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# INSTIGATOR

A PUBLICATION OF HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION

## Alternative Power for Power Alternatives



FOOD, FARMING AND  
COVID-19

THE NEW DIRECTIONS OF  
FRENCH IMPERIALISM IN AFRICA

CONVERSATION WITH AMILCAR  
CABRAL: FROM AGRONOMIST TO  
LIBERATOR

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für die Welt

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# Home Run



**NNIMMO BASSEY,**  
Director, Health of Mother  
Earth Foundation

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We hope to challenge you to question the current economic and development models and inspire you into acting to save the planet and secure a legacy for generations yet unborn.

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The cover story for our last edition was the Coronavirus as it has affected the environment, food systems and human rights. The activities reported in this edition were conducted under the restrictive atmosphere of COVID-19 regime. We have all been forced to work differently, so activities that would have been held in-person had to go virtual. The virus simply gave impetus to the fact that the social space has been shrinking over time as humans become more individualistic.

We recognize the fact that push into the virtual sphere has also made it possible for us to reach much more people than physical meetings would have permitted. For one, we have enjoyed the privilege of having instigators speak to us from across the world, even when we have had to do that at rather unholy hours. The world has also seen less pollution and Nature has had a brief respite. The birds have surfaced and with less contes-

tation for space and survival even unsuspecting fish have frolicked into waiting nets.

Many of the articles and reports in this edition speak to the scenario related to the COVID-19 pandemic. You may wish to look closely at Otiono's Avian Friends, Naturecracy and Artocracy in the time of Coronavirus as well as the Conversations that focused on the inspiring life of Amilcar Cabral.

As usual, we bring you poems and suggested books you should read.

We hope to challenge you to question the current economic and development models and inspire you into acting to save the planet and secure a legacy for generations yet unborn. Drop us a line or share your stories, articles, photos or poems at [editor@homef.org](mailto:editor@homef.org) We always look forward to hearing from you.

Until Victory!

# Alternative Power for Power Alternatives



The word power has many synonyms. Some of these are influence, authority, control and dominance. The term has interesting definitions in politics, military, religion, electrical engineering, sports, law and mathematics. In physics it refers to energy produced by means such as electrical or mechanical ones in order to operate a device. Electric power can come from a variety of sources including solar power, fossil, nuclear systems, steam, thermal power, waves and

hydro power. When a nation considers or uses a variety of these sources for secondary energy production, this is referred to as an energy mix.

We learn something about power when we consider its meaning beyond that of mechanically getting something moved from one point to another or getting a device to produce something. In social science and politics, power is defined as the capacity to influence the actions, beliefs, or conduct

**BY NNIMMO BASSEY**

of others by an individual. We will return in a moment to examine the importance of power in the socio-political context.

## **Tussle over Dams**

A tussle continues between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt over Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile. While Ethiopia wishes to become a net exporter of electric power, Egypt worries that the dam will constrict its share of the river if it is filled up too quickly. Sudan on the other hand could benefit from cheaper electricity from the power project but could also suffer catastrophic flooding if the dam fails. Tensions are running high as recent talks by the three countries did not yield a deal.

Meanwhile a mammoth Grand Inga hydropower project with a generation capacity of 40 GW is proposed to be built on the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Conceived as the largest dam in the world, the scheme would be realized



in three phases. Inga 3 with a capacity of 4.8 GW of power was originally announced in 2013 with the support of the World Bank at an estimated \$14 billion price tag. The World Bank withdrew in 2016 and a redesigned Inga 3 now has Chinese interests and is planned to produce 10 GW of power. Some of that power may head to Nigeria. Inga dams 1 and 2 built under the Mobutu regime in 1972 and 1982 had installed capacity of 2,132 MW and are said to have never produced more than 40 percent of their capacity. Although up to 90 percent of DRC's population does not have access to electricity, this scheme is planned to mostly supply mining companies in the country as well as industrial establishments and urban centres in South Africa.

### Trapped in Crude

The oil price slump driven by the coronavirus pandemic may be easing, but confidence in

the resource is not building up as fast as the crude oil dependent African nations would wish. Reports indicate that although "massive oil and gas discoveries have been made in Africa this century — from Ghana to Mozambique — the prospects of similar ones in the future look bleak" because operators are not investing as enthusiastically as expected. It is indeed believed that low oil prices have forced drillers to cut down on risky frontiers and that oil rigs are disappearing from Africa at a rapid pace.

While the rigs may be shifting away, the fossil industry has a peculiar hold on financial speculators or shareholders. Oil companies shore up their value by showing how much oil reserves they have. That way investors can peep into the distant future and see their investments secured in the oily soup. Consider the Mozambique LNG project operated by TOTAL. The company is sealing a deal to

finance the project through the monetization of the reserves in the deepwater Area 1 of that country.

There is no shortage of huge fossil fuel projects in Africa. There is the \$20 billion Ogidigben Gas Revolution Industrial Park (GRIP) owned by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC); the \$13.5 billion Etan & Zabazaba Oil Fields offshore Nigeria owned by Eni and Shell; the \$12 billion Namibe Refinery Complex in Angola with two Russian investors holding 75 percent shares; and the \$11 billion Dangote Refinery and Polypropylene Plant at Lekki Free Trade Zone, Lagos.

Oil dependency has spelt a big challenge for African governments and this has been heightened by the pandemic. According to International Monetary Fund's data, the breakeven prices for some African countries are as follows: Nigeria - \$144



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"Over 640 million Africans have no access to energy, corresponding to an electricity access rate for African countries at just over 40 percent, the lowest in the world."

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per barrel, Algeria - \$109 per barrel, Libya - \$100 per barrel, and Angola - \$55 per barrel. With such high baselines and with oil prices currently below \$50 per barrel, combined with the fact that the world is gradually shifting from this energy sources, it is clear that countries dependent on crude oil revenues are in for prolonged financial stress except they wake up from slumber and diversify their economies. In response to the revenue debacle, Nigeria has applied for about \$7 billion in emergency loans as of April 2020. For how long can we go on this way?

### **Dim Lights over Africa and the Climate Change Challenge**

There is no doubt that Africa needs electric power and a whole lot of it. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB), "Over 640 million Africans have no access to energy, corresponding to an electricity access rate for African countries at just over 40 percent, the lowest in the world."

With this level of power deficit on the continent, the obvious response is that the gap must be closed. Some have said that this gap must be closed "by any means possible." By the way, when Frantz Fanon penned those terms, and when Malcolm X used them at the founding rally of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), they obviously did not have self-harming connotations in their minds.

Electric power by any means suggests burning of more

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Electric power by any means suggests burning of more oil, gas and coal and use of nuclear power or big dams. These will generate the needed power, but what would it do to the climate?

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oil, gas and coal and use of nuclear power or big dams. These will generate the needed power, but what would it do to the climate? Africa is already one of the most vulnerable regions in the world, with temperatures rising more rapidly than the global average in some places. Extreme floods, cyclones, droughts and even locust invasions have grave implications for the continent.

At a recent webinar, a participant asked this question, "Is it fair not to allow countries in the global South to adopt the destructive pattern that built the global North?" This appeared to be in sync with a statement made by Gabriel Obiang Lima, the Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons in Equatorial Guinea: "Under no circumstances are we going to be apologizing, ...Anybody out of the continent saying we should not develop those

[oil and gas] fields, that is criminal..."

The question is whether Africa's need for electricity trumps our climate change challenge. Some analysts argue that as much as climate concerns are real, switching away from fossil fuels dependence will be misguided. We need to debate "development" and what being developed means.

Oilwatch International has been demanding that fossils be kept in the ground for over two decades now. This started before #KeepItInTheGround became a popular hashtag. Oilwatch is basically a global South network focusing on halting the expansion of destructive fossil fuel activities in the global South. The network recognises the need for power, but it also recognises the right of our peoples to life and dignity.



# Fishing in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic – Stakeholders Call for Just Recovery

The fact that COVID-19 pandemic is a serious threat to global health is beyond question. What is often ignored is the fact that the pandemic is a serious socio-economic crisis in Nigeria and many other countries. The pandemic has ripped off the cover from healthcare delivery systems that had hitherto been hidden since citizens that could afford the bills could easily jet out of the country to nurse their headaches. This was happening whilst the poor died on the doorsteps of health centres that are ill equipped to deliver needed services. With lockdowns and other restrictions, the impact has been disproportionately felt by the poor, women and social classes with no support systems.

One of such exposed and under supported social groups is: artisanal fishers and fish processors and marketers. Routinely ignored in the scheme of things, the lockdown measures threw our 6.5 million strong fishers into abject stress.

Fishers organised under FishNet Alliance expressed how they groan under lockdown measures that



deprived them of access to fishing grounds and daily income to take care of their families. There are stories of woes along the entire 850 km Atlantic coastline of Nigeria. Where fishers are not impacted by oil spills, they are limited by security cordons built around industrial facilities. In places like Makoko, a community on the edges of the Lagos Lagoon, life is precarious due to both the pandemic and heightened vulnerability due to the state of their environment.

According to Akintimehin Claudius Adewole, leader of the Alliance in Lagos State, there are high activities of sand mining (dredging) going on in the area and this has severely impacted on the

livelihoods of the community people.” Mr Adewole called on the government to provide support for the fishers and roll out policies that protect the aquatic environment, clean-up already polluted areas and guarantee the rights of the people to a decent livelihood as fishers.

Makoko is a community known for fishing but unfortunately its people and their livelihoods are suffering from pollution of their waters and constant threats of displacement from their prime location which luxury property developers desire to grab.

The FishNet Alliance has called for support for fishers in Makoko, Lagos State and in other coastal communities



across the country. This call was made during a meeting of members of the Alliance in Makoko on Wednesday, 19 August, 2020.

Nnimmo Bassey, the Director of HOMEf, urges that adequate support systems should be in place to ensure the wellbeing of fishers whose services are essential. Without fish a vast population of Nigerians would go without that source of protein thus exacerbating the nutritional deficiencies in the population. "Our fishers are among the most vulnerable in our country," Bassey said. "Special measures must be put in place including ensuring that wastes are not dumped into our water bodies to ensure healthy aquatic species and higher catch for the fishers. It is regrettable that thousands of fish died off the Niger Delta coasts between February and May, 2020 and to date there is no definitive statement from government about what killed the fish and what actions have been taken to avoid future occurrences."

