Our Forests Are More Than Just Trees

Outrage as NBMA Pushes Monsanto’s GMOs Into Nigeria

Of Stewardship And Caution
The Eco-Instigator is a quarterly publication of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)

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Outrage On Monsanto And NBMA Push For GMOs Into Nigeria 44
The second quarter of 2016 was a roller-coaster season. Highlights include the continued struggle to save our last remaining rainforests in the Cross River axis of Nigeria. Threatened communities (Edondon, Okokori, Old and New Ekuri) as well as non-governmental organisations have worked to ensure that the proposed Super highway does not decimate community forests, displace communities and lock in poverty in the resource-rich territory. HOMEF spent three days (9th-11th June 2016) in some of the communities, facilitating dialogues and offering training on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as advocacy and ecological/forest defence tool. The collaboration of NGOCE, Peace Point Action, GREENCODE, Lokiaka Community Development Centre and Rural Action for Green Environment was invaluable. We include media reports from the engagements in this edition.

HOMEF acknowledges the support of The GEF Small Grants Programme Nigeria (GEF-SGP) implemented by UNDP for the forest community capacity building project including for the publication building of this edition of your favourite Eco-Instigator.

May 10, 12 and 14 were special days for us within the Global Breakfree from Fossil Fuels mobilisations. HOMEF marched and held teach-ins at Oloibiri (Bayelsa State), the site of the first oil well in Nigeria, Bori – Ogoni (Rivers State) and Ibeno on the Atlantic coast of Akwa Ibom State. Nigeria. The events sent strong calls for the clean-up of the Niger Delta and reiterated our call to Keep the Oil in the Ground. Actions in 14 other countries underscored the vital importance of these climate actions. The Breakfree events succeeded because of the strong support of 350.org, Chief Nengi James Foundation, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Social Action, Peoples Advancement Centre, Kabetkache Women Development Centre, Peace Point Action and several others. We bring you reports and photos from the events.

For three days, environmental experts and stakeholders met in Abuja to strategize on what would be the policy direction for environmental governance in Nigeria. We bring you a report from that gathering.

A dark blot on our horizon has been the granting of permits for Monsanto Agriculture Nigeria Ltd to introduce GMOs in Nigeria. We bring you a report from a major Biosafety Conference we co-hosted with the African Faith and Justice Network and other groups in Abuja in May 2016. We also bring you statements and essays on the GMO debacle and the continuing struggle to keep the risky, needless, technology off our lands.

In addition, our Sustainability Academy #07 held at the University of Abuja on 15th June and at LUFASI Nature Park, Lagos on 17th June 2016. We as as Instigators, Hilma Mote of Africa Labour Research Institute and Ruth Nyambura, ace eco-feminist. They examined the climate change COP21 with the perspectives of the youths, geo-politics and continental challenges. Both instigators became HOMEF Fellows at a ceremony at LUFASI Nature Park, with foremost environmentalist, Desmond Majekodunmi, presenting their fellowship plaques.

The clean up of Ogoni and other communities in the Niger Delta was flagged off on 2nd June 2016. That date became a clear milestone in the struggle for the remediation of our extremely polluted Niger Delta region. HOMEF was a part of this landmark event. And we are keeping a deeply interested watch over developments in that direction.

As usual we serve you poetry, book reviews and books we suggest that you read. And, do not forget that we welcome your feedback.

Until victory!

Nnimmo
3 DAYS OF ACTIONS: OLOIBIRI, BORI, IBENO
BREAKING FREE FROM FOSSIL FUELS: 10TH-14TH MAY 2016

At Oloibiri: A Monument to Pollution

On the 10th of May 2016, activists from around Nigeria gathered in the Niger Delta to commence the push for a shift from fossil fuels tagged “Break Free from Fossil Fuels”.

Actions began at Oloibiri in Bayelsa State, at the first oil well site in Nigeria drilled in 1956. Community chiefs, women and Children, CSOs and NGOs groups came together to say no to fossil fuels and to demand for the total clean up of the Niger Delta. They demanded that the Government should cleanup and develop their environment, fossil fuels should be left in soil and gas flaring should be stopped totally in the region.

“This day is a special day as it marks a turning point in our lives, in the past we had hopes for a better tomorrow but now that hope is dashed, just as this well has been abandoned so has the people in Oloibiri has been abandoned and dispossessed of their livelihood.

Oil extraction has brought us much problems in our community, so we are joining the organizers of this great action to tell our government to leave our oil in the soil and clean up the already polluted environment in the Niger Delta” - Chairman and Chief of Ogbia community.
In respect to the actions an environmental activist and artist Comrade Akpotu and his Bio-Magic music group performed some environment themed songs in defense of Mother Earth. They passed the message that we need a breath of fresh air in the Niger Delta and demanded a stop to gas flaring which has ravaged the region since the discovery of oil in 1956.

The leadership and members of the Ogbia brotherhood worldwide, a community led youth group also expressed their displeasure about the environmental state of their community in a message conveyed through their Chairman: “our community has become a living hell as we longer have drinking water, no development in our community and environment, so we are using this medium to call upon the federal government to clean up our environment now.”

**Ogoni breaks free from Fossil fuels**

The second phase of the Break Free from fossil fuels action in Nigeria was held in the MOSOP Peace Centre in Bori Ogoni, on the 12th May 2016.

We started with a peaceful solidarity match from the MOSOP Peace Centre into Bori community and a visit to B-Dere community which has been totally ravaged by oil spills.

The rally at the Peace Centre featured recitation of Ken Saro-Wiwa’s last statement at the Tribunal that condemned him. This was done by the Spirit of Ogoni. Speeches were made by the secretary of MOSOP as well as by Nnimmo Bassey of HOMEF, Comrades Ken Henshaw of Social Action and Celestine Akpobari of Peoples Advancement Centre.

**FISH not OIL: Break Free at Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State on 14th May 2016**

The Break Free rally at Ibeno Beach was preceded by a seminar at Mkpanak Hall. The event was anchored by Kentebe Ebiaridor. Participants were welcomed by Umo Isuako, executive director of Peace Point Action.

Another Speaker, Dr. Charles from Ibeno community, a medical Doctor and Director of Profound Love Health Initiative gave brief words on the Health impact of pollution in their land. He explained that it has been scientifically proven by researchers from University of Port Harcourt that prostate cancer and cancer of the blood is now so rampant in Ibeno and other parts of the region due to pollution from the extractive industries around these communities. He further explained that in Ibeno they also experience acid rain and various respiratory diseases as a result of heavy pollution from the gas flares in the community. With all these health cases we must stop gas flaring and pollution in our land, he concluded.

In addition Chief Dr Iyang Okon a community leader from Ibeno reminded all that Ibeno plays host to Exxon Mobil, In spite of this, the locals are not accorded the opportunity to work in the organization.
A popular Nollywood actor, Umoh Okon, spoke about the state of the environment in Nigeria, demanding a halt to environmental destruction in the Niger Delta. The humorist said that in stories often end with the phrase and they live happily ever after. He noted that in the case of the Niger Delta, “the story is different as we always read and the oil left the people crying ever after.”

This was followed by a 20 minutes’ march to beach for the closing rally. At the beach, participants dipped their palms into the ocean and declared their resolve to keep demanding that the nation breaks free from fossil fuels so that when we did our hands in water it doesn’t come out stained by crude oil or by blood.

Solidarity Messages

In solidarity members of the community began to give their messages in support of leaving the oil in the soil. Among them was the chairman of the association of artisanal fishermen in Ibena, Pastor Samuel Ayadi. “We need fish, not oil,” he said. These oil companies have come into our land to destroy our environment. We no longer get fishes along our coast except we sail deep into the ocean. Even then what we get is very poor due to oil pollution.”

A woman leader from Ibena community, Madam Maria Edem, stressed, “We, the women need our fish not oil.” Madam Nora Asuquo, also from Ibena, added that “oil should not only be left untapped, the pollution must also be cleaned up.”
Thousands Worldwide Took Part in Largest Global Civil Disobedience in the History of the Climate Movement
A global wave of peaceful direct actions lasting for 12 days took place across six continents targeting the world's most dangerous fossil fuel projects

Twelve days of unprecedented worldwide action against fossil fuels have just concluded, showing that the climate movement will not rest until all coal, oil and gas is kept in the ground. The combined global efforts of activists on six continents now pose a serious threat to the future of the fossil fuel industry, already weakened by financial and political uncertainty.

Tens of thousands of activists took to the streets, occupied mines, blocked rail lines, linked arms, paddled in kayaks and held community meetings in 13 countries, pushing the boundaries of conventional protest to find new ways to demand coal, oil and gas stay in the ground. Participants risked arrest -- many for the first time -- to say that it's time to Break Free from the current energy paradigm that is locking the planet into a future of catastrophic climate change.

Driving this unprecedented wave of demonstrations is the sudden and dramatic acceleration in the warming of the planet, with every single month of 2016 shattering heat records - combined with the growing gap between world governments' stated climate ambitions, and their demonstrated actions in approving new fossil fuel projects. On the last day of mobilisation, a key monitoring site on Tasmania recorded atmospheric carbon-dioxide exceeding 400 parts per million for the first time ever.

These actions took place under the banner of Break Free, which refers to the need to shift away from our current dependency on fossil fuels to a global energy system powered by 100% renewable energy.
In 2015, 90% of new energy capacity came from renewables, signaling that a rapid transition to 100% renewable energy is more feasible than ever.

As the impacts of a warming planet become more visible in the form of rising sea levels, drought and stronger storms, the citizens who joined Break Free will continue to be a part of the next phase of the movement as it becomes more vocal, disruptive and powerful.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Thousands worldwide risked arrest during the actions, many for the first time.
- $20 million worth of coal shipments were halted by activists shutting down the largest coal port in the world in Newcastle, Australia.
- The UK’s largest opencast coal mine was shut down for a day.
- Hundreds occupied the first Nigerian oil well at Oloibiri, marched at Bori Ogoni and Ibeno demanding for an end to oil spills and gas flares, a clean up of the Niger Delta. They also demanded that the polluting oil should be kept in the ground to tackle global warming.

Hundreds stood up to South Africa’s most powerful family with a march that delivered coal to their front door, despite their attempts to silence civil society by pressuring police to revoke permits for a march.

Dozens of people occupied train tracks overnight on both coasts of the United States to stop oil-filled ‘bomb trains’ from rolling through communities — including less than 100 feet from low-income public housing in Albany, New York.

