virtuous cycles of nonviolence; from negative economies of death and destruction to living economies that sustain life on earth and our lives; from negative politics and cultures that are leading to mutual annihilation to living democracies which include concern for and participation of all life.

We can choose another path.

A path that leads to a new vision of planetary citizenship and a new pact with the Earth based on reciprocity, caring and respect, on taking and giving back, on sharing the resources of the world equitably among all living species. It begins with changing attitudes about the way we treat the soil. Rather than seeing it as an inanimate mineral to be used until exhausted, it should be cherished as a living entity, a Terra Viva, whose survival is essential to our own.

In soil lies the answer to all.

The Paradigm of Separation and Fragmentation

What is propelling this destructiveness and preventing us from arresting it? A major reason is the solutions offered perpetuate the paradigm that caused the problem. As Einstein said, ***"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them"***.

The predominance of separation as a way of seeing and being, the belief that things are insular and separate is the characteristic of this dominant paradigm.

Three illusory perceptions of separation prevent the correction and transformation of how we think of soil and land, food and work, the economy and democracy:

- Humans are separate from Earth
- The wealth creation in the market is separate from the contribution of others – nature, workers, women, ancestors;
- Actions are separate from consequences and rights are separate

from responsibilities.

These false perceptions separate humans from nature, soil from society, ecology from economy.

The paradigm of separation and fragmentation leads to the law of one way extraction from nature and society, of taking without giving. Its practitioners ignore the responsibility of giving back to nature and society and in so doing foment ecological crises and perpetuate social and economic injustice. Even though the evidence of ecological and social collapse has become such common knowledge, the consequences of this exploitative logic are routinely ignored, externalized, and separated from the actions. Climate change is denied, as are the ecological impacts of non-sustainable agriculture on soil, on biodiversity, on water, on livelihoods.

The conflicts emerging from non-sustainable and unjust resource use are not seen in their ecological context but reduced to ethnic and religious conflicts. For every problem and crisis created, ever greater applications of the extractive, linear, and blind logic are brought to bear. This linear mentality propels the powerful to blindly and arrogantly press on toward successive conquests. It is a blinkered paradigm, leaving no room for correction of course.

We are the Soil, We are the Land

The United Nations has dedicated 2015 as the International Year of Soils "to make people aware of the crucial role soil plays in food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, essential ecosystem services, poverty alleviation and sustainable development".

Industrial civilization has distracted us from considering our relation to the soil, based on the arrogant belief that the more we conquer and destroy nature the more 'developed' we are. This has led to the severing of our relationship with the land. We need a new pact with the earth and the soil. A pact that recognizes that we are the soil, we grow from the soil, we are sustained by the soil.

This is the new renaissance - a new awakening that soil is alive and that taking care of the soil is of fundamental global importance and the most important work that humanity can do. Good, nutritious, and healthy food comes as a by-product of healthy and vibrant soils.

When the important role of farmers as providers of health and builders of soil is recognized, traditional agriculture will no longer be seen as a backward and primitive activity to be conquered by industrialization and urbanization but will be given the priority it merits.

A new balance between the city and the countryside will grow out of the new pact with the soil.

Towards a New Agriculture

A new agriculture is the ground where new economies and new democracies are being shaped concretely. The last century has been dominated by an industrial agricultural model that came out of the war industry and focused on chemicals and fossil fuels. It has destroyed the soil, uprooted farmers, produced ill-health, created waste at every level, including 30% of food waste.

It is a major culprit in the destruction and

erosion of water, land and biodiversity, as well as greenhouse gases and large scale unemployment. It extracts the fertility of the soil and the value created by farmers and gives nothing back. Farmers are being forced to spend up to 10 times more than they can earn, using 10 times the energy than they can produce as food.

This has led to the crisis faced by family farmers and small peasants, the crisis of debt and suicides. Industrialized agriculture is no longer a food system but a commodity production system, where grain production goes for biofuel, and animal feed and not for feeding people. It creates profit for corporations but leads to the degradation of people, land, food and health.

The costs of this degradation are not tabulated and left as social and economic externalities.

The new agriculture begins with giving back fertility to the soil through organic methods, and ensuring a fair and just price to the farmers to enable them to stay on the land and continue their work of providing bountiful and nutritious food to citizens and communities.