Officials of FishNet Alliance urge that relevant government agencies should work with fishers to develop policies that will help protect the aquatic ecosystems, especially in the restoration of polluted areas and the creation of freshwater and marine protected areas.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on movement imposed by the government have seriously impacted fishers and farmers in rural communities who have no formal jobs and who rely on their day to day expedition for their sustenance.

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*Fishers organised under FishNet Alliance expressed how they groan under lockdown measures that deprived them of access to fishing grounds and daily income to take care of their families.*

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According to some of the fishers at the meeting, the pandemic has brought about disruptions in supply chains for fish due to disruptions in transportation, trade, and labour. Many people employed in the sector, such as fish vendors, processors, suppliers or transport workers lost their jobs and subsistence has become a huge challenge for them.

Recognising how the pandemic worsens the situation for these fishers who were already vulnerable from the issues of pollution and displacements, HOMEf, during the meeting extended food items to the fishers as a way of cushioning the impact of the environmental and socio-economic stress brought about by the pandemic.

**At the end of the meeting, stakeholders resolved and demanded that:**

1. Government should put adequate measures in place to help fishers during COVID-19 pandemic.
2. There should be increased participation of fishers in public policies with regard to the aquatic environment.
3. Traditional knowledge of fishing practices, including those that would help mitigate climate change impacts should be adopted in policies.
4. All Indiscriminate displacement of fishing settlements and sand-filling of fishing creek, rivers and wetlands should be halted.
5. Polluting corporations should be held liable for the harms created; required to clean-up immediately and; to duly compensate the affected people and communities.
6. Fishers should unite and engage in further dialogues to equip members with skills to serve as environmental defenders and as agents against climate change.

*FishNet Alliance is an Africa-wide network of fishers engaged in and promoting sustainable fishing in line with ecosystem limits. The Alliance's stands oppose extractive activities in water bodies - including rivers, lakes and oceans.*

# Avian Friends, Naturecracy and Artocracy in the time of Coronavirus

BY NDUKA OTIONO



It was yet another beautiful dawn during the novel coronavirus lockdown in Orleans, a suburb of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. The lazy warmth of the spring sun was filtering through our window. A house wren, nesting in our backyard, a patch of land privately screened off with emerald green arborvitae trees from a popular road, was warbling joyfully again. Although, I first noticed it last spring, I did not pay much attention to the bird and its avian companions. Under COVID-19 lockdown, however, I have rediscovered my old hobby of birdwatching, making me something of an amateur ornithologist. It made a lot of difference to me that I did not have to leave our home to indulge in a childhood passion that the hustles of everyday city life in normal times had nearly torpedoed. I must confess that I have been enjoying every moment of it, happily becoming an unofficial host. From the bathroom window and the porch of my kitchen, I see them flirting and mating, twittering in

their peculiar avian language, flapping their wings and as carefree as only birds can be.

As dawn flushed into daylight, the singing wren softened its songs; it sang intermittently. Going by the growing intensity of the morning sun, I must have been lost at the window for quite some time, listening to the Avian minstrel. Soon, it came into view as it perched on the arched roof top extension, surveying the environment as if to confirm that it was safe enough to fly into the vent connecting its nest in the attic. At other times, its male partner accompanied this female. Most active in the early mornings and evenings, together they spend the day working and ferrying twigs and food for their chicks.

Irritated by the birds' unsightly droppings on my rooftop, the signature of their roosting in our attic, I have become hostage to the lockdown addiction, watching them come and

go as they like. I have caught myself, in turn caught by my wife, staring out the window pondering, admiring and even envying the artistry, artisanal workmanship and industrious behaviour of the visiting avians. On one of my truly lucky days, different species fly in and out, fluttering and singing in the backyard: American robins, brown-headed cowbirds, Northern cardinals, house sparrows, and starlings.

Unproductive as this pastime may seem, I have come to better appreciate John Harold Johnson's philosophical declaration in his inspiring autobiography, *Succeeding Against the Odds*: "There is an advantage in every disadvantage, and a gift in every problem." Thus, a remarkable irony about the current COVID-19 pandemic is that while it has upended life as we used to know it, and continues to asphyxiate the old and young leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide, it has also given humanity the opportunity to turn to the little but important things of life they previously overlooked. Right now, in parts of England, people are taking up gardening more passionately, nurturing home-grown tomatoes and some such veggies in their backyards. Previously uncommunicative neighbours in a country famous for its horticultural bias have been offering useful hints on how to grow aubergines, for instance, graft a twig, and even giving out seedlings for free.

In all of this, it does seem

humanity is returning to nature or is it nature reclaiming the space humanity stole from it? Everywhere in the world, we have heard reports and seen pictures of indolent big cats sprawling or snoozing on major highways, primates taking over government offices, goats stretching out on tarmacs. Call it the COVID-19 Wildlife Occupy Movement (WOM) and you may not be wrong. Ever since the lockdown, there have been unusual reports of "Wild animals . . . claiming their space back as urban areas around the world are emptied due to Covid-19" The wide range of animals sighted occupying or strolling freely through deserted streets of usually bustling cities include wild goats (Wales), mountain goats (Cimesgezek, Turkey); kangaroo (Adelaide, Australia); crocodile (Toronto), monkeys (New Delhi), Coyotes (San Francisco); peacock (Dubai) deer (Paris, France; Nara, Japan; Trincomalee, Sri Lanka); wild boar (Antalya, Turkey; Haifa, Israel; France; Barcelona, Spain); buffalo (New Delhi highway) Puma (Santiago, Chile); sea lions (Mar del Plata, Argentina);

wild penguins (South Africa); etc.

Even inside zoos and national parks and game reserves (Kruger in South Africa, Yosemite National Park, and the Hong Kong zoo), animals have been sighted taking unusual natural "vacation" as they exploit the lockdown to express their much-denied freedom. A particularly striking story is that of the pandas in a Hong Kong zoo finally mating after 10 years, apparently because there were no human visitors gawking at them. In the same vein, environmentalists and nature lovers have celebrated the momentary healing of the earth due to drastic reduction in pollution because of the restrictions on nonessential automobile transportation and industrialization across the world. I call this fresh phenomenon *Naturecracy*, and by that I mean, Nature's rule over the material world—as related to but subtly different from "ecocracy," a term that has been used by "environmentocrats" to highlight a system of government that privileges natural order in relation to

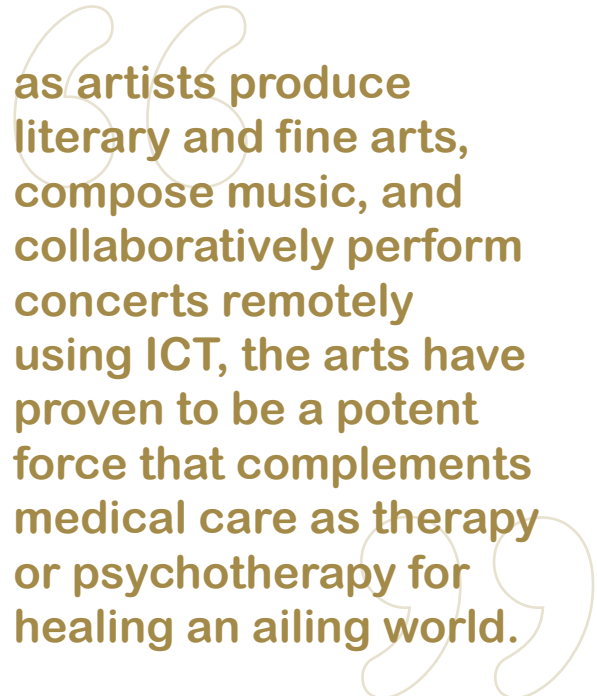
**I call this fresh phenomenon  
Naturecracy, and by that I mean,  
Nature's rule over the material world  
— as related to but subtly different  
from "ecocracy,"**

environment and development. In thinking of naturecracy in the time of COVID-19, I am re-envisioning the jubilant reign of nature, even if momentarily, as humanity retreated from the streets in compliance with governments' emergency lockdown orders to fight the super-spreading of the highly infectious virus.

There is another phenomenon that has developed in this period of coronavirus, which is Artocracy. In deploying this, term, I am aligning with Nuno Sacramento and Claudia Zeiske's coinage in their 2010 book of the same title, "conceived to help structure our thinking with regard to art and society."

While naturecracy thrives and heals in a world wounded by the bureaucracy of everyday life under COVID-19, the pandemic has equally ushered in a reign of creativity. This creative spark among artists is visible in Africa and other parts of the world. Next to medicine and emergency medical professionals in the frontlines of the war against the pandemic, the arts and artists have become everyday consolation companion. More so, that "catchy songs," music, films, books, skits, etcetera have been weaponized to "edutain" citizens of a world stretched to the limits by a merciless scourge that has claimed over 346,000 lives worldwide. And so, while some artists are rediscovering their muses, many people have had to rely on the arts for intellectual and spiritual nourishment as well as for comic relief. What is more, as artists produce literary and fine arts, compose music, and collaboratively perform concerts remotely using ICT, the arts have proven to be a potent force that complements medical care as therapy or psychotherapy for healing an ailing world.

Given the centrality of nature and the arts to our survival of the pandemic and to post pandemic recovery, the question may be asked: How can Nigeria take advantage of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to rethink the role of culture and the creative industries? This question presupposes that the country has a responsive cultural bureaucracy that could re-imagine her cultural and creative landscape using the pandemic as a catalyst to create a model for the future. I am not exactly sure what kind of "model for the future" one might expect. But I would like to state my cynicism about



**as artists produce literary and fine arts, compose music, and collaboratively perform concerts remotely using ICT, the arts have proven to be a potent force that complements medical care as therapy or psychotherapy for healing an ailing world.**

the capacity of the traditional bureaucracy to process the challenges of cultural production in the present times towards developing a programmatic "competitive model for the future." So, if one is expecting Nigeria's government agencies to set the agenda, I am afraid, salvation will not come from that critical sector.

Therefore, we should not be looking up to government to construct any new visionary cultural architecture for the creative industries. Instead, I am confident in the capacity of independent Nigerian artists and cultural producers to further strategically entrench artocracy. This much they have been doing by establishing the country as the cultural capital of the continent as per the literary, filmic, and musical subsectors of the arts. On that note, I foresee our enterprising creative artists rising from the ravages of the pandemic to create enduring works informed by the experiences of this terrible season. But this is not to say that the government or corporate sector should withhold support from the creative industry.