3,500 people shut down one of Europe’s biggest carbon polluters in Germany, occupying a lignite mine and nearby power station for over 48 hours, reducing the plant’s capacity by 80 percent.
10,000 marched against a proposed coal plant in Batangas, the Philippines.

3,000 sent an ear-splitting message to Indonesia’s president with a whistle demonstration against coal in Jakarta, and a few days later 12 activists climbed the cranes supplying coal for the Cirebon Coal Power Plant, and dropping banners to Quit Coal and for Clean Energy, Clean Air.

Community members blocked traffic outside the gates of Brazil’s largest thermal coal plant, in Ceará.

On land and water, indigenous communities and local activists blockaded the Kinder Morgan tar sands facility in Metro-Vancouver, unceded Coast Salish Territories.

150+ local activists marched and occupied the entrance of two fossil fuel refineries, which are the largest unaddressed source of carbon pollution in the Northwest of the United States.

In Aliaga, Turkey 2000 people marched to the gates of the Izmir region’s largest coal dump, and surrounded it with a giant red line, as a call to end plans for the massive expansion of coal in the country.

GLOBAL ACTIONS:

May 3: Wales - UK
Three hundred people halted operations at the UK’s largest opencast coal mine at Ffos-y-fran in South Wales, making it the biggest ever mass action in a UK coal mine with the majority of participants joining a climate action for the first time. The occupation and blockade ended after 12 hours with no arrests.

May 4, 14: Philippines
Some 10,000 people marched in the streets of Batangas City opposing a proposed 600MW coal-fired power plant and to demand the cancellation of another 27 proposed plants in the country. The march, led by Archbishop Ramon Arguelles, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Lipa, also included activists from many organisations as well as thousands of people from coal-impacted communities. Days later, hundreds of community members in Calaca demonstrated against a proposed coal plant expansion project there.

May 5-15: United States
In Sacramento, Central Valley community members sat-in outside of Governor Brown’s office. In Philadelphia, hundreds of people marched to the largest refinery on the east coast. In Colorado, hundreds of people disrupted an auction selling public lands for fossil fuel extraction, as seven people held a sit-in blocking the room where the auction was being held. Over 2,000 people protested refinery pollution in the Pacific Northwest and blockaded oil trains for three full days culminating in at least 52 arrests. In Albany, 2,000 people marched and blockaded bomb trains, resulting in five arrests. Hundreds occupied a proposed fracking site outside Denver, and in California dozens blocked the road to the Porter Ranch gas facility, which was the site of the largest methane leak in the history of the US. Led by frontline community members, 1,300 people marched in Washington, DC to call on President Obama to end to offshore drilling; and outside of Chicago, 1,500 people protested proposed the expansion of BP’s Whiting refinery.

May 6-13: New Zealand
Day after day dozens of people shut down ANZ bank branches in Christ Church, Wellington, Auckland, and Dunedin calling for ANZ to divest from fossil fuels.

May 8: Australia
An armada of kayakers blocked the Newcastle harbour entrance while 70 people blocked a critical rail crossing preventing any coal from getting to the port for over six hours.
In total 2,000 people took part in the action shutting down the world’s largest coal port for a day, preventing the shipment of almost 2 megatonnes of coal during the protest. In Western Australia, over 150 occupied the headquarters of BP & Chevron, blocking a busy intersection in front, with two arrests.

**May 9-14: Brazil**
A series of anti-fracking events led up to over 300 people marching through the streets of Uruamama, in the state of Paraná, towards the City Hall where a Bill to ban fracking in this city was being voted. In the presence of the marchers, the city councilors unanimously agreed to declare Usaramama fracking free. Then on the 14th, over 500 people marched on the highway used to deliver coal to a power plant in Ceará. The March included people from 20 municipalities, four Indigenous ethnic groups (Anacé, Pitaguary, Tapeba and Tremembé), fishermen and residents of the coastal zone, farmers and residents of the inner cities severely affected by drought.

**May 10-14: Nigeria**
A coalition of climate justice organisations gathered with representatives of oil communities at Oloibiri, the site of the first oil well in Nigeria, as well as at Ogoni and Ibeno to emphasize fossil fuel’s role in climate change, calling for an end to the Nigerian economic dependence on oil and to reduce adverse effects of climate change. The activists also demanded an end to the extreme pollution caused by endless oil spills and toxic dumps in the Niger Delta. At the concluding action at Ibeno, fisherfolks called for an halt to oil extraction, insisting that fish is far more valuable than crude oil.

**May 11-15: Indonesia**
More than 3,500 participants marched in Jakarta carrying banners with slogans such as ‘Stop Dirty Energy Investments’ and ‘Stop Pollution, Stop Using Coal’, as they called for President Joko Widodo to move Indonesia, one of the world’s biggest coal producers, away from coal and embrace renewable energy. On 15 May, 12 Greenpeace activists stopped operations at the Cirebon Coal Power Plant for 12 hours, the activists unfurled banners saying ‘Quit Coal’ and ‘Clean Energy, Clean Air’ from both cranes supplying the coal terminal.

**May 12-14: South Africa**
Affected communities represented by 200 people including farmers and private citizens gathered to speak about the daily realities of living in a town with the most polluted air in the world at Emalahleni, which directly translated means “place of coal.” A picket of 45 people was organized outside Medupi and Exxaro coal mine in Lephalale, which will be one of the world’s biggest coal-power stations. Also 400 participants joined the National Bread March to protest the increasing cost of food as a consequence of the severe drought the country is suffering. Finally, despite efforts by the Guptas to shut down a mass action at their residence – hundreds of people rallied at the nearby Zoo Lake to speak out about corrupt mining deals, and 15 people delivered a coffin of coal to the doorstep of the Gupta residence.

**May 13-15: Germany**
More than 3500 activists from all over Europe shut down the opencast coal mine Welzow-Süd in the Lusatia coal fields. While hundreds entered the mine, others blocked coal trains and conveyor belts transporting coal to the power plants. Around 300 people continued the blockade overnight. On 14 May another 2000 activists cut off coal power plant Schwarze Pumpe from all coal supplies. Around 120 were arrested and released the next day. Five occupations continued over another night. After the power plant had been blocked for more than 48 hours, the activists stopped the blockade on Sunday, May 15th.
May 14: Canada
Over 800 people took action to surround the Kinder Morgan facility on the Salish Coast. On the land, activists locked messages onto the gates of the facility, staged a sit-in and painted a giant mural. On the water a massive kayak flotilla swarmed the pipeline’s tanker terminal.

May 14: Ecuador
The group Yasunidos took over close to 500 hectares destined to built an oil refinery called Refinería del Pacífico, where Ecuador plans to process the oil extracted at the Yasuní National Park. Yasunidos planted 1 tree in the area, and managed to stay in the premise for about three hours after peacefully passing through the security control. Since the action, members of the Yasunidos have been facing harassment and public discredit on behalf of Correa’s government and those backing the fossil project.

May 15: Turkey
Community leaders, led two thousand people in Aliaga in a march through to a coal waste site and called for the stopping of four fossil fuel projects in the surrounding area. The activists made a human chain and spelled out the word “Stop” (“Dur” in Turkish).

Break Free Quotes
“This is the hottest year we’ve ever measured, and so it is remarkably comforting to see people rising up at every point of the compass to insist on change,” Bill McKibben, co-founder of 350.org

“As our communities rise against this addiction to coal, we hope to inspire massive civil participation all over the planet. Break Free is a breath of hope for all communities who are standing up to the fossil fuel industry’s relentless expansion despite climate change,” Yeb Saño Executive Director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia.

“Breaking free from fossil fuels is a vote for life and for the planet. The Paris Agreement signed by world leaders ignored the fact that burning fossil fuels is the major culprit in global warming. In these actions the peoples of the world will insist that we must come clean of the fossil fuels addiction,” Nnimmo Bassey, HOMEF

“The global climate justice movement is rising fast. But so are the oceans. So are global temperatures. This is a race against time. Our movement is stronger than ever, but to beat the odds, we have to grow stronger,” Naomi Klein, award winning journalist.✅
OUR FORESTS ARE MORE THAN JUST TREES: FELLED TREES, FAILED EIAs, MOBILISED PEOPLES

Dialogues in our Forests

We are connected and interconnected by the environment. And the state of our environment can be measured by the state of our forests. When our forests are threatened, we are all threatened. When communities are threatened everyone should be concerned.

The letters to the Governor of Cross Rivers State, written by the Ekuri Traditional Rulers Council on 7th February 2016, and by the Okokori Traditional Rulers Council on 13th February 2016, brought to light the unexpected about-face of the government that had promised to situate the Cross River State as a green state, to possibly one that is brown or grey. The two letters notified the world of the alarming revocation of occupancy of a 20.4 km swath of land along a 260km length of a proposed superhighway. We would have been surprised if the world was not outraged by the threat the communities faced.

The Traditional Rulers and many observers were piqued by the Public Notice of Revocation signed by the Commissioner for Lands and Urban Development and published in Weekend Chronicle, of 22nd January 2016. Among other thing, the government ordered that “all rights of occupancy existing or deemed to exist on all that piece of land or parcel of land lying and situate along the Super Highway from Esighi, Bakassi Local Government Government Area to Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State covering a distance of 260km approximately and having an offset of 200m on either side of the centre line of the road and further 10km after the span of the Super Highway, excluding Government Reserves and public institutions are hereby revoked for overriding public purpose absolutely.”
That declaration was troubling for many reasons, including that:

1. Taking such lands out of the control of owners could lead to massive displacement thus rendering the people landless and threatening their cultures
2. The land area referred amounts to about a fifth of the landmass of Cross River State and grabbing such a landmass for one set of projects has serious implications
3. There will be a real danger of serious deforestation, illegal logging and poaching
4. There will be a heavy loss of biodiversity including already endangered species that are endemic in the area
5. The Cross River Forests and National Park would be irreversibly threatened

A project of the size of the superhighway cannot be executed without an approved Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). As it has been seen, bulldozing of forests and farmlands have been carried out without an approved EIA and in defiance of Stop Work Orders issued by the Federal Ministry of Environment.

The draft EIA prepared by the State Government has eventually been reviewed and rejected and the government is back to the drawing board on the matter. What the mean failure of the draft EIA means is that there should be no further work on the ‘project’ until there is an approved EIA. We note that an EIA cannot be said to be acceptable if the people to be affected by the project are not involved in the process of its preparation and if the document is not presented in a language that the affected people understand. So far we have not seen any serious engagement with affected communities.

We are meeting today to talk about our forests. It is essential that we sit together, recall what the state of our forest was in the past, consider what the situation is at present and then ask ourselves if things are better or worse than they were before. This is a very essential dialogue because sometimes we are so busy struggling to survive while ignoring the very things that would make our lives better if only we spent a few moments to review them.