The new agriculture replaces the linear law of extraction and exploitation of the soil and resources, with a circular law of return that guarantees resiliency and permanence, sustainability, justice and peace. It decommodifies food and land, and brings to the production of food the dignity it deserves.

The history of every nation is eventually written in the way in which it cares for its soil" Franklin D. Roosevelt

The land is people's identity; it is the ground of culture and economy. A bond with the land is a bond with the Earth - a bond that is shared by all cultures of the world, from North to South and from East to West. Land, soil and food are inextricably bound together. Splitting land from soil, and soil from food, making them separate entities was the effect of a colonial idea that has led to linear economies and the industrialization of agriculture.

In contrast indigenous cultures of Latin America have referred to land as earth and soil - Pachamama, or "Mother Earth". Among Dalit communities in southern India, they find their heritage in Mata dharti (Mother soil).


Earth defenders worldwide see land as sacred because they are living systems that harbor human and animal life. Land is as much life as is mother's milk to her infants. Only by seeing land as life, do we revolutionize the human consciousness away from the narrow linearity that commodifies land as private property, and take on the transformational approach that is spelled out in this Manifesto. Small household farming is the mainstay of food production in the world today.

Land is often the sole asset of rural communities and family farmers around the world, the health of which their livelihood and well-being depend upon. Land is the source of life, nourishment and learning. It provides us with food, fibre, feed and energy.

The capacity of land to provide these goods depends on a complex interaction between living organisms, water, air, minerals and solar energy. A healthy land provides a regular flow of goods, based on

natural cycles. Agricultural, aquaculture and forest systems are the outcome of a longstanding interaction between natural and human cycles. Human communities manage natural cycles and adapt them to their needs.

For this reason a land 'stewardship', the caring of the land, goes beyond purely technical and economic aspects. A good land management keeps land from generation to generation through social practices. "e relation to land is an essential component of people's identity and spirituality.

However, today we are witnessing the transformation of land from commons into a commodity, which has disrupted the complexity of the interaction between human societies and nature, and has permitted the dispossession of sources of livelihood for millions of people. Moreover, current land use practices have led to deforestation, overgrazing and over- exploitation of soils and water resources, causing a cascade of negative impacts : land degradation, loss of soil fertility, loss of biodiversity, the breakdown of agro-ecosystem functions, declining yields, hunger and malnutrition, and declining livelihoods. 

These few pages on Our Soil, Our Commons, Our Future are excerpts from the book, TERRA VIVA.

You can download an e-copy from ...

MAPUTO DECLARATION

Maputo Declaration of African Civil Society on Climate Justice

Climate justice advocates, community peoples and mass movements' representatives met in Maputo, Mozambique from 21-23 April 2015 to consider the roots, manifestations and impacts of climate change on Africa and to consider needed responses to the crises.

At the end of the deliberations it was agreed that Africa is disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis although she has not significantly contributed to the problem. The conference also noted that the climate crisis is systemic in nature and is a result of defective economic and political systems that require urgent overhaul. In particular, the meeting considered that Africa has been massively plundered over the centuries and continues to suffer severe impacts from resource exploitation and related conflicts.

The meeting noted that the *Africa Rising* narrative is based on the faulty premises of neoliberalism using tools like discredited measures of GDP and is presented as a bait to draw the continent deeper into extractivism and to promote consumerism.

The meeting further noted human and environmental rights abuses on the continent, as well as the ecological, economic, financial crises, all adversely affect her peoples and impair their capacity to adapt to, mitigate impacts and build collective resilience to climate change.

The meeting frowned at the widening gap between our governments and the grassroots and the increasing corporate capture of African governments and public institutions. These constitute obstacles to the securing climate justice for our peoples.

The *long walk* to climate justice requires mass education of our populace, as well as our policy makers, on the underpinnings of the climate crisis, the vigorous assertion of our rights and the forging ahead with real alternatives including those of social and political structures and systems. It also demands collective and popular struggles to resist neo-colonialism, new forms of oppression and new manifestations of violence including criminalisation of activists and social movements, and xenophobia. We recognise that as climate change worsens, it will increase the resource crunch and migrations and will lead to more conflicts between people. We also recognise that the exploitation of migrant labour by corporations often leads to conflicts between neighbouring countries.