It is too early, in my opinion, to see the emerging creative works in terms of a competitive model for the future. The works will speak for themselves in terms of what artistic models emerge and how competitive or not they become. The simple reason being that there is no operational school or movement at





work as was the case with say, “the Zaria Rebels” of Nigeria’s Independence era that sprouted in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. But if the pointers are to be taken seriously as evident in some recently released compositions such as Erigga’s “Quarantine Cruise” or Bella Shmurda’s “Colodia Drive Us,” then we should be expecting works hinged on humor as metaphor. Instructively, beyond formal artistic production, informal memes, jokes, and online skits have become part of the daily dosage of humour transmitted through WhatsApp and other social media platforms and consumed by the masses towards coping with the debilitating psycho-social consequences of the pandemic. Beyond the epicentres of the pandemic in hospital rooms, artocracy holds sway in the comfort of family homes, balconies, and social media chatrooms as evident on cable television broadcasts.

More than ever before, the new coronavirus has led me, and I believe many others, into rediscovering the god of small things, to appropriate the title of Arundhati Roy’s popular novel. And as the Nigerian pop artist Tekno Miles sings in his hit single, “Rara,” we should “forget about the big things oh/ Say make we talk about the small things.” These ostensibly “small things” include daily watching the spring birds that have made our backyard their seasonal nesting home. The god of small things is teaching us to emulate the animals roaming freely under the pandemic by not focusing on existentialism, but to take one day at a time amid an overwhelming wave of diseases and deaths encircling the world. The healing power of taking life’s inscrutable experiences with equanimity is underscored by the fact that these days, “The world we wake up in” appears as “a counterfeit reality,” to paraphrase Louis Netter in his fascinating article, “The

importance of art in the time of coronavirus.” And as if to further facilitate conversations on the troubled times we live in, and to foreground the primacy of naturecracy and artocracy to our survival, the speaker in Akua Lezli Hope’s poem, “Arrivant,” asks rhetorically: “Why can’t we see god anymore? And the response follows: “because we don’t bend low enough/ We are being called by the little/ fish to save the world (Wreaths for a Wayfarer 110).”

Indeed, it is time to start listening to the gods of small things such as the little birds building their nests at my backyard and the little fish in the river calling us to save the world.

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# We can't Breathe - Africa Chokes on COVID-19 and Fossil Fuel Flames:

## Communiqué from Oilwatch Africa Annual General Meeting 2020

On the 10th of August 2020, Oilwatch Africa held a virtual Annual General Meeting (AGM), with the theme- We can't breathe – Africa Choking on COVID and Fossil flames. The AGM was attended by 32 participants from 12 African countries, including Nigeria, Togo, Swaziland, Mozambique, South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, DRC, Uganda, Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe and Ivory Coast. The meeting surveyed the devastating impacts of fossil fuels on the continent, both through exploitation and combustion, punctuated this week by the oil spill off the shores of Mauritius. The spill originated from a Japanese ship whose main purpose is taking iron ore from Brazil to China, in a world economy which already suffers a massive steel glut.

The world economy is just as chaotic as our global political ecology. The crash of oil prices due to Russian-Saudi rivalries and lockdown demand compression, has offered a perverse opportunity for African governments to turn to neo-colonial international financial institutions for loans and financial aid while leaving healthcare and social support systems in tatters.

And while citizens are restricted by the lockdown, fossil fuel companies have remained active at diverse crime scenes. They have been piling up further ecological harms in their search for profits, to shore up shareholder confidence at a time when they are also required to devalue their assets by tens of billions

of dollars in keeping with accounting standards.

The crash of Big Oil confirms that fossil fuels are fast losing their relevance in relation to other commodity-based corporations, and COVID19 has clearly exposed how in future, we can all do with far less petroleum consumption.

We have always endorsed divestment from oil, coal, gas and petrochemical companies, and this wisdom is confirmed as their assets now sell at massively discounted prices. These firms are taking unprecedented hits to their balance sheets, slashing dividend payouts for shareholders, and racking up debt to preserve a facade of stability. Even the petrochemical sector —

hailed by industry leaders as a panacea for future growth — has been exposed for its unviable economic prospects. There is a general ruinous exposure of the entire fossil fuels 'global value chain,' now better described as a devaluation chain.

We who have been victimised by fossil fuel devaluation of our lives and prospects – at sites of extraction, in pipeline construction and operations, in refining, in shipping, in combustion, in disposal and in the most climate-vulnerable parts of the world – welcome the economic pain felt by investors who did not heed our warning and divestment demands. We told you so – that the laws of nature create reckonings you have no idea when and where and how deep the pain will affect you in the Global North, not just us in Africa.

In short, while Oilwatch Africa participants understand that the pandemic can be partially contained through lockdowns, the unfolding climate catastrophe will precipitate a devastating knockdown on the continent, and everywhere on earth.

There is, therefore, an urgent need for Africa to view the fossil fuel sector with scepticism, hostility and a willingness to promote its shutdown. The retrogressive economies, deepening inequalities and irresponsible exploitation of our peoples and environments must now decisively end, before any further damage is done.

### Observations:

During presentations and deliberations, it was observed that:

- The extractivist pathways are entrenched as a mechanism for colonial, neocolonial and neoliberal plunder and the worsening of our continent's overall dependency through "unequal ecological exchange" with the major economic powers.
- We need to change our leaders' belief in commodity market revival – including of fossil fuels – because we insist we should no longer be dependent upon such export earnings, especially when seen as a means of recovery from COVID-19. Such belief has failed everyone in Africa who has lived or worked in the zones of extraction.
- There is an urgent need for a united Africa empowered with information to tackle the menace of fossil fuel extraction across Africa. We need to calculate the vast "ecological debt" that the fossil fuel producers owe us, including multinational corporations active across Africa. In South Africa's case alone, as the world's third most carbon-intensive economy per capita (behind only Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic), the two unprecedented cyclones and a rain bomb did unprecedented damage to Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe in March-May 2019, as well as to its own KwaZulu-Natal coastline around Durban. Avoiding the consequences of fossil fuels, as well as the inevitable pollution flowing from oil and gas leaks –as has become synonymous with the Niger Delta and as is now unfolding due to a ship's leak of 4000 tons of bunker fuel in Mauritius – will occupy Oilwatch Africa into the future, given how desperate African elites are to still do deals with the corporations that threaten our very future.
- We join in solidarity with all those suffering the implications of oil, such as hungry food producers in the Horn of Africa, as billions of locusts swarm in to eat their grains, thanks to the proximity of excessively wet weather caused by climate change. We salute the Mauritian eco-socialist movement Rezistans ek Alternativ, as they both provide urgent material support to contain the spill – using sugarcane husks wrapped tightly within plastic as oil booms – and demand state and corporate accountability. They tell us all, that "We are proud that a new Mauritius is emerging that is putting nature and life at the centre," and we vow to follow their lead.



## **Demands**

At the end of the one-day virtual Oilwatch Africa AGM the participants demanded:

1. African governments should finally recognize not the hucksters of a 'global value chain' in oil, but instead the global devaluation of life due to fossil fuels addictions. We insist they turn the continent from any ruinous pathways that lead to a global petroleum value chain, and instead work with us to hasten the demise of these firms and the replacement of leaders who are their African collaborators.
2. Corporations and states should totally halt all new and existing fossil fuels exploration and extractive sites/activities across Africa and remove the knee of the extractive industries from the neck of Africa, to give her a chance to breathe.
3. African governments should establish climate-resilient and just recovery models to defend communities, stop destructive extraction and support agroecology through their leading visionary organisations in civil society.
4. The COVID19 Pandemic should not be used as a yardstick to layoff workers, to oppress citizens, or to victimise activists across Africa.
5. Government should not use the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to carry out development plans that will negatively affect the environment and impact on community's health and well-being, without proper and meaningful popular consultation.
6. Government should not lower environmental standards, suspend environmental monitoring requirements or reduce environmental enforcement as part of response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. African governments should support Annex Zero, by recognising and incentivising countries, nations, subnational spaces, localities, and territories that keep fossil fuels in the ground. We need to pressure the Global North to pay its climate debt, one aspect of this is our societies' willingness to leave fossil fuels underground. A down payment of the Global North's ecological debt to Africa is long overdue, and in this category we include the greenhouse-gas over consumers of South Africa, the BRICS countries and other emerging markets.
8. Annex Zero communities should be supported with series of international incentives and recognitions based on solidarity, relevant technological exchanges and the payment of an ecological debt associated with their suffering due to climate crisis. We think such communities could be paid properly



following two models: the proposed 'Yasuni' strategy of Northern governments paying the Ecuadoran government money to leave fossil fuels underground, which they would convert to more generous social programmes; and the 'Basic Income Grant' successfully piloted in Otjivero, Namibia, which gives individual households in climate-sensitive sites a monthly cash grant to improve their lives and fend off the damage done by Global-North polluters.

9. Africans should resist all forms of neoliberal capitalism that deepen the extractive-export model in the Global South, causing unequal ecological exchange and in the process causing the displacement of millions, destruction of the environment, new dependencies, and recolonization.
10. Africans should promote accountability for the carnage, deaths and ecocide across Africa, especially those caused by worsening climate chaos.
11. The impact of COVID-19 on the health and livelihoods of countries already adversely affected by fossil fuels exploitation should be assessed. In such countries, it is clear that communities made vulnerable by such industries – for example when people near refineries or oil wells suffer asthma – are also more susceptible to COVID-19. And during national lockdowns, these communities are also more vulnerable than others. When local industries return to post-lockdown operations, the damages associated with pollution due to restarting wells and refineries is even greater than normal.
12. A just transitioning away from fossil fuels and equitably phasing out coal, oil and gas extraction should be a fundamental part of the plan for African nations' economic recovery from COVID19 Pandemic.

Finally, we salute activists fighting fossil fuels in all their manifestations. The protest rates in African countries have been at historic post-colonial highs since early 2011 when the North African uprising became manifest. There has been no break in the action, as Africa's popular movements have demanded more democratic leadership, accountability and transparency,

less austerity, less extractivism, an end to femicide and ethnic battles, and a shift to ecological sustainability. The first weeks of COVID-19 dented our ability to protest injustice but we have banged out the dents and are revitalising our popular movements. These movements are not as narrow as they were during the struggle against the 1950s-90s colonialism, 1980s-90s dictators imposing structural adjustment, and against 'resource-cursed' elites.