If through our dialogue we find that things have changed in a way that we should be concerned about, we will then ask why the change occurred, who was responsible and what can be done to repair the situation. In other words, we are embarking on a diagnostic environmental dialogues. Our forests are too precious and you have stood out as excellent custodians of the remaining high forests in Nigeria. We are here to assure you that the world is with you.

There is severe pressure from growing demands for timber and land for developmental purposes. These result in the conversion or degradation of forests into unsustainable forms of land use forgetting the fact that forests are complex systems of closely inter-related and inter dependent ecosystems and any harm done to any components of the forest directly affects the entire forest system. It is time for us to say that development must support our lives and not make us refugees in our own land.

In line with our conviction that the forest system is a broad subset of the environment, and that the environment is our life, we at Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) are collaborating with you and other forest dependent communities to work towards monitoring our forests and ensuring that they are preserved for our good and that of future generations.

Preserving our forests is equal to preserving our lives and cultures. Healthy forests support healthy living and bulldozers are never the friends of our forests.

Let the dialogue continue!

(Welcome words by Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation, at the Community Forest Dialogues held at Okokori and Ekuri, Cross River State, Nigeria on 9-10 June 2016)
The submission of the UNEP report on the assessment of the Ogoni environment in August 2011 laid to rest any doubts anyone may have had over the degree of hydrocarbons pollution in the Ogoniland, and by implication the Niger Delta. That scientific work proved to the whole world that Ogoniland has suffered extreme pollution and by interpretation that the response ought to be one of environmental emergency. For years down the road, there has been nothing concrete beyond signposts to indicate that this signal was understood by government.

In his statement before execution, Ken Saro-Wiwa declared that we all stand before history. Today, in another sense, we all stand at the brink of history. We stand at the line denoting the fact of the justness of the historic, determined and heroic calls for a clean up of Ogoniland. We salute the memory of the Ogoni 13 and all that have laid down their lives, lost their limbs and were displaced in the hard and long years of struggle for justice. Today we stand in solidarity with our peoples who still breathe air loaded with hydrocarbon fumes, drink water laced with toxic chemicals, fish and farm in polluted lands. Today we recall a fragment from one of the letters Ken Saro-Wiwa wrote during his last imprisonment and note his cry for environmental justice:

“I'm not going into partisan politics. What I meant is that I would be taking a wider role in the nation's affairs—expanding the Ogoni struggle to other parts of the delta and beyond. I could never be a part of whatever Abacha is planning for the future. What I want to see, and what I will always argue for is ERECTISM — ethnic autonomy, resource and environmental control. If this comes to pass, then Ogoni will be free and it is to them that I wish to dedicate the rest of my life. And I hope that that can be an example to other ethnic groups. The translation of my dreams into reality. Nothing to do with partisan politics.”
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THE ECO INSTIGATOR

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With decades of extreme hydrocarbons pollution, the environment of Ogoniland and several places in the Niger Delta has been out of control. The environment that ought to provide the backdrop for life, safety and progress, indeed turned hostile, becoming an impediment to the enjoyment of the right to life.

We applaud the courage of President Muhammadu Buhari as he flags off the cleaning of the environment of Ogoniland as the pathway to the detoxification of the Niger Delta environment. Taking this step at a time such as we are in is a mark of commitment that we must salute.

I believe that civil society and concerned peoples of this great nation, will pledge to contribute our quota to see that this is not a mere political event, but one that is adequately funded, systematically pursued and implemented with clear targets and milestones, with best available expertise and with the full inclusion of local communities. As we commit to do this, we keep in mind the stanza of our national anthem which declares: the labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain.

Several issues have emerged since the judicial murder of the stormy petrel of Ogoniland; the late Kenule Saro-Wiwa popular known and referred to simply as Ken. Part of the bequest of Ken is the sense of valour and fearlessness in tackling matters pertaining to the exploration of oil in Ogoniland and the attendant destruction of lives, the environment and properties.

They were beaten and bloodied. They were used by rampaging trigger-happy military personnel for target practice but they were not cowed into subservience. Curiously they refused to retreat and give away an inch of their soil to the combined might of the military, Shell and their local collaborators. They fought to retain self respect, overcame the intimidation and the pall of fear that wrapped the community like a dark blanket.

Since the death of Ken, the Ogonis have taken with equanimity all that life with its vagaries has hauled at them. They have learnt so much but their major sources of knowledge are principally three books: the Bible, the UNEP report and the literatures of Ken.
The Bible provided the anchor of faith that the turbulent years of their lives will invariably come to an end. With the UNEP report comes the knowledge of every kind of carcinogens that are prevalent in Ogoniland. Their conversations are always lavishly sprayed with names of chemicals like benzene, hydrocarbon, trace elements of chromium, metals such as iron, copper and vanadium. These are chemicals that the UNEP report said existed in Ogoniland at about 900 percent higher than acceptable standards. They quote copiously from the works of Ken to back their arguments which has given Ken a cult like followership in the land especially recalling his last comment. That statement rings through the creeks, the hamlets and the towns of Ogoniland egging them on to keep faith for victory. Ogoni has become the metaphor for the wrong choices made in building a sustainable energy livelihood in the country.

The Ogonis have through the period acquired a very high level of numeracy especially the numbers that reduced so abruptly and sharply the life expectancy of the Ogoni people to just 50 years. Many of these innocent people have for no fault of theirs bathed in rivers flowing with chemicals, eaten produce that are tainted and inhaled hydrogen spiced air and have been exposed, all of their lives to the ravages that are unacceptable in any human habitation. Organ failure is more common than common cold in Ogoniland. There are a couple of families where the next in rank to the oldest person is merely in his or her thirties. With the cleanup they believe that life will be kinder and less brutal for them. That life will no longer be short and brutish. That life will once more be blissful, that they can sit by the fire and tell stories of how long ago they had to battle forces of environmental terrorism to get freedom from pollutants. It is a 30 years journey but with hope renewed at the launch there will be springs in their steps, songs on their lips and joy in their hearts. It will certainly be a less tedious walk for the people of Ogoni.

Let the clean up as it has begun with the sense of euphoria and expectation for the most good for most of the community be a moment for dreams of development and growth and not a period to worry over the memories to catch and hang vultures.

http://thenationonlineng.net/ogonis-can-dream/
'WE WANT SUPERHIGHWAY, BUT DON'T DEPLETE OUR FOREST'

By Nicholas Kalu, Calabar

As controversies over the Cross River State superhighway rage, communities have begged that they do not want it to cause the damage of their forests.

The superhighway, proposed by Governor Ben Ayade, is to run 260km from Bakassi Local Government Area in the southern senatorial district to Bekwarra local government area in the northern senatorial district. Both points are extremes of the state.

The state is host to the largest remaining rainforest in Nigeria, which are globally acknowledged as one of the richest sites for biodiversity in the world.

The forest communities of Edondon and Okokori in Obubra Local Government Area as well as the New Ekuri and Old Ekuri in Akamkpa Local Government areas urged the that the government should go ahead in a manner that would not affect the forests.

The communities, who spoke after a Community Dialogue on Forest and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) training organised by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in the two local government areas, said they had been preserving the forests for years, which they had inherited from their forefathers.

The state government said though over 250 trees would be affected by the project, about 5 million more would be planted. Also, setting the communities are on edge is a gazette published by the state government revoking 10kms on either side of the entire stretch of the road.

Though the government had said that the area would be for development control, this has done little to assuage the nerves of the people who do not understand what this really means.

The Village head of Old Ekuri, Chief Steven Oji, said: “We learnt about sustainable management. We started conserving our forests from our forefathers. And until now we do not even allow logging companies to come here and log. That is why you see this beautiful forest and we don't want people to come and destroy it. Because of this the whole is thanking us as it would provide oxygen to keep people alive. And they are going to pay us carbon credit for keeping the forests.

“We are not against the highway. We want highway, but the width of the highway should be constructed outside.”

Mr Innocent Imah Oyamo from Old Ekuri community said: “If the forest is healthy, we will be healthy. We have been preserving the forests from our ancestors. We would not just allow government to take over what we worked for over the years. If it was just the road, we would not have worried so much, but taking 10km from either side of the road, which is 20km times the total stretch of road is something we are very worried about. Conservation is our culture. We inherited it from our grandfathers. And we would partner any one who would help us conserve our forests and preserve our environments. We want the road but let a proper Environmental Impact Assessment be done so that our environment will not be degraded.”
Akamo Nathaniel from New Ekuri community said the forest was their source of livelihood and losing it could mean losing the means of income, their homes, heritage and culture.

Mr Okon Erem from Okokori community said: “The road should not lead to the destruction of the forests. If it is going to destroy our forests, we say no. Otherwise it is a welcome development. If they do a proper EIA where everyone would be involved, then there would be no problem. All we are saying is that let the right thing be done. Let the government leave the forests because the forest gives us life. The issue of 10km to the left and right is also unacceptable to us. This is the right time for us to insist that government should do the right thing. We are saying they will plant more trees for each one they cut, but how long will it take the trees to grow to replace our forests?”

Mbe Martins Jonah from Edondon community said: “We inherited the forests and do not want anything to kill it. The government should carry out a proper EIA so that we will not suffer. We wish it would not launch our people into poverty, because the extent of land the government is speculating would launch our people into poverty.”

Director of HOMEF, Rev Nnimmo Bassey said: “This is the last tract of full rain forest in Nigeria. It is a very valuable forest. This community is very valuable not just to the people living here, but to the global community, because they have managed the forests sustainably by themselves for decades now. These are people who know what the forests are worth.

“The forest is not just a tree that stands there. The forest is a very complex ecosystem. A place that supports cultures and life and providing the oxygen that we are all breathing. If we cut the forest we are more or less suffocating ourselves. So their own enlightened self-interest is to protect their environment and that interest they have in protecting the environment has a big advantage for the whole world. That is what we are for.

“We intend to bring the communities together to look at the place of EIA in development projects within forest communities. We want to raise issues about what the people should look out for when an EIA is prepared, the roles of communities in EIA preparation and hope to have a team of forest eco-defenders. These would be people who would keep a close eye on the forest, monitor it and report to the whole world changes they notice around here.”

260 KILOMETRES SUPER HIGHWAY: COMMUNITIES, CSOS DEMAND INVOLVEMENT IN EIA, COMPENSATION

By Bassey Inyang in Calabar

As controversy surrounding the construction of the proposed 260 kilometres in Cross River State rages, stakeholders in projects; the rainforest communities and civil society organisations (CSOs) have demanded that they be involved in the drafting of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), for the project.