With justice and equality as the irreducible minimum, the conference further noted and declared as follows:

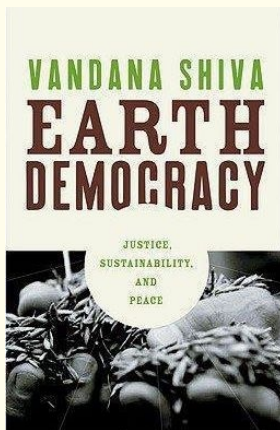
1. All nations must act together to ensure that global average temperature rise does not go beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels as anything beyond that will mean a burning of Africa;
2. In Paris COP21, we demand that African governments defend positions that benefit Africans not the World Bank or corporations;
3. We reject carbon markets, financialisation of land and natural resources, consumerism and commodification of nature, and all forms of carbon slavery;

SEEDING

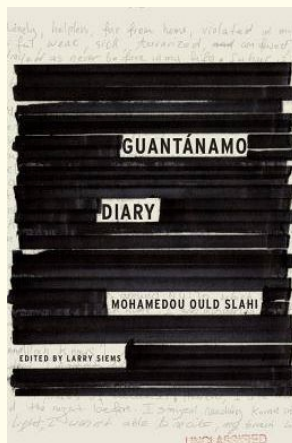
37 Climate Justice



BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ



Boldly confronting the neoconservative Project for the New American Century, world-renowned physicist and activist Vandana Shiva responds with *Earth Democracy*, or, as she prophetically names it, *The People's Project for a New Planetary Millennium*. A leading voice in the struggle for global justice and sustainability, here Shiva describes what earth democracy could look like, outlining the bedrock principles for building living economies, living cultures and living democracies. Starting from the initial enclosure of the commons—the privatization of six million acres of public land in eighteenth-century Britain—Shiva goes on to reveal how the commons continue to shrink as more and more natural resources are patented and fenced. Accompanying this displacement from formerly accessible territory, she argues, is a growing attitude of disposability that erodes our natural resources, ecological sustainability and cultural diversity. Worse, human beings are by no means safe from this assignment of disposability. Through the forces of neoliberal globalization, economic and social exclusion work in deadly synergy to perpetrate violence on vulnerable groups, extinguishing the lives of millions. Yet these brutal extinctions are not the only trend shaping human history. Fortright and energetic, Vandana Shiva updates readers on the movements, issues and struggles she helped bring to international attention—the genetic engineering of food, the theft of culture and the privatization of natural resources—and deftly analyzes the successes and new challenges the global resistance now faces. From struggles on the streets of Seattle and Cancun and in homes and farms across the world has grown a set of principles based on inclusion, nonviolence, reclaiming the commons and freely sharing the earth's resources. These ideals, which Shiva calls earth democracy, will serve as unifying points in our current movements, an urgent call to peace and the basis for a just and sustainable future.



An unprecedented international publishing event: the first and only diary written by a still-imprisoned Guantanamo detainee.

Since 2002, Mohamedou Slahi has been imprisoned at the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In all these years, the United States has never charged him with a crime. A federal judge ordered his release in March 2010, but the U.S. government fought that decision, and there is no sign that the United States plans to let him go.

Three years into his captivity Slahi began a diary, recounting his life before he disappeared into U.S. custody, "his endless world tour" of imprisonment and interrogation, and his daily life as a Guantanamo prisoner. His diary is not merely a vivid record of a miscarriage of justice, but a deeply personal memoir—terrifying, darkly humorous, and surprisingly gracious. Published now for the first time, *GUANTANAMO DIARY* is a document of immense historical importance and a riveting and profoundly revealing read."