We now know we owe our continent a chance to heal from the terrible state of economy-society-nature relations, so that COVID-19 and other zoonotic diseases will cease, so that local ecologies recover, and so that climate catastrophe can be averted. We know we have consensus for these values from the rest of the continent, aside from a few corrupted souls. And we know we can and will prevail in bringing our beloved Africa to the necessary post-fossil phase of our individual and collective lives – but only with your guidance and involvement, dear African citizens.

If we fail, then Black Lives Matter in the USA and Europe, but not in Africa?

#### **Signed:**

*Africa Coal Network  
JVE, Cote d'Ivoire  
Oilwatch Ghana, Ghana  
Friends of Lake Turkana, Kenya  
Justiça Ambiental, Mozambique  
Green Alliance of Nigeria, Nigeria  
Health of Mother Earth Foundation, Nigeria  
Kabetkache Women Development Resource Centre, Nigeria  
We the People, Nigeria  
Peace Point Development Foundation, Nigeria,  
Policy Alert, Nigeria  
Leke Development Foundation, Nigeria  
Earthlife Africa, South Africa  
South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, South Africa  
Oil Change Africa, Swaziland  
Les Amis de la Terre/Oilwatch, Togo  
Africa Institute for Energy Governance, Uganda  
National Association of Professional Environmentalists, Uganda*

# Food for Thought for Food

BY JOYCE EBEBEINWE



When you think of food what comes to mind?  
the sweet taste?  
the captivating aroma?  
How about the sight of it?  
Does it command the army in your tommy to  
be in a hurry?

Oh, how much food means to us  
more than the taste, the fragrance, the feeling  
of satisfaction  
But how much have you thought  
from whence comes my daily bread?  
Oh yes, many a meal come from beyond the  
market.

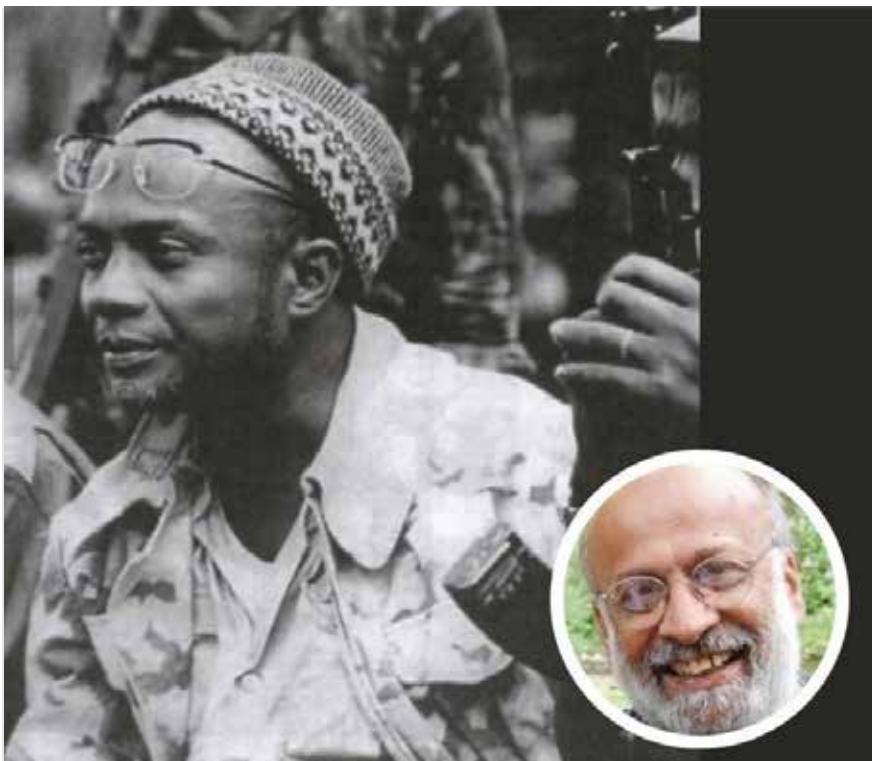
Many seeds descend from greedy minds  
which put profit over proper nutrition  
from systems that engineer genetic changes in  
organisms  
Changes that go as far as killing future  
generations  
Changes that enslave the original custodians of  
food

Most food ascend from soils soaked in  
chemicals  
soils that can't breathe no more  
Soils too unhealthy to produce healthy food  
We must ask the greedy minds  
To hands off our food  
To hands off our soils  
To hands off our lives

# CONVERSATION WITH AMILCAR CABRAL:

## From Agronomist to Liberator

BY OGECHI OKANYA COOKEY AND MFONISO ANTIA



To facilitate attainment of the change that Health of Mother Earth Foundation seeks, the “Conversations” was created as part of the foundation’s learning spaces. Through this space, young and aspiring activists are to learn from the history, passion, dedication and sacrificial struggle of older activists while hinging their current struggles and fights for justice on practical and theoretical knowledge, well thought out plans and analysis. The first edition which focused on Ken Saro-Wiwa, held in 2019.

The second episode which held on August 13, 2020 was titled Amilcar Cabral: From Agronomist to Liberator and the discussant was Firoze Manji, a pan-Africanist and publisher of Daraja Press. This episode focused on the life and times of Amilcar Cabral and highlighted how we can use our professions and competences as tools for liberation.

The Conversation was facilitated by Nnimmo Bassey, the Director of HOMEF who raised questions that elicited a

review of Amilcar Cabral’s life, his experiences and struggles. They were then examined in the light of current struggles.

To open the conversation, Nnimmo Bassey described Amilcar Cabral as an agronomist who became “singularly important to the struggle of independence in Africa.” He added that Cabral’s agricultural expertise was very instrumental in modelling his political practice. What can be learnt from this is that, “no matter what your profession is, whatever labels you attach to your names- the objective conditions around you and the skills you have can be utilized to change the situation on the continent”.

Firoze Manji revealed that the revolutionary, Cabral, believed that “the way forward for freedom does not come from allowing the elite decide what the solution is.” He added that Cabral was committed to the understanding that people are capable of thinking, of theorizing and of giving voice to their experiences. Manji informed that Cabral was popularly known for the expression “Tell No Lies, Claim No Easy Victories” and that he was absolutely clear that

people must be respected and involved in the struggle for it to succeed.

To facilitate a narrative on Cabral's shift from agronomist to liberator, Bassey iterated two central ideas that Cabral pushed. The first being the need for 're-entry of history' and the second, being the need to make farmers central in the food production process. This he said is against the imported, colonialist agricultural model which disregards the peasants and supplies the needs of the imperialists instead of those of the African people. To meet the second need, Bassey informed that Cabral spent time providing agricultural training for the farmers and militants, both before and during the liberation struggle.

Throwing more light on the above, Firoze Manji stated that Cabral began examining and studying what the situation of Guinea-Bissau's agriculture and was able to make significant agricultural policy changes during the colonial administration. This moved the colonial administration to put him in charge of an extensive centre of agricultural production. Cabral seized the opportunity to understand the farmers and learned how to listen to their concerns.

Part of the ideas emphasized in the Conversation was Cabral's belief in the 're-conversion of minds, a mindset indispensable for true integration of the people into the liberation movement'. To achieve this, Cabral used the tactic of having daily contact with the masses. According

PART OF THE IDEAS EMPHASIZED IN THE CONVERSATION WAS CABRAL'S BELIEF IN THE **'RE-CONVERSION OF MINDS, A MINDSET INDISPENSABLE FOR TRUE INTEGRATION OF THE PEOPLE INTO THE LIBERATION MOVEMENT'**.

to Firoze, he referred to this exercise as "a communion of sacrifice necessary for the struggle for emancipation."

Cabral did not believe that all the masses would buy his ideas. He indeed had come to the conclusion that if he had won over 25% of the population, he was well on his way to winning the whole. His reasoning was that the people would eventually change their views as they saw in practice what was happening in liberated zones. Cabral advanced the idea of a distinction between the concepts of the people and the population. The people comprising those committed to or engaged in overthrowing colonialism and the population covering "everyone who lives there".

Another idea discussed was Cabral's understanding of culture as the expression of national liberation. This also explains the process by which culture grows- emphasizing the understanding that culture is never fixed. It was emphasized that to fight for

national culture means to fight for the liberation of the nation. In Cabral's words, "National liberation is the phenomenon in which a socio-economic whole rejects the denial of the historical process". This entails a process where a people reclaim their historical identity. This explains Cabral's idea of the need for a 're-entry of history' possible, partly by making efforts to reconnect an emergent culture to the historical process that precedes it – the history that was lost to colonialism.

Manji explained Cabral's clear perception of the way history is used to consolidate the subjugation of a people- "To dominate a people, one has to first destroy, then rewrite their history." This, he said was why a return to history after independence should not have been bargained in Africa. Instead of reconnecting to her history, Africa chose to embrace that which the colonialist left by allowing their recruits to occupy and take on the same power structures. This led to the maintenance of the same strategies used by



the colonialists- violence and money – to ensure that the new occupants' interests were secured.

Through Cabral's political education, he was able to show how ecological degradation affects social and political conditions in a country. Cabral understood that humans are part of nature. He saw the negative impact of the colonialist-dominated agricultural sector on the environment- as a true agronomist is one who understands the revolutionary nature of his/her profession.

To be liberators, there is need to understand that everyone can become an intellectual. There is also a need to build our capacity to listen to and learn from people's experiences. This eradicates the habit of regurgitating dogma and instils the culture of making our experiences concrete and responding to the objective conditions of the people.

Amilcar Cabral was an internationalist. Besides being key in the formation of African Party of Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC) in 1956, he was also a key player in the formation of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in 1956 and; Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO).

His life and ideas had strong correlations with those of Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney, both of whom were clear liberation struggle thinkers and practitioners. Bassey explained that

this connects to HOMEf's belief and experience in her community dialogues with fishers, farmers and students; stating that as activists, the best approach to advocacy is to find time to sit down with the grassroots, engage with and learn from them. He maintained that a lot of knowledge is available at the grassroots which are not taken into account in policy formulations.

On responding to a question on how environmental groups like HOMEf can get Africa out of a state of being a plunder zone, Manji responded that the first transition out of the situation would be the understanding of the fundamentality of power in the struggle. Thus, rather than focusing so much on seeking policy change or getting multinationals to be nicer, "activists should be creating the conditions of power." This would involve moves to control our destiny, for example, keeping the coal in the hole and the oil in the soil- as HOMEf and Oilwatch have been advocating.