The stakeholders also demanded that compensation be paid to the communities that would be affected by the construction of the proposed super highway, designed to extend from Bakassi in the state to Katsina-Ala in Benue State.

Their demand is coming amid fears that the EIA for the project done in March this year at the instance of the state government, was rejected by the Federal Ministry of Environment for allegedly being inadequate.

The stakeholders made the call in the resolution they reached at a two-day community dialogue and one day EIA training at Okokori and Ekuri communities in the central part of the state, held from June 9 to June 11, 2016, which was coordinated by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF).

These demands were contained in a 14-point communiqué signed and issued at the end of the events by representatives of Old Ekuri community; representatives of New Ekuri community; representatives of Okokori community; representatives of Edondon community; Ekuri Initiative, EI; Health of Mother Earth Foundation, HOMEF; Rural Action for Green Environment (RAGE) and Green Concern for Development (GREENCODE). The rest are Peace Point Action (PPA); Lakiaka Development Centre (LDC); Rainforest Research and Development Centre (RRDC); and NGO Coalition on Environment (NGOCE).

The document read in part: “At the end of a three day interactive community dialogue and EIA training, participants and community stakeholders from Edondon, Okokori, Old and New Ekuri resolved that they: “Need good roads but do not want their cultural heritage destroyed.

“Insist on active engagement of communities in the EIA process with adequate compensation paid where necessary; Write to Government to register their concerns relating to the proposed super highway project;

“Call for NGOs and International agencies support to build a stronger alliance against the super highway project especially with regard to threats to forests; Community’s FPIC must be sought in all projects before implementation;

“Protest and resist any unsustainable forest management practices in the forest rich region; Reduce every activity that promotes deforestation; Promote forest conservation and regeneration of indigenous trees in degraded areas.
“Minimise poaching, unregulated hunting and stop illegal wild life trade; Reject use of forest lands for large scale plantations; Campaign against water pollution and the indiscriminate use of chemicals; Strengthen the Community Forest Watch for effective community forest monitoring; Form a community health monitoring group to ensure sustainable forest management practices; and “Help to protect, preserve and conserve their forest which provides them with social, economic, spiritual benefits.”


500 BENEFIT FROM COMMUNITY DIALOGUE, EIA TRAINING IN CROSS RIVER

by Anietie Akpan, Calabar

No fewer than 500 people have benefitted from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) training programme organised by Health of Mother Earth Foundation, (HOMEF).

The training, which was aimed at building the capacity of relevant community stakeholders was in tandem with vision of EIA in tackling the issues related to forestry and its importance to the community. According to HOMEF, the three-day training benefitted participants from Okokori and Edondon in Obubra Local Government Area; Old Ekuri and New Ekuri from Akamkpa Local government Area of Cross Rivers.

Director, HOMEF, Reverend Nnimmo said the training programme which many papers and issues were presented, brought out much awareness on EIA, the superhighway and benefits of forest to the people and the world at large. The proposed digital super highway is a good thing and they support it but added, “the state government must do it in accordance with a proper EIA”, hence they rejected the absolute revocation and acquisition of 10km right of way of their forest land on either side of the proposed superhighway which threatens their biodiversity rich forest and its resources, the environment and livelihoods they depend on for daily survival were of great concern.

Rev Bassey said, “this is the last tract of full rain forest in Nigeria. It is a very valuable forest. The forest is not just a tree that stands there. The forest is a very complex ecosystem. A place that supports cultures and life and providing the oxygen that we are all breathing. If we cut the forest we are more or less suffocating ourselves. So their own enlightened self-interest is to protect their environment and that interest they have in protecting the environment has a big advantage for the whole world.”

He said the training was to bring the communities together to look at the place of EIA in development projects within forest communities and issues about what the people should look out for when an EIA is prepared, the roles of communities in EIA preparation were raised in addition to having a team of forest eco-defenders.

At the end of the three day interactive dialogue and training which took place at Okokori and Old Ekuri from June 9 to 11, the participants and community stakeholders resolved that they “need good roads but do not want their cultural heritage destroyed” as current plan by the government will do.
The resolution which was signed by the Village Head of Old Ekuri, Chief Steven Orji; New Ekuri village Head, Chief Abel Egbe; Edondon Youth Chairman George Nbeh and nine others insisted “on active engagement of communities in the EIA process with adequate compensation paid where necessary and to write to government to register their concerns relating to the proposed super highway project”.

They also resolved that Community’s Free Prior and informed Consent (FPIC) must be sought in all projects before implementation as they are prepared to “protest and resist any unsustainable forest management practices in the forest rich region.”

Accordingly, the state government was advised to “reduce every activity that promotes deforestation” but should “promote forest conservation and regeneration of indigenous trees in degraded areas”. It called for a minimized poaching, unregulated hunting and stop to illegal wild life trade in the precinct forest and “reject use of forest lands for large scale plantations, water pollution and the indiscriminate use of chemicals”.

Commenting on the training programme, the Village Head of Old Ekuri, Chief Steven Oji, said, “we learnt about sustainable management. We started conserving our forests from our forefathers. And until now we do not even allow logging companies to come here and log. That is why you see this beautiful forest and we don’t want people to come and destroy it. Because of this the whole is thanking us as it would provide oxygen to keep people alive. And they are going to pay us carbon credit for keeping the forests.

“We are not against the highway. We want highway, but the width of the highway should be what they have been constructing outside and not our own to be a different thing, by coming to destroy all our forests.”

Also commenting on the training programme which took some of the resource persons to the forest, the Principal Community Secondary School, Old Ekuri, Mr. Philip Ita Okoma said, “the training programme is very useful because it has further opened our eyes to many issues on the EIA and forest conservation. You see people have been coming here to deceive us. You see the super highway they are talking about, we are not against the super highway but the issue is that we don't want our forest to be destroyed because before our forefathers, we had already learnt and understand what is called conservation. So we will not like our governor in the name of coming to give us a road to destroy our forest.

Another trainee, Mbe Martins Jona from Edondon community, said, “we key into this programme keenly in the fact that in the forest area there is so much and we have been here because we inherited this forest from our fore fathers and they will not expect to see the intervention of government either from any form of developmental stride to cancel the depth of our forest by keeping us in poverty or hunger.

“The question I expect the government and their agents to answer is why government is planning to destroy over 250,000 trees that took over 100 to 200 years to mature into a forest with the small ones coming up. What will the government do with this large number of trees?
When will the so-called five million trees be planted and at where. When will it take to mature to give us the kind of protection we are getting from current timbers against global warming? Besides you don’t plant trees to grow a forest because a forest is natural with several other trees and other things in it. Why the green police instead of the usual forest rangers. I see this project as a scam.

Joseph Oyamo, a farmer, “for a very long time we have been conserving the forest and impoverishing ourselves. It is not that we don’t know we should extract timber and make money for ourselves. If the forest was destroyed years ago the government will not be interested in doing this road because there will be no timber for it to haul down and cart away. The Oban-Okoroba-Okuni road cutting across Akamkpa-Ikom which former Donald Duke started but not completed is there as the best alternative for the government to use and improve upon without coming into forest reserves to destroy over 250,000 trees if it was interested in doing a super highway.

“We found out that it was necessary for us to conserve our forest but the government which show us the way we can gain from our forest is now coming to take over our forest and we say no. we are ready to fight even with the last drop of our blood”.


WICKED GENES
by Nnimmo Bassey

Peddler of wicked genes, will you slide on gene drives? Knocking out, annihilating traits and yellowing all fruit flies? Have you considered the many techie graveyards littered with DDT, Agent Orange and all? Malaria will not be an excuse for you to unleash wahala on our already broken backs

You create a poison and sell the antidote
You create a virus and market anti-virus

Don’t crush my cultural webs, ecosystems and bio diversities
Just because you can spit in Mother Earth’s face
Trample on Genesis
And flaunt genetically modified technocrats

HIV-AIDS, Ebola, Zika…
Scratch your pouch and unleash some more

We see through your shady genetic scissors, errors and terrors
Your hypothetical benefits drowned in oceans of unquestionable risks
Time it is to break your addiction to crooked technofixes cause our DNA is not for sale,
Nor are we guinea pigs for your gene driven exterminator technologies

NB
NIGERIAN BIOSAFETY LAW: A KEG OF GUN POWDER

by Nnimmo Bassey

It is an honour to welcome you all to this conference jointly hosted by the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), the Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN), Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and Africa Europe Faith & Justice Network (AEFJN).

The ink with which the Nigerian Biosafety Management Act of 2015 was signed into law had hardly dried when the Nigerian Biosafety Management Agency (NABMA) quickly received applications for genetically modified maize and cotton from Monsanto Agricultural Nigeria Limited and advertised same for public comments. The rush was such that the advertisement of the applications published in Leadership (Thursday, February 25, 2016) had two display duration dates with one saying 29th February to 28th March 2016 and another paragraph stating 22nd February to 15 March 2016. Two conflicting dates in the same advert does raise cause for concern. Also puzzling is the fact that the advertisement was published in February 25, 2016 but the deadline mentioned in the notice took effect from February 22nd. We submitted objections to the two applications and copies of the objections are available for participants in this conference.

We were not surprised by the move of NABMA because even before the law was signed in the dying days of the previous administration, the National Agricultural Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) had at a press conference on 17th July 2014 stated that they were working to fast track the adoption of genetically modified organisms in Nigeria.
At that time, the agency claimed there were sufficient safeguards to protect Nigerians from the unpredictable consequences of introducing GMOs into our environment.

Their acclaimed safeguards included the “a draft Biosafety Bill, biosafety application guidelines, biosafety containment facilities guidelines, and a variety of forms such as those for accreditation, GMO import and shipment form and a host of drafts.”

The average Nigerians tend to think that any fruit that is bigger than normal is genetically modified. They also think that genetically modified crops grow rapidly, have high yields and are more nutritious than their normal counterparts. People routinely ask how the growing population would be fed without modern biotechnology.

All these are myths that the industry has quite successfully propagated. People believe these false claims without demanding for evidence beyond the scientific sounding terminologies: genetically, engineered, etc. Very few Nigerians know that genetic engineering is actually a cut and paste technology where genetic materials when inserted often arrives at unintended locations. Moreover, up to 70% of the world’s population is fed by small scale farmers and not from the products of genetic engineering. Indeed, a bulk of genetically engineered crops produced over the past two decades are used mostly as animal feed.