4. We reject all false solutions to climate change including, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD), industrial tree plantations, genetic engineering, agrofuels and geoengineering, noting, for example, that clean coal does not exist;
5. We reject the false notion of “green economy” that is nothing but a ploy to commodify and hasten the destruction of nature;
6. Renewable energy that is socially controlled must be promoted across the continent.
7. We call for the creation of financial systems that promote and facilitate clean energy options including by supporting subsidies, facilitated loans, research and development;
8. We demand an end to financial systems built on extensive subsidies, externalisation of costs, over-optimistic projections, and corruption;
9. We resolve to work towards reclaiming energy as a public good that is not for profit and reject corporations-driven energy systems;
10. We say no to mining as we lived better without extreme extractive activities.
11. Our land is our present and our future livelihood and we reject land grabbing in all its forms including particularly for so-called “investment” projects that are setting the path beyond land grabbing to a full continent grab;
12. There must be full, transparent and prior informed consent of communities before the use of their lands for any sort of projects;
13. In all cases the welfare of local communities and our environment must come be prioritised over the profits of investment companies.

In line with the above and through other considerations, the conference demands as follows:

1. Governments must ensure that the energy needs and priorities of local households, local producers and women - including with regard to social services, transport, health, education and childcare - should be privileged over those of corporations and the rich;
2. We demand that no new oil exploration permits or coal mines should be granted in order to preserve our environment and to keep in line with demands by science that fossil fuels be left in the ground if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change;
3. We call for and support public and social control of the transition to renewable energy, including by community-based cooperatives, civil society collectives and the provision of local level infrastructure;
4. Governments must dismantle the barriers of privilege and power including those created and reinforced by financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank;
5. We demand urgent technology transfer for clean energy production, the abolishment of intellectual property and increased research and development funds to tackle climate change;

MAPUTO DECLARATION

6. We demand full recognition of local community knowledge of forests, food production, medicinal and cultural uses of land and forests; funding of research in this area and use as part of the public education system;
7. We demand an urgent transition from dirty energy forms to clean energy systems while ensuring that workers are properly equipped and provided with new healthy jobs created by this shift;
8. Governments must support agro-ecological food production in the hands of small scale producers, prioritise food production over cash crops in order to promote food security in the context of food sovereignty;
9. Governments to ensure the protection and recognition of farmers' rights to save, sell and exchange their seeds while rejecting genetic engineering and synthetic biology, including of those seeds manipulated and presented as being *climate smart*;
10. Ensure access, security, control, and right to use land for women. We recognise land as a common good;
11. Tree plantations must not be misrepresented as forests and trees must not be seen simply as carbon stocks, sinks or banks;
12. Community forest management systems should be adopted across the continent as communities have a genuine stake in preserving the health of forests;
13. The right to clean water should be enshrined in the constitutions of all African countries;
14. Governments must halt the privatisation of water and restore public control in already privatised ones;
15. Governments should halt the building of big dams, other mega structures and unnecessary infrastructure;
16. Governments should be responsible for holding corporations accountable for all environments degraded by ongoing or historical extractive and other polluting activities. Corporations who have created this contamination must pay to clean it up, but their payment does not constitute ownership of these environments;
17. Governments to ensure the cost of social and health ills by using energy derived from fossil fuels are not externalised to the people and the environment;
18. Governments must take up the responsibility of providing hospitals, schools and other social services and not leave these for corporations to provide as corporate social responsibility or other green washing acts.

Conference participants resolved to work with other movements in Africa and globally for the overturning of the capitalist patriarchal system promoted and protected by the global financial institutions, corporations and the global elite to secure the survival of humans and the rights of Mother Earth to maintain her natural cycles.

Signed by: All the civil society organisations, representatives of social movements and communities from Mozambique and southern Africa, and students present at the meeting.

BLASTING THE ROCK, BLOWING AWAY OUR FUTURE

-Rural organizing against harmful hill/rock blasting
for construction materials in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria

By God'spower Martins

Urban-Rural Environmental Defenders (U-RED) a non-governmental environmental advocacy organization determined to contribute towards the preservation of the environment by resisting and discouraging all forms of unwholesome practices in the environment for environmental justice and sustainability is deeply disturbed by the alarming rate of indiscriminate blasting of rocks right in the midst of host communities in Abuja. Her fear is however deepened by the endless complaints from indigenous host communities on the deadly effects of the blasts on their lives and environment.

The hill/rocks in our communities are supposed to be a blessing in many ways especially to the communities. This seems not to be the case as hills/rocks are being blasted and extracted in the middle of communities while the communities are ignored and exploited.