TO BE  
LIBERATORS,  
THERE IS  
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THAT **EVERYONE  
CAN BECOME AN  
INTELLECTUAL.**

The issue of betrayal also came up in the Conversation as Amilcar Cabral was killed by his comrades. The consequence of his killing was the dismantling of the favourable revolutionary structures put in place by Cabral that would have taken root in Guinea Bissau and possibly spread to other parts of Africa. This revealed that in any given group, there will always be people with agenda different from the leaders. The betrayal of Cabral has echoes in many other betrayals on the continent, including that of Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso who was equally slain by comrades. The point to note, according to Manji, is that not all those who support the struggle would end up supporting the revolution.

Amilcar Cabral was born on the 12th of September 1924 in Bafata, a small town in central Guinea-Bissau. He qualified as an Agricultural Engineer in Lisbon in 1950. A leader to the end, when a colleague fired a fatal shot that took his life on 20th January, 1973 in Conakry, his last words were an admonition that- that was no way for comrades to settle a disagreement.

The Conversation can be viewed at this link: <https://www.facebook.com/HealthEarth/videos/2728171107420122/>

# FishNet Alliance Extends Support to Fishers in Dic-Fibresima Ama Community in Okrika, Rivers State

BY MFONISO ANTIA



Dic-Fibresima Ama is a fishing community in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. In February 2020, the community was hit with a fire outbreak that destroyed houses and fishing equipment, putting a strain on their source of livelihood, alongside that posed by the pandemic.

In response to the plight of the people of Dic-Fibresima Ama, FishNet Alliance paid a visit to the community to show support and solidarity to the fishers. The Alliance, together with its governing principles was introduced to the group of fishers, who were very excited to hear that there is a group

that is concerned about their wellbeing and challenges.

The fishers shared their plight and struggles as caused by illegal refining of crude oil in the area and illicit fishing methods. They mentioned that a lot of fish and other aquatic species that were prevalent in the area are now extinct as a result of these activities. Notably among the extinct species is the mud skipper, which an older woman said was her expertise.

A report on fishing activities during the pandemic by some of the fishers revealed that, the lockdown occasioned by

the COVID-19 pandemic, stalled the illegal oil refining activities which in turn gave room for fish to rejuvenate and brood better than before. This, they said, was a clear confirmation that the shortage in catch is as a result of the pollution from the illegal crude oil refining.

Another challenge to fishing in the area, they said was lack of fishing equipment. Some complained on their inability to procure new tools since the fire incidence in February. In responding to this, the Alliance gave the group some fishing nets, hooks and other fishing accessories to help alleviate their struggles.

The fishers were very grateful for the goodwill and expressed their intention to join the Alliance. The meeting was a short introductory visit to the community. Members of the Alliance promised to return to the community for a full FishNet Alliance Community Dialogue and to link the group up with members of the Alliance in other fishing communities in Nigeria for experience and knowledge sharing.

# Don't Muddy Our Waters

## (Protecting Freshwater and Marine Ecosystems in the Congo Basin)

BY NNIMMO BASSEY

The theme of this year's World Ocean Day is 'Innovation for a Sustainable Ocean'. Innovation resonates readily because it speaks of new ideas, methods and ways of doing or using something. It speaks also of products and exploitation. Like most concepts, innovation is not value neutral. This calls for a careful consideration of what uptakes may arise from innovative ocean use. The theme aligns with SDG 14 – Life Below Water. Targets of this SDG encompass reducing marine pollution including those from land-based activities. It also targets the management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems in ways that do not yield negative impacts.

The Atlantic coastline of the Niger Delta and its network of rivers and creeks is notorious for being heavily impacted by oil spills, produced water and chemical wastes. The oceans have become huge sewage dumps for polluting industries. While floating plastic "continents" have caught global attention, oil spills frequently get pushed to the bottom of the sea with fractions evaporating into the atmosphere, avoiding notice until bits float to the coastline or are picked up by fishers struggling to make a living in the polluted seas. Spectacular offshore oil spills here include Shell's 40,000 barrels Bonga oil spill of 2011 and the one from a Texaco (Chevron) offshore station in 1980 that released 400,000 barrels into the ocean. It is estimated that about 1 million barrels of crude oil are dumped into the Niger Delta environment annually.

Besides oil production, other industries are serious threats to the oceans. The phosphate



factory at Kpeme, Togo, pumps industrial waste directly into the Atlantic coast, turning the water green for up to 1.5 kilometres into sea and rendering the area a dead zone for fisheries. Phosphate factories equally pollute the Atlantic Ocean with heavy metals at El Jadida-Safi coastal zone in Morocco.

Our freshwater ecosystems are under threat because of the offhanded manner they are treated. Rivers and lagoons get contaminated by industrial effluent and offshore extractive industries simply load the ocean with wastes and are not accountable to anyone. In sum, it is tragic that our rivers, creeks, lakes and seas are often seen as waste dumps.

The story does not end there. Considering the energy deficit in Africa, energy projects get

many excited. Consider the grand Inga hydropower project in Democratic Republic of Congo. While being touted as an infrastructural development that will power and light up Africa, the local people believe the main beneficiaries will be the extractive industries in the region. They believe that there will be major disruptions of the freshwater ecosystem and that they will be left to suffer the negative impacts of such an infrastructural development on the world's deepest river and the second longest in Africa.

The Inga III Dam to be located at the mouth of the Congo River is attracting finance from China and from the African Development Bank (AfDB). While we like to see the AfDB support and finance energy projects on the continent, they should be circumspect about funding projects that would have huge negative repercussions for Africa's biodiversity and her peoples, just as they did by withdrawing support for the Coal Power plant at Lamu, Kenya. The decision showed the bank's consideration for public opinion as well as the adverse climate change realities the power plant would contribute to. The bank cannot do any less with regard to the Inga III Dam project considering the dire impacts it would have as we hear from grassroots activists opposed to the project.

Rather than allow the World Ocean Day to be another opening for talk shops we are determined to make it a day of deep reflections from a people's perspective

on the state of our marine and freshwater ecosystems with a view to outlining concrete steps towards protecting them. One of our key recommendations is that it is time for the creation or expansion of protected Freshwater and Marine Areas in the Gulf of Guinea, the Congo Basin and in other inland lakes and rivers.

Health of Mother Earth Foundation has just issued a Policy Paper calling for the creation of Marine and Freshwater protected areas in Nigeria. The paper is adaptable for other countries in the Gulf of Guinea and Congo Basin. It states "There is need to develop institutional framework and an all-inclusive marine protected areas policy to protect the marine ecosystem against destructive and extinctive practices. Although there are no official gazettes of Freshwater or Marine Protected Areas in Nigeria, community people through cultural and local knowledge have led and managed the creation of protected areas, protection of some aquatic animal species and even scheduling of fishing periods." The issue of recognizing indigenous knowledge and practices is central to the call. We insist that protected areas must not deprive local populations of access to ecosystem resources. Any such protected areas must have provisions that are gender sensitive and socially inclusive.

We are also concerned that innovation in the oceans may herald the upscaling of plans to implement the Blue

.....  
The issue of recognizing indigenous knowledge and practices is central to the call. We insist that protected areas must not deprive local populations of access to ecosystem resources.  
.....

Economy concept which we see as an aquatic version of the Green Economy. The concern here is that just as the Green Economy epitomises the commodification of Nature, the literal placing of Nature on the market shelf, the Blue Economy will lead to partitioning and grabbing of our aquatic ecosystems with the attendant rise of extractive activities such as deep sea mining, marine biotechnology and bioprospecting.

It is time to raise the capacity of our fishers to monitor aquatic ecosystems, share knowledge, map threatened and valuable species, network with other fishers within and across borders. Water is life is not a mere slogan. It is declaration that must be fought for. Many see water as a resource that is limitless, conveniently forgetting that only three (3) percent of Earth's water is freshwater and only 1.2 percent can be used as drinking water while the rest are inaccessible in ice caps, permafrost or way down in the ground. Thinking about that should be sobering



# Climate Debt Long Overdue



Climate Debt, an overdue debt

You want to know

If and when the Climate Debt will ever be paid

When will the debtors agree there is a bill?

Could be soon... Could also be later

Don't you see?

Can't you yet perceive it?

Like the Natural Mystic

Probably a Climate Lockdown?

A stormy knockdown to wake us up?

Why are we so stuck up

Why do we imagine we are so strong

Don't you see?

Can't you yet perceive it?

By adorning a sunny crown

**BY NNIMMO BASSEY**

A tiny virus with Martian suction landing pads

Craves unwary nostrils, mouths and eyes

Made super powers powerless

Powerless, like in powerless

Don't you see?

Can't you yet perceive it?

Climate lockdown

Could be sooner

No, not later

With or without a crooner

Do not here mention corona

Don' you see?

Can you yet still not perceive it?

# The New Directions of French Imperialism in Africa

*Original in French: Les nouvelles orientations de l'impérialisme français en Afrique*  
*Translated by La Via Campesina Africa (LVC)*

BY SAÏD BOUAMAMA



The announcement in a simple communiqué dated 2nd February, 2020, of the dispatch of 600 additional French soldiers to the Sahel (bringing the number of Operation Barkhane forces to 5,100) has given rise to little debate and even less opposition. No militant initiative has accompanied the announcement despite the fact that since 2013, France Insoumise or at the same time the PCF explicitly raised the need to clarify France's war objectives in the region. For example, the communiqué of the PCF's Africa Collective dated 29 November 2019 states that "the military

response is a failure". The various organizations of the so-called "extreme left" have also denounced the French presence in West Africa. Consequently, we find ourselves in a situation of "denunciation without action" at the very moment when popular demonstrations are taking place in several countries in the region to demand the departure of French troops.

## **The Western military presence in Africa**

Operation Barkhane is only one aspect of the French military presence on the

African continent. It adds to (and reinforces) the French permanent military bases, which officially number four for some 3,000 soldiers (Djibouti, Abidjan, Libreville and Dakar). However, to these bases must be added the "Armed Forces of the Southern Zone of the Indian Ocean (FAZSOI)" stationed on the island of La Réunion and on the island of Mayotte with 1,900 men. The permanent bases and the "temporary bases" (an increasingly permanent interim in the case of Operation Barkhane) of the External Operations (OPEX) allow a division into zones of the continent from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa. Thus, nearly 10,000 French soldiers remain permanently on the African continent, making France the country that permanently maintains the largest number of military personnel in Africa. Currently only Southern Africa and North Africa are outside these military zones.