Some of us are concerned that agricultural modern biotechnology or genetic engineering is already being surreptitiously introduced into Nigeria. In 2006/2007 Friends of the Earth Africa groups detected illegal genetically modified rice on Nigeria’s market shelves. The findings were reported to the Federal Ministry of Environment and NAFDAC with no response from either. Finding an illegal GMO rice on Nigeria's market shelf through a very random search suggests to us that we may be sitting on a keg of gun powder.

Africa is a frontier yet to be conquered by the biotech industry. Attempts to introduce the engineered crops to small scale farmers have met spectacular failures- especially with regard to cotton engineered to be pest resistant – as have been exemplified in South Africa and Burkina Faso. Other than cotton, the attempts have been on staple crops that our peoples depend on, including cassava, beans (cowpea) and bananas. The significance of such attempts is that our staples are captured by the biotech industry, then our agriculture and food will inexorably fall into their control.

Genetic engineering is still a young science, even though there already are more extreme versions of biotechnology, notably, synthetic biology. As you will learn from this conference, the drawbacks of agricultural genetic engineering are numerous and work against the grain of African agricultural systems. For one, they are mostly grown as monocultures, depend on agro toxics or agro-chemicals and on artificial fertilizer.

Concerns include negative impact on agro-ecosystems, such as development of resistance in target insect pests, harmful effects on non-target insects, development of herbicide tolerance in weeds, and genetic erosion or loss of traditional crop diversity as a result of genetic contamination through cross-fertilization.

Scientists have illustrated that GM crops at most have similar yield levels as their natural counterparts.

As the research by the Union of Concerned Scientists in the USA showed, yield gains have been due to improved traditional breeding methods and other agricultural practices other than those of genetic engineering. Moreover, it does not make sense comparing the product of mono-culture with the product of multi-culture.
Hunger is caused by poverty and not by a lack of food. A majority of those who go to bed hungry are actually farmers. They suffer hunger because they have to sell off their produce in order to meet financial obligations related to family needs. In addition, farmers in rural communities with poor infrastructure are simply unable to get their harvests to markets where they could obtain reasonable prices. This dearth of infrastructure and social support opens our farmers to multiple layers of exploitation and deprivation.

We are concerned that rather than focusing on supporting local farmers who are known to hold the key for supply of wholesome food now and in the future, our agencies appear to have thrown caution to the winds, ignore the Precautionary Principle – the very bedrock of biosafety- and are embracing risky technologies and systems that would eventually lead to a colonisation of our agriculture.

As you will hear in this conference, the Nigerian Biosafety Management Act (2015) is a highly defective piece of legislation contrived to open up Nigeria for a literal GMO invasion. HOMEN has examined the law and our publication on its yawning short comings is available online and in hard copies.. We demand that the law be drastically and transparently reviewed to safeguard our environment, health, food systems and future generations. We also demand that the applications by Monsanto to introduce genetically modified maize and cotton into Nigeria be set aside as Nigeria must not be a dumping ground for failed or risky technologies.

Let me conclude these welcome words by sharing an extract of what HOMENF stands for:

HOMENF is an environmental/ecological think tank and advocacy organisation. It is rooted in solidarity and in the building and protection of human and collective dignity. We believe that neoliberal agendas driven by globalization of exploitation of the weak, despoliation of ecosystems and lack of respect for Mother Earth thrive mostly because of the ascendancy of enforced creed of might is right. This ethic permits the powerful to pollute, grab resources and degrade/destroy the rest simply because they can do so. HOMENF recognizes that this reign of (t)error can best be tackled through a conscious examination of the circumstances by which the trend crept in and got entrenched. Thus, HOMENF will have as a cardinal work track continuous political education aimed at examining the roots of exploitation of resources, labour, peoples and entire regions. HOMENF hopes through this to contribute to the building of movements for recovery of memory, dignity and harmonious living with full respect of natural cycles of Mother Earth.

(Welcome words at the Conference on The Nigerian Biosafety Act and GMOs - Implications for Nigerians and Africa held in Abuja 24-25th May 2016)
OF STEWARDSHIP AND CAUTION


I give me great pleasure to be a part of this conference at which I believe there will be deep interrogations of the Nigerian Biosafety Biosafety Management Act as well as the issue of the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into Nigeria.

I am made to understand that the key anchor of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the Precautionary Principle which states that “if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to the public, or to the environment, in the absence of scientific consensus (that the action or policy is not harmful), the burden of proof that it is not harmful falls on those taking an action that may or may not be a risk.” As far as we know, there is no consensus that GMOs have no harmful implications and so we are convinced that this principle should be at the core of agricultural, environmental and public health policies.

Permit me to state that while the Church is not averse to science, we never forget that our God demands justice and has primarily given man the duty of stewardship over creation. The Holy Bible says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15 NIV1984).

Agricultural genetic engineering as well as the more advanced nano technology and synthetic biology are extreme means of modifying life that must be treated with caution.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is common knowledge that the collective efforts of small-scale farmers are what feed the world. While millions go to bed hungry, a whole lot of food goes either into animal feeds or is wasted.
The problem of hunger is not primarily that of lack of food, but one of lack of access to food. For us in Nigeria, one key factor is the wastage of our harvests due to poor rural infrastructure and little or no value addition.

We have heard the argument that GMOs hold the key to providing nutrition for our children. Our recommendation is that more effort should be aimed at ensuring that our people eat locally produced wholesome food and keep to diets that are culturally and ethically suitable. Nigeria must be very careful about accepting risks without caution.

Let me add in this goodwill message that the National Biosafety Management Agency Act of 2015 is hardly known by the majority of Nigerians. There are key areas of concern with that law, and it would be unwise for government to use that law as a basis to introduce foods and organisms into Nigeria that may not be in our best interests. All hands must be on deck to support our farmers in their efforts to feed the population.

There have been statements in the media that we already have GMO products on our market shelves. If this is true, this conference should raise a wake up call to the government over the need to ensure that unauthorised foods are not imported into Nigeria. In addition, any food or products that contain GMOs should be adequately and boldly labelled so that our peoples can exercise their right of choice.

Nothing we do in our environment should negate the principles of justice, sovereignty, sustainability, solidarity, and participation. It goes without saying that Nigerians cannot participate in what they do not know or are not consulted on.

Before I conclude this brief goodwill message, I must not fail to commend the organizers of the conference and the network of advocacy groups for their relentless fight to safeguard the future generation and ensure only that safe, healthy products and introduced into our environment for consumption. Let the NGOs and advocacy groups be inspired in their spirited fight for justice by the words of Mahatma Ghandi who said, “A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.” I believe that posterity will appreciate your spirited fight.

I pray that the Lord grants you all wisdom in the deliberations at this meeting for the good of our country and to His glory.

Thank you.
ABUJA DECLARATION ON THE RELEASE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOS) IN NIGERIA

At the conclusion of the conference on Just Governance: The Nigerian Bio-Safety Law, GMOs, and Implications for Nigeria and Africa held at Reiz Continental Hotel, Abuja, May 23-25, 2016; we, the participants from diverse religious and faith based bodies, communities and civil society organizations (CSOs) from Nigeria, Africa and other parts of the world, affirm that organic foods are healthy, nutritious and remain a vital aspect of human rights to food and food security.

Informed by the robust, structured and eye-opening presentations by specialists and panelists and spontaneous contributions by the participants, we strongly object to the release of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Nigeria, convinced that GMOs are not the solution to hunger.

Nigeria’s fertile land guarantees the nation food sovereignty. Consequently, hunger is due to bad governance, poor infrastructure for preservation and distribution of food and lack of adequate all round support to small holder farmers who constitute over 70% of the farmers in Nigeria. We, therefore, strongly recommend to the Nigerian Government to invest more in agriculture.

The Nigerian Bio-Safety Law, in its present form, is a recipe for the destruction of Nigeria’s ecosystem, food cultures and systems. The process leading to its passage was devoid of critical input and public participation that would have enabled Nigerians to significantly determine and protect their food cultures and systems. It lacks legal safeguards for protecting their rights.
We observe that the public hearing at the National Assembly did not meet an acceptable, minimum, global standard and the best practices in a democratic society. The hearing was just a formality to create the semblance of a democratic process and skewed in favour of the GMOs Trans-National Corporations. The Government should not only introduce appropriate mechanisms but repeal the laws seeking to legalise and adopt GMO seedlings and food products and consequently marginalize Nigerian farmers.
Furthermore, the Nigerian Bio-Safety Law is not in the interest of Nigerian farmers and the wider public because it facilitates the introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) on a massive scale that violates the precautionary principle, which forms the basis of the African Union’s revised African Model Law on Biodiversity, to which Nigeria is a signatory. We adopt the comments of Health of Mother Earth Foundation and Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria on the relevant sections of the Bio-Safety Law and strongly suggest their incorporation into the Nigerian Law to safeguard the rights of Nigerian citizens and protect Nigeria’s ecosystem.

The potential socio-economic, cultural and ethical impacts of GMOs are enormous and diminish the positive impacts of small holder farmers who are feeding the country; promoting cultural practices, community well-being, traditional crops and varieties; reducing rural unemployment; engendering trade; raising the quality of life of indigenous peoples; and reaffirming food security.

Aware that the UN recognizes socio-economic consideration as a key element in biosafety negotiations and decision-making processes (Protocol on Socio-Economic Considerations; Article 26), we, therefore, appeal to the Federal Government to conduct a socio-economic impact assessment of GMOs before the Government takes measures that destroy Nigeria’s agricultural sector. The concern about Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) is not only about safety for consumers, we are equally concerned about the more damaging systematic appropriation of the rights to seeds by the Trans-National Corporations that deprives farmers of their traditional rights to seeds, in favor of patents by multinational corporations (South-South Dialogue Conference).

There has been intensive and sustained propaganda on the positive contributions of GMO on food security questions, very little has been done to draw attention to the inherent risks and hazards of industrial mono-cropping and consumption of GMOs such as loss of biodiversity, destruction of livestock, land grabbing, land and environmental degradation, communal conflicts over land and loss of rights. Therefore, there is an urgent need to present the true and full picture to Nigerians. Industrial agriculture has no real contribution to national food sovereignty of Nigeria. It is part of the western development and capitalist economic regime bent on making Africa remain a cheap resource continent and market for finished products. More fundamentally, the GMO project is anti-creational. It disturbs, contradicts and destroys the ecosystem. God created every plant and vegetable with its seed in it.

We implore our policy makers to learn from the experience of Burkina Faso and a host of other countries that are rejecting the GMOs and their false gospel of agricultural development. We maintain that Nigeria’s food sovereignty lies in investing aggressively in agriculture, empowering small holder farmers, and practicing agri-ecology that is sustainable and environment-friendly.