Apart from reducing on the aesthetic quality of the environment there are many questions agitating our mind and begging for answers.

Were Environmental and Social Impact Assessments carried out before these quarries are sited? Are the communities part of the EIA/ESIA processes?

Do the companies obtain the prior informed consent of the communities before blasting the rocks?

How long will this environmental ill and injustice go on? Is government aware of this socio-environmental harm going on in these communities? If yes, what effort is being made to arrest the menace?

When this hazardous blasting of the rocks

and unhealthy quarrying stop, who restores or remedies the environment, craters, security pits, cracks, compacted soil and the abandoned machineries?

We are concerned that our natural heritage – hills/rocks - are being blown away?

Following the urgent need to provide answers to the above disturbing questions and the general outcry of the affected communities along Airport Road, Abuja, Urban-Rural Environmental Defenders (U-RED) went into extensive environmental monitoring and investigations on the activities of quarry operators who recklessly blast rocks in the communities. What we found are shocking in terms of the deadly effects of rock blasting, neglect of communities, the slavery and dehumanising way indigenous workers are treated at the quarries, to mention but a few. U-RED's discoveries moved the organisation to organize a dialogue/sensitization programme tagged "Blasting the rocks, blowing away our future" to explain the adverse effects of the extractive activities and to share possible civil/legal templates on how to correct the unsafe approach to mining, economic exploitation, ecological abuse and injustice that threaten their aver-all existence and the environment.

The dialogue was held in a cluster of communities: Toge (host), Baruwa, and Dayinsa. Government agencies that participated include the Federal Ministry of Environment, National Environmental Standards Regulation and Enforcement Agency (NESREA), and Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB).

From the beginning to the last word, the communities were deep in sorrow as U-RED explained the deadly effects of quarrying and blasting of rocks such as the adverse health effects on community members through vibrations, dust, flying-rocks and poisonous metals. Exposure to high effect of natural disaster from windstorms as the hills/rocks serve as wind breakers; distortion and destruction of natural aesthetic value; loss of community economic potentials and wealth such as from eco-tourism while leaving them with poverty and environmental problems. Others include life expectancy reduction, turning cultural heritage into history, possible landslide that can wipe out the entire community and beyond, displacement of fauna, loss of arable lands for agriculture to quarry sites, roads and compacted soil. Pollutions—(noise, air, water), abandoned wastes, deforestation, abandoned deadly craters and security pits, cracks and building collapse through vibrations, general inconveniences, and miscellaneous losses.

During the meeting the local people repeatedly lamented their plight. Looking at their faces, no one needed to be told that the people were in a terrible deep environmental crisis. You could see sorrow, pains, and frustrations on their faces especially as they bewailed their recent agony when many residents had to flee Toge community after a blast that literally shook the community to its foundation.

A youth when asked “how did the quarry companies come to their communities”, said “we suddenly saw them in our land”. We were not part of the process that brought them into the community. We, including the chief of Toge, were

threatened and chased away when we went to ask questions.

The situation, according to the local people became more worrisome as every invitation to CNC quarry company, a Chinese company, blasting rock in Toge community for both parties to meet, discuss and reach an understanding on how to best mitigate the deadly effects of the blast on the community and environment as stipulated in the 2013 Nigerian law on quarrying and blasting operations.

Speaking about the dangers of the presence of the destructive forces in their communities, the local peoples said “our hearts break daily with shocks from sudden blasts, our children get confused in the class while learning as the school is just few meters away from the site, a situation they said can be verified from school teachers”. According to them, the general trauma of the big and small in the communities can only be better imagined than experienced. Animals are no more in the communities because of the sound of blasts and vibrations. They have lost trees and plants of economic and herbal values to quarry sites and roads that lead to quarries. Arable lands for farming, their main source of livelihood and income have been taken from them.

They are surrounded by mining craters and over five meters deep so called security pits they dig round some quarry sites. Communities often lose domestic animals and community members especially during the raining season in these pits. They blast the rock unannounced. Flyrocks, general inconveniences, and miscellaneous losses threaten existence in their land.