To these figures we must also add the military presence of other EU countries, which is no less regular because it is "punctual". Most often,

European military intervention takes the form of aid to finance military operations carried out by France. However, it can also take the form of direct military intervention, as in the case of Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2003, in which military personnel from 'Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, Sweden and the Netherlands were present'. These European military interventions are deployed under French coordination: 'France, the most committed, takes on the role of "framework nation"', explains historian Martine Cuttier. Paris thus becomes a subcontractor of European military intervention and the French army a mercenary army.

The US military presence on the continent is not lagging behind. The main part of the American deployment is at the base in Djibuti with 4,000 men destined to cover operations in both Africa and the Middle East. But it is not the only base. "The United States has a total of 34 military sites among the 14 military bases and 20 camps, outposts", summarizes the magazine *Tribune Afrique* of December 3, 2018. This military network directed by AFRICOM (US Africa Command, whose headquarters are in Stuttgart, Germany), "allows the deployed forces to provide operational flexibility and a rapid response to crises involving US personnel or interests", summarises Thomas Waldhauser, commander of AFRICOM.

The importance of the Western military presence on the continent is not comparable to that of other major powers. Thus, Russia has no military base in Africa and China has only one in Djibouti, which opened in 2017 and has 400 soldiers. A study by the IFRI (French Institute of International Relations) summarises its conclusions after comparing the US, Russian and Chinese presence as follows: "Africa, which was a geopolitical challenge during the Cold War, is again emerging today as a key area of strategic competition and is attracting major non-European powers such as the United States, China and Russia. These powers are trying to secure access to Africa through financing and diplomatic agreements, the construction of logistical bases and the exercise of their 'soft power'. They

also carry out military operations there which are significant and coercive in the case of the United States, involved in Africa by virtue of anti-terrorism. China, for its part, concentrates on its peacekeeping operations and the evacuation of its citizens in the event of a crisis. Russia still limits itself to advisory actions".

Of course, in this "strategic competition" in Africa, the European Union (and France's place as "framework nation") must be added. The disproportion of the military presence between the different powers highlights that the Western military strategy is not a response to a Russian or Chinese military strategy, as it was during the so-called "Cold War". The military strategy thus seems to be a response to the development of the Russian and Chinese economic presence. In fact, Trump's national security advisor, John Bolton, explains the motivations behind the US strategy in Africa as follows: "Predatory practices by China and Russia slow down economic growth in Africa, threaten the financial independence of African countries, inhibit US investments, and interfere with US military operations. They pose a real threat to our national security interests".

As the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz already said, "war is nothing but the continuation of political relations by other means".

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*"Africa, which was a geopolitical challenge during the Cold War, is again emerging today as a key area of strategic competition and is attracting major non-European powers such as the United States, China and Russia."*

## The economic interests of French multinationals in Africa

Clausewitz's famous formula highlights the error of defining imperialism solely from a military angle. Imperialism is first an economic reality before being a military practice. The former is the material basis and the true causality of the latter. French military strategy in Africa is the object of a discourse of justification and legitimisation that explicitly addresses the objective of defending French economic interests. This strategy is defined in two "white papers for defence and national security" dated 2008 and 2013 respectively. The 2008 white paper emphasises the international tensions linked to "strategic supplies" and "increased rivalry with emerging countries" in a continent rich in "strategic raw materials and energy resources" which constitute vital assets for the world economy".

This document clearly announces the immediate and lasting intensification of military interventionism in Africa: "Africa will be at the forefront of our prevention strategy for the next fifteen years". Since then, we have had Libya, the Ivory Coast, Mali, the Central African Republic and now all the countries of the Sahel (Senegal, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritius, Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Sudan du Sud, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti and Ethiopia). The Sahel is the area of convergence of two distinct ecosystems: the Sahara desert and the Savannahs).

The second white paper, the one of 2013, establishes a first "positive" balance of this offensive strategy which is updated in 2017 in a document entitled "Strategic Review of Defence and National Security". In addition to the objective of increasing the defence effort to 2% of GDP by 2025, the latter document stresses the creation of national cohesion' (particularly among young people) and the need to support the arms industry. The first point is directly linked to the establishment of a compulsory "Universal National Service", which in turn is linked to the creation of "national cohesion" to enable preventive wars to be waged: "National cohesion conditions the legitimacy of the actions of armies through the support of the nation to decisions to resort to the use of force.

Today, this cohesion is confronted with the spread of ideologies that call into question the values and principles of the Republic. [...] In this domain, armies play a role of socialization, by means of recruitment but also through the devices in which they participate (National Guard, Voluntary Military Service, Adapted Military Service...). The second provides for the strengthening of the "French Defence Industrial and Technological Base" (BITD), with the following argument:

"The French Defence Industrial and Technological Base (BITD) is made up of a dozen large world-class groups and nearly 4,000 SMEs, which in 2017 accounted for more than 200,000 jobs in France, most of them extremely technical and difficult to relocate, with a fundamental positive impact on the trade balance (more than 6 million euros in 2016). It is supplemented by a range of government resources and skills (research bodies, expertise and test centres, agencies, etc.). ...] BITD must be supported and maintained at all levels (start-ups, SMEs, medium-sized enterprises, large groups). Such support is provided through long-term policies on research and investment, cooperation, export support, acquisition and protection against foreign investment'.

It is, therefore, a question of preparing new military interventions by meeting the material conditions (strengthening of the military-industrial complex) and ideological conditions ("Universal National Service" and, more broadly, discourse and propaganda for "national cohesion" and defence of the "values of the Republic"). This military preparation and the future wars it heralds are in the service of defending the interests of French multinationals whose monopoly positions inherited from history are already being eroded by the emergence of new international players (the so-called "emerging" countries and in particular China). Without being exhaustive, it is not useless to recall some of these large groups that our armies defend in Africa: "A large part of the heavyweights of the CAC 40 or of France's greatest fortunes have developed flourishing (and sometimes almost monopolistic) activities in Africa: Bernard Arnaut (LVMH), Bouygues, Bolloré, Pinault (CFAO until its recent sale in July to

the Japanese group Toyota Tsusho Corporation, TTC, a diversified subsidiary of the Toyota group), Seillière (Bureau Veritas), Jacques Saadé (CMA-CGM), Romain Zaleski (Eramet), Lafarge, Total, Technip, Vinci, Véolia, BNP Paribas, Natixis, Crédit Agricole, Alcatel, Accor, Gaz de France, Michelin, Alstom, Air France, KLM... A non-exhaustive list to which should be added arms dealers and some other groups, especially in the agri-food sector, with, for example, the Castel and Compagnie Fruitière groups. And in general the reports of the CIAN (French Council of Investors in Africa) confirm this every year: despite the increasing international competition, [the relationship] between French employers and Africa is always "I love you more than yesterday but less than tomorrow".

These large groups have been the main beneficiaries of the privatization of public services imposed by the IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment

Plans since the 1990s. Thus, for example, it is [French company] Lyonnaise des eaux that benefited from the privatisation of the Compagnie Nationale des Eaux et de l'Electricité du Togo or the Bolloré group that inherited the management of the container terminal in the port of Lomé. In Cameroon this same Bolloré company inherits the port traffic of Douala and the operation of the railway. Bouygues is now present in the production and distribution of water in the Ivory Coast and Senegal, and in the construction and maintenance of transport infrastructure. Orange dominates mobile telephony in most West African countries. Water, electricity, railways, port management, telephony, etc: for French multinationals, the purge of structural adjustment and their privatisation of public services means access to new, particularly lucrative income.

Mining and energy resources are the second "income" of our multinationals protected

by the French army. All the multinationals in the French oil, gas and mining industries are developing their presence in the exploitation of the continent's resources. For example, a third of the hydrocarbon production of the oil company Total is carried out on the African continent. Another oil company, Technip, has a strong presence in the Nigerian petrochemical industry. In the steel industry Eramet is the main producer of manganese alloys in Gabon. Orano (formerly Areva) exploits the uranium mines of Niger, but also of South Africa. The systematic destruction of the state-owned companies created at the time of independence has resulted everywhere in the direct establishment of multinationals in these strategic sectors.

Agro-industry, which during the colonial period and the first decades of independence was a source of immense profits, is still the third "income" of French multinationals in Africa. The company Géocoton is firmly established in the production of cotton for all the countries of the Sahel. Bolloré exploits the palm groves in Cameroon. Rougier exploits two million hectares of forest in Cameroon, Congo and Gabon for the production of plywood.

The economist, Jean Roch, sums up the place of the French multinationals as follows: "The market share of France south of the Sahara is 8% (compared to 4% in the whole world) and exceeds 15% in the CFA zone, which is not insignificant. Thus,

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*The systematic destruction of the state-owned companies created at the time of independence has resulted everywhere in the direct establishment of multinationals in these strategic sectors.*



despite the difficulties of conversion, French companies undoubtedly occupy some of the most profitable sectors of the black African economies'. The three "rents" mentioned above explain the strong French military presence and the multiplication of its military interventions. In Africa too, war is the continuation of policy by other means, all the more so as China offers more advantageous contractual conditions and thus competes with France's "reserved domain". Maintaining by force, destabilisation and making dependent in terms of security what is no longer obtained through "free and undistorted competition" is one of the logics of the African policy of French imperialism in the continent.

### The Shock Doctrine

Asking about the persistence of the "Malian crisis" and the French military intervention triggered by it, the Malian historian Doulaye Konaté points out that "whoever controls Mali controls Africa, if not all of Africa". Eight years after the destruction of Libya, thanks above all to French military intervention, the situation in the whole of the Sahel is now unstable. The military presence of Operation Barkhane has not improved security. In turn, this "insecurity" is used as a justification for the long-term prolongation of Operation Barkhane, so it is not surprising that more and more voices are being raised in Africa asking about the real "war aims" of Operation Barkhane: saving the Sahel



from the jihadist threat or defending the economic and geopolitical interests of French imperialism?