Signed:
Rev. Aniedi Okure, OP
Executive Director AFJN

Nnimmo Bassey
Executive Director HOMEF

Fr. Evaristus Bassey
Executive Director Caritas Nigeria and Church and Society Department

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

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

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

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

Join our Selfie Contest and win N50,000!
Simply take a selfie at LUFASI Nature Park, upload it to www.lufasi.com, campaign for likes get the highest number of likes and win.
The contest ends on May 1, 2016.
HOMEF anchored a three-day meeting for environmental agenda setting for Nigeria from the 17th - 19th May, 2016.

The highly interactive meeting had 41 participants drawn from a broad spectrum of individuals and groups that have a track record of work in the environmental sector and could deliberate on the current challenges as well as proffer a guide for policy direction. The crop of participants included members of the civil society organizations, academia, technocrats, and community actors. The turnout for the workshop was very representative.

Discussions were articulated in panels and group work sessions. There was a panel on State of the Nigerian Environment and this took an overview of the nation, focused on climate change and conflicts, especially those of herders and farmers’ conflicts as well as deforestation/desertification debate including the Great Green Wall, mangroves, land use and conversions and plantation-based projects. Members of this panel were: Mohammed Bello Tukur, Ken Henshaw, Prof Haruna Ayuba, Dr Ladipo Olajide, Prof Francis Adesina, Ms. Betty Abah with Nnimmo Bassey as moderator.

A Pollution and Clean Up panel discussed the effects of oil and industrial effluents. It also raised arguments on sanitation and wastes - including solid wastes, medical waste, military waste, etc. Celestine Akpobari, Ken Henshaw, Prof Ife Ken, Kola Lawal, Emem Okon were the panellists for this session. It was also moderated by Akinbode Oluwafemi.
The team on Agriculture, Biosafety and Environmental Health deliberated on sanitation, environmental health, the regulations within the sector and the various players therein. The panellists were Mariann Bassey-Orowujo, Naseer Kura, Dr Celestine Aguoru and Dr Robert Onyeneka. Dr Ako Amadi moderated the session.

The fourth panel dwelt on Energy, Green Growth and Development and Urbanisation. Its discussion was centred on the challenges facing our wetlands in Nigeria. The panellists included Huzi Msheila, Prof Yakubu Ochefu, Dr Iniodu George, Ewah Eleri, Prof Haruna Ayuba, Michael Simire and Prof Chinedum Nwajiuba. The panel was moderated by Faith Nwadishi.

The Environmental Policies, Laws and Regulations panel focused on environmental governance and research. Panellists for this session were: Prof M. T. Okorodudu-Fubara, Chima Williams, Charles Aholu, Alade Adeleke and Dr Ako Amadi. This fifth session was moderated by Dr Henry Sawyer.

These discussions were followed by short sessions where opinions and comments were raised and discussed. In-depth analysis and deliberations took place in group sessions.

The working groups were on (a) Climate, Deforestation and Desertification; (b) Pollution & Wastes management; (c) Energy, Green Growth/Development & Urbanisation; (d) Food, Agriculture and Biosafety and (e) Water, Sanitation and Environmental Health. Their task was to draw up policy areas for government and action areas for private sector, communities and civil society.

**Background**

The environment is a living system and environmental problems are all interlinked. The health of any environment has a direct correlation with the health of the people. This fact is even stronger in Nigeria where our compatriots depend directly on environmental resources for their sustenance.
We are faced with key environmental challenges across the nation: desertification and water stress in the North, high levels of pollution from petroleum extraction in the Niger Delta, gully erosion in the East, unregulated artisanal mining and land conflicts in the Middle Belt, industrial pollution in the West and coastal erosion and deforestation across the broader Southern Belt.

The President Muhammadu Buhari's government recognises environment as one of the six (6) pillars of policy thrust and sees it as a high priority area to drive development in Nigeria along with the economy, social development, infrastructure, governance and state/regional development.

Environmental problems in Nigeria may appear daunting in some sense, but in the context of ongoing political change, we see a great opportunity for resolving these environmental challenges through actions that would serve as unifying factors at the same time.

In response to this need, Mother Earth Foundation - HOMEF (www.homef.org), an ecological think tank and advocacy organisation facilitated the articulation of a think tank on the Nigerian environment in Abuja, Nigeria from the 17th – 19th May 2016. The think tank included a broad spectrum of individuals and groups that have track records of work in the environmental sector drawn from the academia, civil society organisations, technocrats, community actors and media. They deliberated on the current challenges of the Nigerian environment and proffered a guide for policy direction.

The policy direction proposed by the team of experts is hinged on change that will produce results that must be clearly defined and imbibed. Secondly, the platforms for attainment of the proposed change must be delineated and constructed. In other words, this transformation would be built on a foundation where harnessing an opportunity should bring about a just transition that goes beyond the political while not ignoring it, but directly restores our highly degraded environment and thus directly impacts on the lives of citizens.

This transition would be one which requires the treatment of our challenges holistically rather than in silos as well as uncovering the systemic roots of our environmental rot in order to set the path for reconstruction. The team further identified areas of focus for a national agenda, keeping in mind that such an agenda should promote the creation of massive awareness of environmental issues across the strata of the nation. It also stressed that where citizens own the agenda of ecological defence, such agenda would readily become institutionalised and help build a resilient system.

As a guide, the areas deliberated on during the two-day workshop included the following:

Environmental restoration which centres on human activities especially those of oil exploration and exploitation which has raised a number of issues such as depletion of biodiversity, coastal and riverbank erosion, flooding, oil spillage, gas flaring, noise pollution, sewage and waste water pollution, land degradation, soil fertility loss and deforestation, which are all major environmental issues. The effects of these environmental issues have resulted in environmental degradation which necessitates urgent and steady environmental remedial and restorative measures.
Environmental sanitation, which included solid waste management and access to potable water. The different kinds of erosion as experienced in Nigeria: gully, wind and coastal erosion which are serious challenges. A comprehensive framework was proposed to tackle this menace.

The Great Green Belt and Deforestation discussion was also pivotal due to the billions of naira lost annually due to environmental challenges such as deforestation, drought and desertification. This is premised on the immediate survival needs and few options the poor have often been faced with and continual exploitation of the natural resources in the nation.

The Climate change debate of which Nigeria had submitted her intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) to emissions reduction as required by the UNFCCC. These need to be reviewed and put into action. Awareness creation and development of multiple layers of actors (youth, women, community, CSO, etc.) on climate change are essential.

Environmental laws/regulations which is not lacking in the nation; however, some of these laws and regulations require to be reviewed. Examples of laws that require review include those that led to the setting up of the following agencies:
(a) The Biosafety Management Agency (NABMA), especially with applications for introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)
(b) The National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA)
(c) The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA)
(d) The Environmental Impact Act (EIA)

The importance of a national environmental baseline which will provide a comprehensive understanding of the physical, chemical, biological and social environment in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised. This is because well planned and executed studies would enhance project/programme efficiencies and increase acceptability by stakeholders.
ON MONSANTO’S CLAIMS THAT GMOs ARE SAFE

By Nnimmo Bassey, Mariann Bassey Orowuje and Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour

We have read with interest the response form Monsanto to Premium Time's report of NBDA's surreptitious granting to permit for Monsanto to bring GMOs into Nigeria. We restate here that Monsanto’s applications were approved without due diligence and that the law setting up NBDA is extremely flawed in that it gives individuals in the agency the latitude to toy with the health of Nigerians, our environment and food systems.

Monsanto argues that their GMOs and their weed killers are safe. The truth is that the company is good at avoiding liability while exploiting the agencies that out to regulate them. They claim, “A big part of that confidence comes from knowing that independent experts who’ve looked at GMOs have concluded that they’re as safe as other foods. That includes groups like the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization, as well as government agencies like the FDA.”

This is an interesting argument. We quote two statements, one from Monsanto and the other from FDA and leave the public to read between the lines.

Philip Angell, a Monsanto's director of corporate communications said: “Monsanto should not have to vouchsafe the safety of biotech food. Our interest is in selling as much of it as possible. Assuring its safety is the FDA's job.”

For the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) “Ultimately, it is the food producer who is responsible for assuring safety.”

When Monsanto and FDA makes statements like these, the reading is that consumers are left to literally stew in their soups.

In the words of David Schubert, Professor and Head of Cellular Neurobiology Laboratory at the Salk Institute of Biological Studies, La Jolla, California;

“One thing that surprised us is that US regulators rely almost exclusively on information provided by the biotech crop developer, and those data are not published in journals or subjected to peer review... The picture that emerges from our study of US regulation of GM foods is a rubber-stamp 'approval process' designed to increase public confidence in, but not ensure
THE LOOTING MACHINE By Tom Burgis

The Looting Machine’ is a searing exposé of the global web of traders, bankers, middlemen, despots and corporate raiders that is pillaging Africa’s vast natural wealth. From the killing fields of Congo to the crude-slicked creeks of Nigeria, a great endowment of oil, diamonds, copper, iron, gold and coltan has become a curse that condemns millions to poverty, violence and oppression. That curse is no accident. This gripping investigative journey takes us into the shadows of the world economy, where secretive networks conspire with Africa’s kleptocrats to bleed the continent dry. And like their victims, the beneficiaries of this grand looting have names.

PATTERNS OF COMMONING

In more than fifty original essays, Patterns of Commoning addresses these questions and probes the inner complexities of this timeless social paradigm. The book surveys some of the most notable, inspiring commons around the world, from alternative currencies and open design and manufacturing, to centuries-old community forests and co-learning commons—and dozens of others. Margaret Thatcher once championed neoliberal capitalism with the harsh ultimatum, “There is no alternative!” Patterns of Commoning shows in vivid detail that there are plenty of alternatives! We need only understand the robust power of commoning.

OIL, POWER AND A SIGN OF HOPE

“Oil, power and Sign of Hope” documents the struggle to get the parties responsible at the oil companies and at their partners of sponsorship to adhere to internationally-applicable standards and, by doing such, to enable 180,000 people to exercise their human right to clean water. Another thrust of Sign of Hope’s endeavors is the preservation of one of the world’s largest wetlands and of its unique biodiversity: There are ways and means of pushing the buttons of the managers responsible for making decisions at entities that are engaged in polluting the environment. These buttons just have to be really strongly pushed.

SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION By F. William Engdahl

This skillfully researched book focuses on how a small socio-political American elite seeks to establish its control over the very basis of human survival, the provision of our daily bread. Control the food and you control the people. This is no ordinary book about the perils of GMO. Engdahl takes the reader inside the corridors of power, into the backrooms of the science labs, behind closed doors in the corporate boardrooms. The author reveals a World of profit-driven political intrigue, government corruption and coercion, where genetic manipulation and the patenting of life forms are used to gain worldwide control over food production. The book is an eye-opener, a must-read for all those committed to the causes of social justice and World peace.
the safety of, genetically engineered foods.” This is exactly what is happening in Nigeria today, unfortunately. We have an agency that disrespects the voices of the people, ignores national interests and blatantly promotes the interests of biotech corporations.

The relationship between National Biosafety Agency (NBMA), National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) and Monsanto is rife with conflict of interest against the Nigerian people. How is it that the regulated is so influential on the regulator? The evidence in leaked WikiLeaks cables is clear. How can we have NABDA sit on the Board of NBDA, be a co-applicant with Monsanto and then sit to approve the application? This should fit into the definition of corruption in this season of Change.

Monsanto has been desperate to tell the world that their weed killer laced with the ingredient known as glyphosate is safe. The debate about the safety of glyphosate has been interesting with Monsanto in this response to Premium times claiming that “glyphosate poses no unreasonable risks to humans or the environment when used according to label instructions.”

The above claim says two or more things. First that glyphosate poses risks. Secondly that this risk can be tolerated when the chemical is used according to label instructions. Thirdly, when something goes wrong, Monsanto will absolve itself of culpability by claiming that the chemical was not used “according to label instructions.”

The scientific debate over whether glyphosate causes cancer continues, but based on research several countries have banned the use of the chemical. The very fact that there is no consensus on the safety of glyphosate is the reason why Nigeria must apply the precautionary principle. It is interesting that Monsanto accuses IARC of selective interpretation of scientific data. This is a case of a kettle calling a pot black. We doubt if there is any other corporation that engages in selective interpretation of data more than Monsanto.

There was a time when scientists insisted that cigarettes do not cause cancer. Today that has been exposed as a lie. Monsanto claims that their liability over PCB is over an historical misdemeanour.

This is another problem with Nigeria’s Biosafety Act. If problems emerge in future over toxic chemicals introduced into the Nigerian environment today, Monsanto will go free because the law does not have provisions for strict liability. Meanwhile we remind ourselves that if toxic PCB is in history, so is Monsanto’s Agent Orange, the defoliant used in the Vietnam war and the toxic template on which the company continues the business of killing biodiversity.

GMOs are basically regulated because their safety is in doubt. The approval granted Monsanto to conduct field trials of genetically modified maize requires that these crops should keep a distance of 20m from non-GMO farms. That is absolute nonsense and is designed to ensure that our natural maize varieties are contaminated. It is known that pollen grains travel several kilometres.

Contamination has been one key tool used by Monsanto in countries like USA and Canada to chase after non-GMO farmers that actually are the victims of this companies polluting activities. Our agricultural systems, eating habits and cultural requirements are not the same as those of Americans, for example, and bringing these crops into our country will expose us to unimaginable health impacts.
We would also be closing markets against ourselves. A case in point is a recent refusal of Brazil to buy corn from the USA, due to GMO concerns, even in the face of shortage of corn needed in chicken feed. Note that Brazil is a country already with other varieties of GMOs!

Finally, we ask, are we so stupid that a genetically modified crop, Bt Cotton, that just failed in neighbouring Burkina Faso, (and the farmers are making claims from Monsanto) is what we are glibly opening our country to? Are we having regulators or GMO traders making decisions over our destiny?

We restate our stand that the so-called permit issued to Monsanto to introduce GMOs into Nigeria should be overturned and the Biosafety law itself should be repealed. We also call on the National Assembly to urgently investigate the process leading to the granting of the permit on Sunday, 1st May 2016 to assure Nigerians that we are not pawns in a commercial game to open Africa to toxic technologies.

...
That is my position on the Biafran issue.” We agree with him. These cleavages cannot define who we are or under what political architecture we chose to live in.

Earlier in the chapter of the same book titled 2015: Why Buhari matters, Chido writes and I quote: “The improvement of millions of our country men and women, the wanton abuse of rights, the unmitigated corruption, alienation, internal colonisation and exacerbation of the fault lines of the country, are not issues that the current political order can tackle.”

These fault lines are not only socio-economic or political, they are also physical. They are pervasive and democratically distributed across the land. Permit me to reiterate that we are indeed all Biafrans. Consider the forces of displacement that pushed some Nigerians into the geographical zone that took that name. Today, the forces may not be the same, but Nigerians are being displaced, marginalised and pushed into conflicts of various degrees of viciousness. There are enclaves of Biafra everywhere in Nigeria. You may not like the name, you may even change it, but Biafra sticks to us like our shadows.

Accepting the inevitability of our identity may well help us to find the glue that would hold us together, or give us the boldness to accept to live together in a state of flexibility. Rigidity often leads to collapse. And that is why forced codes of relationships cannot build trust, solidarity or cohesion. Our fractiousness and selfishness speak to this reality. The dispossessed, the displaced and the marginalised are found all around us. They are voiceless and easy to overlook. Like vermin, their lives count for little. Gully erosion challenges the notion of Biafra. It also reinforces it. These huge gullies have literally become insatiable mouths that swallow everything in its path that does not scamper away on time. Farmlands, homesteads, sundry infrastructure disappearing before our eyes.

The dispossessed, the displaced and the marginalised are found all around us. They are voiceless and easy to overlook. Like vermin, they should be glad to have the earth provide them graves. Some fellow countrymen and women think they can hide away under trees in thick forests, living with nature and communing with other species, our relatives. But we need superhighways with internet backbones; we need shopping malls and we need top notch hotels. Highways chalk up cheap political points for making first, second or third year anniversaries. So, deforestation defrocks forest communities. Who needs monkeys or chimps when we can make ourselves spectacles for the rich.

The dispossessed, the displaced and the marginalised are found all around us. The are voiceless and easy to overlook. What is the purchasing power of a forest dweller? What do they add to our GDP? Coastal erosion and subsiding lands. Sea level rise. If the guns cannot silent dissent, these will swallow them up. Add unrelenting pollutions and infernal gas flares and we will soon be pumping fists of victory in the toxic air. The dispossessed, the displaced and the marginalised are found all around us, and our challenges can be traced to similar roots. Games of power and reckless exploitation and accumulation. One powerful truth is that the oppressed in one are the same as the oppressed in the other. That defines our all being Biafrans. Being pressed into the borders called Nigeria, we ignore that pressure at our peril.

We could push ahead in fear or hate. We could also choose to sit together and deliberate on how to ease the shocks, overcome the odds, build love and solidarity and introduce some flexibility that considers the possibility of the bight in the Biafra in which all Biafrans live. It is a choice. Inaction may shut the bight but usher in the bite of Biafra.
The Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) hosted two sessions of its 7th Sustainability Academy at University of Abuja and LUFASI Nature Park, Lagos, Nigeria. The theme of the Sustainability Academy was COP21 Post Mortem. The sessions in Abuja and Lagos were moderated by Ruth Eskhiegbe and Funmi Oyatogun respectively, and brought together over 200 Nigerians youths who are actively involved in the Climate Change activism.

Two instigators, Hilma Mote from Africa Labour Rights Institute, based in Togo, and Ruth Nyambura, a radical eco-feminist from Kenya, led the conversations alongside HOMEF Director - Nimmo Bassey and LUFASI Director – Desmond Majekodunmi. The world is in critical danger with continuous carbonization of the atmosphere, and Africa and other continents of the Global South continue to bear a disproportionate amount of Climate Change impacts. In his welcome address, Nimmo Bassey challenged young Nigerians to critically examine the 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that held in Paris December, 2015. According to him, the Paris COP was another missed opportunity for nations to take real climate actions, including especially urgently transiting from dependence on fossil fuels. Mr. Bassey also expressed his displeasure with the revocation of occupancy rights for up to 10 km on either side of the superhighway project proposed by the Cross River State. Such an action will lead to massive deforestation, biodiversity decimation, displacement of communities and lock in socio-economic deprivations. On the other hand, Nimmo extolled LUFASI saying, “such platforms as LUFASI Nature Park serve as a practical tool to engage Nigerians with nature and relay information on Climate Change in a space that is educational, relaxing, natural and unique.”

In his ever so passionate manner of speaking, Desmond Majekodunmi – the chairman of LUFASI Nature Park, pointed out the wickedness of the human heart in ignoring the impending state of catastrophe as a result of Climate Change. In his words, "Mother Earth has become a time bomb waiting to explode and we are doing very little about it.”
Corroborating Nimmo's disappointment with the Cross River superhighway project, Mr. Majekodunmi implored all participants to divest from the notion that humans are apart from nature by interacting more closely with spaces such as LUFASI Nature Park.

Hilma Mote who spoke on Youth, Labour and Climate Change stressed the fact that the planet is our home and therefore we must care for and live in harmony with it. She stressed that “the planet is vulnerable just like human beings are.” “Imagine”, she continued, “if someone threw garbage on your head daily. You would cry for help and our neglect of the Earth's cries for help will either lead it to implode or to die.” Mote also shared extensive knowledge on the role of young people in combating the challenges of climate change. According to her, as we struggle for the needed “transformation towards a sustainable future for people and the planet, the youth should be at the centre and so all have to engage fully.” She expressed her positive thoughts towards union leaders who have begun to pay attention to the intersection between climate change and labour.

“Nimmo Bassey has a way of ensuring that all are involved in knowledge sharing”, she said in reference to a meeting in January where a union leader made reference to Mr. Bassey's climate change analogy: “imagine how you feel when you have a bit of a temperature. Now, the Earth has been heating up for so long and no one is paying attention.”

Ruth Nyambura spoke on COP21 and how the Paris Agreement can be implemented. According to her, 21% of the world population contribute about 80% to the challenges of climate change and therefore should bear a higher percentage of the solution. Women must also be at the focal point of solutions as 75% of the small scale farmers feeding Africa are women, who often have limited land rights but are the most vulnerable. She told the audience that by 2020, the Sahel Desert will be completely uninhabitable according to scientists. “Africa is impoverished because colonial systems linger to stunt our development”, she highlighted. Citing the flower industry in Kenya as an example, Ruth Nyambura condemned the unsustainable agricultural practices which improve GDP statistics but further devastate local ecologies and economies.