According to the people, their memorial graveyard (cemetery) has been lost to a developer. They told a touching story of how recently, a bulldozer opening the road to the developer's site exhumed the bodies of their dead. The remains of a prominent member of the community who died 35 years ago was excavated recently. And they said strange things have been happening in Toge community after the reburial.

The host communities expressed their worry and anger at the reckless impunity of quarry operators whose offensive activities threaten their existence and general survival in their ancestral land. Apart from that, they said; "no government officials visited the community to check the effects of the exploiters harmful activities, and the magnitude of their suffering". They also complained of lacking the relevant skills and resources to prosecute their struggle against those whose destructive actions may force them out of their ecological inheritance.

The communities requested U-RED and government to stand in solidarity with them to fight the injustice threatening their existence. They also pleaded with the media houses present for space for advocacy to publish and expose the threat to their existence for the entire world to see and join them to stop the menace.

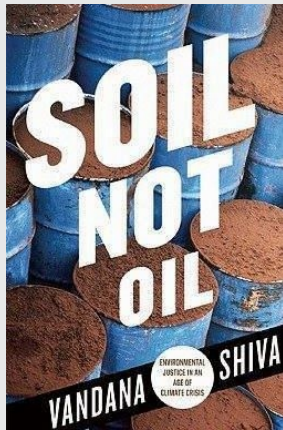
Government officials present in the programme from Federal Ministry of Environment, Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB), and National Environmental Standards Regulation and Enforcement Agency (NESREA) seized the opportunity to reiterate government's stand against harmful mining citing

several legislations on quarrying and blasting operations, compliance monitoring and enforcement. They also acknowledged receiving numerous public complaints about quarry companies operating without due regards to the environment, health and economy of the communities. The officials said, government does not encourage destructive development hence it has worked hard to monitor, enforce environmental laws, prosecute and punish offenders to ensure safe environment for all.

However, the officials said government cannot do the job alone. That communities are government's extended-hand/watch dog and advised the communities to work closely with the government to monitor and report any mining activities going on in their communities, especially quarries that are less than three kilometres to the community. Communities members were urged to be bold, confront exploiters and ask questions on what they are doing in the community.

The chief of Toge community, HRH Auta Gbatsubwa on behalf of the other communities said the meeting created a unique platform for the communities to interact and learn from each other's experiences. With relief on his face, he said, the programme came at the right time to douse the tension in the communities.

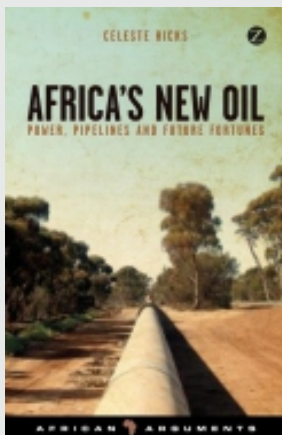
BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ



With "Soil Not Oil," Vandana Shiva connects the dots between industrial agriculture and climate change. Shiva shows that a world beyond dependence on fossil fuels and globalization is both possible and necessary.

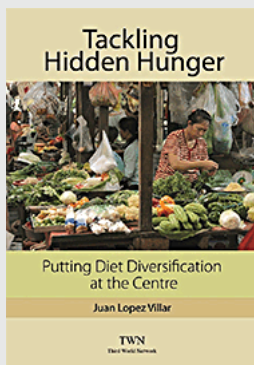
Condemning industrial agriculture as a recipe for ecological and economic disaster, Shiva's champion is the small, independent farm: their greater productivity, their greater potential for social justice as they put more resources into the hands of the poor, and the biodiversity that is inherent to the traditional farming practiced in small-scale agriculture. What we need most in a time of changing climates and millions hungry, she argues, is sustainable, biologically diverse farms that are more resistant to disease, drought, and flood. In her trademark style, she draws solutions to our world's most pressing problems on the head of a pin: "The solution to climate change," she observes, "and the solution to poverty are the same."

Using Shiva's organization Navdanya--praised by Barbara Kingsolver as "a small, green Eden framed against the startling blue backdrop of the Himalayas"--as a model, "Soil Not Oil" lays out principles for feeding the planet that are socially just and environmentally sound. Shiva then expands her analysis to broader issues of globalization and climate change, arguing that a healthy environment and a just world go hand in hand. Unwavering and truly visionary, "Soil Not Oil" proposes a solution based on self-organization, sustainability, and community rather than corporate power and profits.