These two wars' aims may seem to converge on the surface, but in reality they are structurally divergent. The first is to strengthen African states and the second is to weaken them and keep them economically and militarily dependent on the former colonial power. The weakening of the African states is the material basis on which the conditions for the possibility of jihadist destabilisation are developed. It is the result of all the neo-colonial economic policies. From the Structural Adjustment Plans to the Economic Association Agreements, including the CFA franc, these policies converge in the destruction of the State's capacity to ensure a minimum presence in schools, roads, economic activities, etc., in entire regions of each country. In each of these nations, they forge a bipolarization between a "useful country" and an abandoned "useless country".

The maintenance of a permanent but "controllable" degree of instability makes

it possible both to maintain the economic exploitation of "useful areas" and to justify a lasting foreign military presence. More than a decade ago, the economist and anti-globalization journalist Naomie Klein extensively documented this "shock strategy" which consists of relying on the "psychological shocks" caused by disasters (natural or provoked) to justify policies that would otherwise have been rejected. Criticism of this strategy is becoming increasingly frequent in African public opinion. In France, however, it hardly exists for fear of being politically stigmatized as a "defender of the conspiracy theory". In the recent past, this fear led at worst to support for the war in Libya and at best to mutism in the face of it. Today it leads to an absence of anti-imperialist movements and protests at the very moment when the French state is recovering an aggressive strategy to preserve its interests in Africa. Consequently, this fear is part of the vast ideological process aimed at generating the "cohesion" needed by the French state to carry out its military interference, that is, to generate consent to war. The establishment of the Universal National Service reinforces this ideological elaboration of consent.

# FOOD, FARMING AND COVID-19

BY JOYCE EBEBEINWE

There are several pointers to the fact that COVID-19 and similar disease outbreaks are the result of our encroachment on natural habitats and destruction of genetic diversity occasioned by the industrial system of agriculture and other economic activities. The current pandemic and the lockdown measures to curb its spread have given us an opportunity to analyse our food production systems and change our course for a healthy and resilient future.

The pandemic has brought to fore the importance of local, inclusive and sustain-able food systems because while many businesses are shut down and commercial processes including the distribution of genetically modified seeds to farmers are restricted, smallholder farmers have to keep up with the production and marketing of healthy food for the population. This, they do in spite of the challenges they face in terms of restriction of movement; access to markets, credit schemes; lack of storage and processing facilities; and poor road networks etc.



On 30 June, 2020, HOMEF had a webinar (Dialogue) with students of Agriculture and youths from across Nigeria which focused on the implications of the pandemic on our food systems; the impact of industrial agriculture (GMOs, excessive use of chemicals, monocultures etc.) on food systems as well as its link to pandemics such as the COVID19; and issues of seeds and markets and how they affect small holder farmers. The dialogue which also had journalists and CSOs in attendance highlighted the way forward for healthy and resilient food and farming systems in a post COVID-19 Era.

Speakers, drawn from Nigeria, Ethiopia and South Africa included Million Belay, Coordinator of the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa; Tatfeng Mirabeau, professor of Medical Microbiology, Nigeria Delta University; Jackie Ikeotuonye, CEO at Bio-integrity and Natural Foods Awareness Initiative; and Linzi Lewis, a researcher and advocacy officer at the African Center for Biodiversity.

The fact that we must first understand the root of problems before we are able to solve them was stressed by Nnimmo Bassey (HOMEF Director) in his opening remarks. "Industrial agriculture

***“This is the time to explore sustainable agricultural systems which provide healthy, enjoyable diets for all while contributing to socioeconomic development and minimizing (and eventually eliminating) environmental impacts and waste.”***

(which propels 80 percent of deforestation, promotes land grabs, displaces family farmers and communities) and the pursuit of profit have unrelentingly eaten away at natural habitats, bringing about displacement of both humans and beasts” he explained.

According to Million Belay, intensive livestock production and destruction of genetic diversity occasioned by modern biotechnology further increases the risk of emergence and spread of diseases such as the COVID-19, SARS, Ebola, etc. Speaking on the realities of the present pandemic, he stated that it has brought about increased marginalization of already marginalized people. “Women are seriously impacted as they have the responsibility of caring for the sick and also making food available amidst the movement restrictions and market challenges” he added.

Speaking further on the impacts of the pandemic on our food and farming systems, Jackie Ikeotuonye stated

that there have been hikes in food prices, poor access to seeds by farmers, poor access to markets, disruptions in collecting and transporting agricultural products to areas of consumption, post-harvest losses occasioned by lack of storage facilities, and a general inability of farmers to meet up with food supply.

“This is the time to explore sustainable agricultural systems which provide healthy, enjoyable diets for all while contributing to socioeconomic development and minimizing (and eventually eliminating) environmental impacts and waste. Agroecology and food sovereignty are of key importance in the post COVID 19 era. The right to own and control our agricultural systems and our food from seed to consumption must be upheld” she explained.

Speaking on seeds, seed laws and markets, Linzi Lewis stressed on the importance and need to protect farmer managed seed systems which provide 90% of agricultural seeds and which allows for

saving, sharing and sale of local, genetically diverse, adaptable and affordable seeds across planting seasons.

It was noted that currently, the orientation of our seed laws is specifically towards the private sector which undermine the farmer managed systems that we rely on. We must understand that it is the small holder farmers who feed Africa and so we are faced with the question of who will feed us since our laws put the small holder farmers at risk and favour the private sector whose major concern is export and profit.

Genetic modification of food crops and specifically the approval for commercial release of Bt Cotton and cowpea in Nigeria is of serious concern. “Implication of GMOs, in addition to the loss of farmers’ rights over the modified seeds include- increased use of herbicides; destruction of non- target organisms; loss of biodiversity; and health implications such as cancers, immune system disorders, birth defects etc.” Professor Mirabeau explained.

It was stated that landmark outcomes such as the report- Agriculture at a Crossroads issued by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) in 2008 which calls for adoption of the most efficient farming systems, and recommends a fundamental shift toward agroecology as a way to boost food production should be utilized in national policy.



In addition to being an efficient and resilient farming system, agroecology, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in 2014 is a key element of the food system that the world needs in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As noted by the FAO, Agroecology directly contributes to many of the SDGs including eradication of poverty (1) and hunger (2), ensuring quality education (4), achieving gender equality (5), increasing water-use efficiency (6), promoting decent jobs (8), ensuring sustainable consumption and production (12), building climate resilience (13), securing sustainable use of marine resources (14) and halting the loss of biodiversity (15).

From the presentations and discussions, the following action points and recommendations were drawn:

- While the immediate concerns of protecting the health of citizens may be taking precedence during the crisis, our governments need to keep their foot on the pedal of agricultural transformation and take this opportunity to strategically rethink our agriculture and food systems.
- We should focus on regenerative, restorative agriculture such as Agroecology that nourishes and sustains ecosystems and biodiversity.
- Post COVID -19, we must wean ourselves from the dependency on imported processed foods and on the industrial agricultural system which not only impact negatively on our health but also weakens our economy. A mindset of autonomy and strong political will is needed to turn the enormous potential of Africa's food sovereignty into a reality.
- The government should put in place a variety of proactive measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on women, smallholder farmers and producers.
- Young people should be included in dialogues with public health specialists and policymakers and should be given the opportunity to contribute to decision making and problem solving. Including young people will result in a more sustainable and long-term solution to the current and future pandemics. The

youth of today can act as custodians of the pandemic response in order to remind future generations of the lessons learnt, pitfalls, and the best way forward.

- Our governments need to be proactive in monitoring food availability and pricing. This can be done by setting up food-security or agricultural response units in the face of COVID-19 as centralized strategic and planning hubs. Governments should deploy digital tools and data-gathering approaches to manage food availability, accessibility, and affordability—as well as providing support to value-chain players.

Africa is rich in biodiversity and we have the potential to feed ourselves and have excess to share with the global human community. We do not need the external approval of exploitative entities to build a sustainable food and agricultural system. We must resist the urge to have our food system guided by the warped agenda that promotes mass production driven only by higher profit margins and that see food only for its market value.

The pandemic is also forcing nations to recognize the risks of depending on other nations for major food and health supplies. This presents us a pivotal moment to direct the future that we want.

***Africa is rich in biodiversity and we have the potential to feed ourselves and have excess to share with the global human community. We do not need the external approval of exploitative entities to build a sustainable food and agricultural system.***

# I can't Breathe, Says Africa

BY MILLION BELAY

Ever since I saw the video of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 25th May- killed by a police man who knelt on his neck for NINE MINUTES, while he was calling for his dead mother and for mercy, I have been upset and angry, as have been most people across the world and amongst different races. I've been watching the riots in the USA and all over the world and wondering whether this will pass by as just another of these events, or whether change really is on the horizon.

We know this systemic racism started four centuries ago and, through endless and varied legal and political processes, was designed to benefit one section of a society. All other systems are subservient to this system and all other people are subservient to a race, a large number of whom are fighting to keep the privilege they feel is rightfully theirs.

I also see the knee on George Floyd's neck as also being symbolic of how neoliberalism, and the associated neo colonialism, are putting their knee on the neck of Africa. I hear Africa saying, 'I can't breathe.' There are many avenues by which those in

power are putting their knee on the neck of our continent, but let's just focus on what's happening in agriculture.

For me the powers influencing our agricultural future have created a narrative, which is so simple and powerful, and which is told repeatedly, until its ingrained in our DNA. We are told that our seeds are old and have little capacity to give us food and they have to be hybridized and genetically modified to be of use; we are told that what we need is more calories and we need to focus on seeds of few crops; we are told that we are not using our land effectively and it should be given to

those who can do a better job of it; we are told that our knowledge about farming is backward and we need to modernize with knowledge from the West; we are told that unless we focus on few staple crops and produce for the market, we'll remain shackled to subsistence living; and we are told that we need to pump our soil with artificial fertilizers and pesticides if we want to produce enough food. For all this, we are told, we need business to invest billions of dollars and without these saviours from the North, we cannot feed ourselves. Our world is defined simply by producing more, not in having healthy, nutritious and





culturally appropriate food, produced without harming the environment.

A cohort of actors including philanthrocapitalists, Aid Agencies, governments, academic institutions and embassies are working to make this narrative a reality. They talk about transforming African agriculture but what they are doing is creating a market for themselves cleverly couched in a nice sounding language.