According to Nyambura, “food sovereignty is much more important than food security because it challenges the leftover colonial structures which ensure dependence of developing states.” In her critique of the Paris Agreement, she challenged young activists to push for the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) which ensures that countries make proportionate investments to solutions as their contributions to the problem. Her passion shone through as she stressed that mitigation and adaptation funds must not come from loans or aid. Nyambura also highlighted a loophole in the system which has been identified by stakeholders for decades – the absence of recognition of climate refugees in the UN. “When the law does not recognize you, you cannot even voice the injustice you suffer because you do not exist.”

The panellists pointed out that the devastation of the environment and impacts of Climate Change will result in:
§ Climate refugees all over the world.
§ The Sahel region of Africa being more and more uninhabitable.
§ Increase in poverty and vulnerability.
§ Extreme flooding and other environmental hazards.
§ Exposure of humans to dangerous chemicals leading to respiratory challenges, and other dangerous health challenges.

Noting that climate change exacerbates social, economic and ecological injustice the following were the resolutions from the session:
Urgent transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

Those who contributed more to the problem should bear more of the responsibilities in fixing the challenges of climate change.

We must not relate with the environment as if we are not part of the environment.

The youths should not just be relegated to “flower girls” in the environmental advocacy process but they should be involved in the process from start to finish.

Governments should invest in education, green infrastructures and sustainable agricultural techniques as a way of combating climate change.

Youths should combine their academic/technical training with environmental activism and campaign for the greater good of all.

The government of Cross River State should halt the construction of the Superhighway project until the project receives an approved Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and other guidelines as stipulated by ILO article 169.

Nigerians should vehemently oppose the moves to introduce genetically modified (GM) cotton and maize into Nigeria's food and farming systems.

In appreciation for environmental activists (such as Nnimmo Bassey and Desmond Majekodunmi) who have often fought lone battles for long periods of time, Hilma Mote shared an apt Yoruba proverb which in English says: “if we stand tall, it is because we stand on the backs of those who came before us.” She also enjoined Nigerian youths to take the bull by the horn in the fight against Climate Change. According to her proverbial imploration, “silence is an attribute of the dead; they who are alive speak.”

After the presentations, Hilma Mote and Ruth Nyambura were inducted as 7th and 8th Fellows of Health of Mother Earth Sustainability Academy, respectively.

The interactive session came to a close with a guided tour of LUFASI Nature Park, allowing for continued interaction through the park's 20 hectares of protected tropical forest and rescued animals. We look forward to the implementation of these outcomes and commit to providing resources to aid knowledge generation, sharing and action about climate change and the looming food crisis in Nigeria, Africa and the world in general.
UPCOMING EVENTS

Town Hall Meeting: Forests, Food Sovereignty

Community Monitors Training
“Fish Not Oil: Let the CleanUp Begin” 26th July 2016, Nsisioken, Rivers state

Oilwatch Africa General Assembly & Conference 3-7 September 2016, Uganda

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

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OUTRAGE as Monsanto & NBMA push GMOs into Nigeria

NIGERIAN BIOSAFETY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (NBMA)
DEFIES FG, NIGERIANS, PERMITS DEPLOYMENT OF
GMOS IN NIGERIA

By Nnimmo Bassey, Mariann Bassey Orovwuje and Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour

Despite the promise of the Minister of State for Environment, Ibrahim Jibril that “Nigeria would not mortgage the safety of its citizens by introducing unproven products into the country” and the concerted efforts by over 5 million Nigerians (made up of 100 groups comprising farmers, faith-based organizations, civil society groups, students and local farmers) to prevent the introduction of genetically modified (GM)cotton and maize into Nigeria’s foods and farming system, the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) has issued two permits: one for the Commercial Release and Placing on Market of genetically modified cotton and the other for the confined field trial of maize to Monsanto Agriculture Nigeria Limited.

The two permits have been posted on NBMA website. They were signed by the Director-General of NBMA, Mr. Rufus Ebegba on Sunday, 1st May, 2016 (a public holiday) and issued to Monsanto Agriculture Nigeria Limited. The first is entitled: “Permit for Commercial release/ Placing on Market of Cotton (MON15985) genetically modified for lepidopteran insect pest resistance” with Permit No: NBMA/CM/IM/001. The second is entitled: “Permit for Confined Field Trial (CFT) of maize (NK603 and MON 89034 x NK603) genetically modified for insect resistance and herbicide tolerance” with Permit No: NBMA/CFT/001.

According to Nnimmo Bassey, Director of Mother Health Foundation, one of the groups in the front line of the resistance “This is extremely shocking. Little officials of NBMA, National Biotech Development Agency (NABDA) and their pro GMO train have been fighting tooth and nail to fool Nigerians by claiming that GMOs are!”
They approved the poorly concocted applications and issued these permits on a Sunday when government offices do not open. In fact, 2 May was also a public holiday.”

According to Mariann Bassey Orovwuje, a food campaigner, “several main areas of concern had been identified regarding objections to the release (and placement in the market) of GM Cotton and confined field trial of Maize in Nigeria. There are serious concerns and they include amongst many: health Concerns, environmental concerns, socio-economic concerns, technical and administrative concerns, molecular concerns, safety assessments, environment risk assessment, secondary pests and insect resistance and many more concerns have been extensively laid out in our submissions to NBMA objecting to Monsanto’s applications.”

In the objection to Monsanto’s applications, the concerned Nigerians stated that in its application MON 15985, Monsanto is using genes referred to as cry2Ab2 and cry1Ac, which produce Bt toxins that have been synthetically manufactured with no history of safe use in nature. The insertion of the antibiotic resistant marker gene (ARMG) causes concerns regarding the potential transfer of antibiotic resistance to other living organisms. This concern, which is dismissed by the applicant, has been raised by a scientific panel of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) stating that this particular ARMG should be restricted to field trial purposes and should not be present in GM plants to be placed on the market- unfortunately this what NBMA has released into the Nigerian market.

The groups also complained that there is no baseline data regarding the quantity, spread and use of cottonseed meal/cakes/oil used for human or animal consumption in Nigeria, and therefore no foundation for the assessment of food and feed safety.

Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, a concerned consumer, sees NBMA’s decisions as grossly faulty. He finds “the claim of the agency shocking when it claims that in arriving at this decision the National Biosafety Management Agency took into consideration the advice of National Biosafety Committee National Biosafety Technical Sub-committee and public views... The Agency was convinced that there are no known adverse impacts to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity taking into account risk to human health. The agencies they consulted are in the business of promoting these toxic and risky GMOs in Nigeria. We do not also know which public NBMA consulted.”

Nnimmo Bassey concurred, “We have always said the NBMA Act of 2015 is gravely defective, because its governing board is filled with GMO promoters such as NABDA and the Biotechnology Society of Nigeria. Those GMO promoters are concerned with ensuring the profit of biotech entrepreneurs rather than the health and environmental concerns of Nigerians. We are also ashamed that an agency saddled with defending Nigeria’s biodiversity is actively promoting these risky technologies.”

NBMA approved Monsanto’s proposal for Bt cotton despite the fact that on the 14th of April, 2016, our neighbours, Burkina-Faso’s cabinet announced their goal to reduce the acreage for genetically modified cotton this season until it’s completely phased out in 2018 and replaced by conventional cotton.

NBMA approved the glyphosate herbicide resistant maize despite the IARC report, that linked the active ingredient glyphosate to cancer. It is no surprise that nations like Sri Lanka, amongst others, heeded and took action by banning Monsanto’s round up herbicide because of its link to Kidney disease.
NBMA Approved this herbicide resistant GMO knowing full well that The EU nations have refused to back a limited extension of the pesticide glyphosate’s use, threatening withdrawal of Monsanto’s Roundup and other weed killers from shelves if no decision is reached by the end of this month.

Commenting on the decision, Bart Staes MEP environment and food safety spokesperson said: “We applaud those EU governments who are sticking to their guns and refusing to authorise this controversial toxic herbicide. There are clear concerns about the health risks with glyphosate, both as regards it being a carcinogen and an endocrine disruptor. Moreover, glyphosate’s devastating impact on biodiversity should have already led to its ban. Thankfully, the significant public mobilisation and political opposition to re-approving glyphosate has been taken seriously by key EU governments, who have forced the EU commission to back down.”

On May 26, 2016, a St. Louis jury ordered Monsanto to pay $46.5million in damages for negligence in the production of polychlorinated biphenyls or PCBs. This case, which went on trial April 28 2016, involved just three of nearly 100 plaintiffs “claiming that exposure to PCBs caused cancer and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Sadly, while a number of plaintiffs have died as a result of the cancers they developed from Monsanto’s toxic PCBs, their claims were made by surviving relatives. The suit claims that Monsanto knew about the dangers of PCBs decades ago, but gave false testimony and scientific information to the public saying it was safe.”

Further damaging evidences pile up against indicted Monsanto: A trial in Redlands, California in May 2016 on the dangers of Monsanto’s Roundup reveals that “it is not only glyphosate that is dangerous, but also chemicals listed as inert ingredients.” A high court in Paris has punished a high ranking official representing Monsanto’s interests for deceitfully covering up research data proving that Monsanto was hiding toxicity of its own corn. The information showed that it could promote neuro-developmental disabilities including autism, attention-deficit, disorder, dyslexia and other cognitive impairments affecting millions of children worldwide and seem to be increasing in frequency.

Essentially, therefore, GMO maize and cotton into Nigeria must be rejected because they would not only create health challenges, sterilize agric-potentials of the nation but scuttle the change agenda of the current government just as they would lead to neo-colonization of Nigeria and Africa. The time to stop it is now.

It is a mark of utter recklessness that NBMA would rush to issue approvals for GMOs to be released in Nigeria within barely a year of the NBMA Act coming into force. We demand that the permits surreptitiously issued to Monsanto on a platter of gold without regard to the concerns of millions of Nigerians should be revoked immediately. We also urge that the recently enacted National Biosafety Agency Management Act should be quickly repealed to prevent NBMA from running amok with GMOs and flooding our country with these risky organisms.
COMING SOON

Oil Politics – echoes of Ecological Wars

This is to announce Oil Politics – echoes of Ecological Wars a forthcoming book by Nnimmo Bassey published by Daraja Press.

Set out in seven sections, this book of 54 essays deals with deep ecological changes taking place primarily in Nigeria but with clear linkages to changes elsewhere in the world. These essays provide insights into the background to the horrific ecological manifestations that dot the Nigerian environment and the ecological cancers spreading in the world. They underscore the fact there are no one-issue struggles. Working in a context where analyses of ecological matters is not the norm, decades of consistent environmental activism has placed the writer in good stead to unlock the webs that promote these scandalous realities.