Africa's New Oil: Power, Pipelines and Future Fortunes

The development of Africa's oil has greatly accelerated in recent years, with some countries looking at the prospect of almost unimaginable flows of money into their national budgets. But the story of African oil has usually been associated with conflict, corruption and disaster, with older producers such as Nigeria having little to show for the many billions of dollars they've earned. In this eye-opening book, former BBC correspondent Celeste Hicks questions the inevitability of the so-called resource curse, revealing what the discovery of oil means for ordinary Africans, and how China's involvement could mean a profound change in Africa's relationship with the West. A much-needed account of an issue that will likely transform the fortunes of a number of African countries - for better or for worse.



The scourge of "hidden hunger" or micronutrient deficiency affects around two billion people worldwide who lack adequate intake of vitamins and minerals in their diet. While several international and regional initiatives are underway to combat malnutrition, and specifically micronutrient deficiency, these have largely focused on the approaches of nutrient supplementation and food fortification at the expense of dietary diversification, considered the most durable solution to hidden hunger. The development of nutritionally enhanced genetically engineered crops, such as "Golden Rice", has further attracted controversy and raises serious biosafety concerns.

For a global strategy on nutrition to be successful, this book argues, it must place central emphasis on diversifying diets. Towards this end, sustainable farming practices based on agricultural biodiversity, such as agroecology, are key to providing the rich variety of foods that will keep hidden hunger at bay.

U-RED organized the programme on the premise that local communities and individuals have the right to a clean and healthy environment, to livelihood, to life, right of nature, right to participate in decision making on all matters that affect the community and environment especially on developments that may adversely affect the community and environment as stipulated in the LFN on quarry and blasting operations of 2013.

The outcome of the programme was the immediate decision to set up Community Ecological Defence Action Committee (CEDAC) as recommended by U-RED for environmental monitoring, dialogue, justice and dignity employing every legal means available.

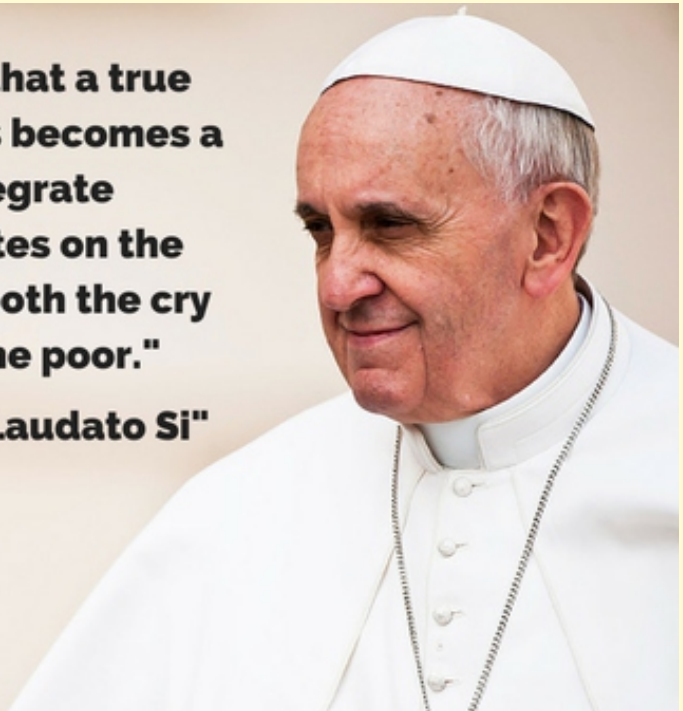
U-RED uses this forum to offer her sincere thanks to the Almighty God, Global Greengrants Fund (GGF), Nnimmo Bassey MFR (Executive Director HOME), and to many other people who provided resources, guidance, and perspective for the programme. We also thank community chiefs and the host communities for believing in us. 🌱

God'spower Martins is the Executive Director, Urban-Rural Environmental Defenders (U-RED).

QUOTES WORTH READING

"Today...we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

Pope Francis, "Laudato Si"



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