The knee on George Floyd's neck is the same knee that is on our neck. It is the same knee that justified colonialism on Africa. It is the same knee that sees Africa not for what it has, but for what it's lacking. Those who are putting their knees on our neck look at us

as stupid, uncivilised, barbaric, clueless and disease ridden, to be controlled and directed by the all-knowing and powerful human race.

We cannot breathe in Africa as policy spaces in the continent are crowded by outside actors and their cohorts, the bell boys. They create a powerful narrative, they design our policies to suit their needs, they influence our legislations, they formulate our education system so that the products of the system serve their purpose, and they denigrate our culture so that we lose ours and become subservient to their cultures.

They do not have to put their own knees physically on us because their culture and ideas are already inherited.

The knee on our necks is now our brothers' and sisters' knee. The knee on our neck is of different shades of color but it comes from the same source, from those who think that the world belongs to them. It comes from a deep-level disdain and contempt for our very existence.

I think the only way to remove this knee and breath is to recognise the knee, understand its ways of working and organise to defend ourselves. Otherwise, we'll find it difficult to even think of breathing.

*Million Belay is General Coordinator of Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa [www.afsafrica.org](http://www.afsafrica.org)*



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# No Alternative Planet

*In the 2020 Right Livelihood Lecture, Rene Ndongo calls for Energy Alternatives and Collective Response to Climate Change*

BY STEPHEN ODUWARE AND JOYCE EBEBEINWE

## Climate Change & Energy Alternatives

**Speaker**

**René Ngongo (RLA 2009)**  
Biologist, Environmentalist, Activist  
Rapporteur, Economic and Social Council, DRC



Over the past six years, HOMEF and the University of Port Harcourt have hosted the Right Livelihood College Lectures in the University which is one of the nine campuses of the Right Livelihood College (RLC) globally.

The Right Livelihood College (RLC) is a global capacity building initiative of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation. Founded in 2009, the RLC aims to make the knowledge of the Laureates accessible to all and, by linking young scholars, academics and civil society organisations with the Laureates, hopes to make their “winning ideas” succeed and multiply. The Award is given in honour of courageous individuals and organisations solving global problems.

The annual lecture serves as a bridge connecting academics, activists, youths, community people and policy makers in the quest to enthrone justice and equity in all

spheres of human engagement. The lectures are delivered by Right Livelihood laureates and bring forward actionable knowledge towards solving local and global challenges.

This year’s session held virtually on 19 June, 2020 and the lecture was delivered by Rene Ngongo who received the Right Livelihood Award in 2009. René Ngongo is a Congolese biologist cum environmentalist and political activist. He was recently elected as the Rapporteur of the Socio-Economic Council of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The chief host was the Acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt, Prof. Regina Ogali. University officials who welcomed everyone to the lecture included the Acting Director, Centre for Conflicts and Gender Studies, Dr. Gladys Worlu; Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Prof. Prince Mmom; Dr. Obinna Nwodim and; Dr Fidelis Allen, coordinator of

the Right Livelihood College campus.

The focus was on Climate Change and Energy Alternatives and it was stressed that the future of our planet depends in part on eco-citizen behaviour of young people who must avoid the tragic mistakes made by older generations through polluting activities that have injected huge quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere resulting to the climate change crisis today.

The lecture noted that through COVID-19, nature has sent humans a message that we must heed. We must halt the rapid destruction of natural environments exacerbated by hunting of exotic and wild animal species for recreational reasons and destruction of their habitats, thus accelerating the spread of infectious diseases.

It was pointed out that climate change transforms all aspects of human life including water supply, availability and distribution of food resources, reduction of snow cover and melting of glaciers, etc. Our failure to contextualise climate change and identify its root causes is having dangerous consequences.

Rene Ndongo noted that forests, including the Congolese forests, are being threatened partly due to the fact that the consumption of resources by humans is exceeding the Earth's capacity to replenish itself. Recurring events

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“access to clean energy is one of the key factors of inclusive growth, especially since it creates opportunities for women, young people and children, both in urban and rural areas. It is an essential component of economic, social and political development and environmental health.”

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such as bush fires in Brazil, the United States and Australia or locust infestations in East Africa, and now the Coronavirus pandemic, demonstrate the interdependence of humans and networks of life in which we live.

The lecturer spoke extensively with reference to the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which constitutes most of the equatorial rain forest in Africa. According to him, with 155 million hectares of forest cover, the country alone houses more than half of the forests of the Congo Basin, and almost 10% of the world's tropical rain forests. In addition to the socio-economic and cultural uses, the Congolese forests store 140Gt of CO<sub>2</sub> (equal to 3 years of global emissions). Preservation of these forests is therefore vital in the fight against global warming.

He stated that flagship actions that can be taken to preserve forests and promote climate change resilience include:

- Monitoring of the forest sector and denunciation of environmental and social violations
- Improving the regulatory and institutional framework for biodiversity conservation
- Raising awareness and educating the population on climate change
- Establishing bush fire monitoring systems and management plans
- Training farmers in resilient agricultural production techniques (agro-ecology)

It was noted that the increase in international electricity consumption in the coming years raises fears of greater increase in greenhouse gas emissions going against climate targets, and could have serious consequences for our planet. Despite all the goodwill displayed during the previous international climate conferences, investment in renewable energy is still poor in the face of the fixation on fossil fuels in the global energy mix.

“Thinking about energy alternatives today is part of a resilience strategy based on the anticipated increase in greenhouse gases; the ability to find innovative solutions such as renewable, clean and non-polluting energy sources; and based on the need to bounce



back from the fossil fuels addiction and begin a just energy transition,” Ngongo stated.

He further explained that getting out of dependence on oil means first of all abandoning our development model which is based on overconsumption and waste. It means to build a transition between two worlds- the old one, marked by dependence on fossil fuels and the new one which will inevitably be the product of an energy mix, produced from 100% green renewable sources.

For civil society, the issue of energy is one of the main challenges of the hour. This issue can only be resolved through tripartite participatory management including state actors, civil society actors and the private sector.

Some steps in the positive direction will include the promotion of renewable

energies; participation in environmental and social impact studies of energy projects; improvement of access to electricity; mobilisation of the private sector for its active involvement in renewable energies; recovery of waste for the production of biomass energy; and improvement of the legal frameworks in the energy sector.

It was highlighted that Africa remains the continent with the least energy. More than 640 million Africans do not have access to energy. This corresponds to an access rate slightly above 40%, the lowest level in the world. Africa has an immense renewable energy potential but it currently uses only a small part of it. Hydroelectricity provides about one fifth of the current capacity but the potential use does not

even correspond to one tenth of the total. The technical potential of solar, wind and geothermal energy as well as bioenergy is also significant.

According to the laureate, “access to clean energy is one of the key factors of inclusive growth, especially since it creates opportunities for women, young people and children, both in urban and rural areas. It is an essential component of economic, social and political development and environmental health.”

To improve people’s access to renewable energy, the activity of operators at national levels should be rationalised and development of large-scale projects should be flexible and focus on regional levels. Innovative solutions to provide populations in rural areas with reliable and efficient energy modes should be encouraged.

Ndongo urged everyone to get involved to engender the transition that we want, given the magnitude of the challenges and the rapidly worsening climate change. It is our collective responsibility to urgently step up our action at all levels. Citizens including civil society actors, trade unionists, young people and other actors should accelerate the implementation of resolutions and commitments in favour of the preservation of our forest heritage and to engage without delay in the energy transition.

“If we don’t react urgently to climate change we will have to look for another planet”, Ngongo concluded.



# FishNet Alliance Calls for Support for Ibeno Fishers



The FishNet Alliance called for support for fishers in Ibeno, Akwa Ibom State and in other coastal communities across Nigeria whose livelihoods have been adversely impacted by COVID-19 and other human-induced environmental stressors. This call was made during a Community Dialogue hosted by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) and attended by members of the FishNet Alliance at Ibeno on 28 August, 2020. The Alliance which is an initiative of HOMEF provided fishnets and food items to the Ibeno fishers who earlier this year, suffered a fire outbreak that destroyed their homes and fishing gears.

The COVID-19 pandemic and government restrictions on movement have seriously impacted fishers and farmers in this community who have

no formal jobs and who rely on their daily fishing expeditions for sustenance. The fire incidence made their situation worse.

Nnimmo Bassey, Director of HOMEF, noted that fishers are essential to both local and international economies, but unfortunately, are among the most vulnerable groups especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to him, the continuous pollution of the Niger Delta by oil and gas related activities is unacceptable and government must heed to the call for the cleanup of the entire polluted Niger Delta communities. He emphasized that government must recognize and restore the dignity and rights of the people of the coastal communities to a decent livelihoods as fishers, fish

processors and marketers. He used the opportunity to also condemn the oil spill in Mauritius' pristine marine ecosystem and noted that impacted fishers must be supported and the environment cleaned.

Bassey lamented the lax and discouraging body-language of government in protecting the aquatic ecosystems in Nigeria from pollution. According to him "Looking back to the incidence of dead fish along the coastlines of Niger Delta between February and May 2020: , it is regrettable that months after schools of fish died in the area there has been no definitive statement from government about what killed the fish and what actions have been taken to avoid repeat of such occurrences."



It should be recalled that the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) had reported that there were 1,300 oil spills in the Niger Delta between 2018 or 2019.” It is astonishing that we could have an average of 5 oil spills a day in the Niger Delta without government declaring a state of environmental emergency in the entire region. This is unacceptable,” Bassey lamented.

The chairman of the FishNet Alliance in Akwa Ibom State, Rev Sam Ayadi, called on the government to consult and engage fishers in the drafting of policies to protect the aquatic ecosystems. This, according to the chairman, would enable government come up with all-inclusive policies that ensure the safeguarding of their rivers, creek and seas as well as guarantying their livelihoods as fishers. He also called on the government to hold the companies that are polluting their environment accountable for their acts.

A member of the Alliance called on the government and other well-meaning stakeholders to emulate the gesture of HOMEF in providing palliatives and fishing gears to fishers in these trying times. He noted that these will go a long way in cushioning the effect of the pains caused by the fire incidence that burned their houses, fishing gears and also cushion the impacts on their economy by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**It is astonishing that we could have an average of 5 oil spills a day in the Niger Delta without government declaring a state of environmental emergency in the entire region. This is unacceptable,”**

At the end of the Dialogue, stakeholders resolved and demanded that:

1. Fishers should be recognised as frontline aquatic ecosystem defenders and should be engaged in policy issues
2. Government should delineate marine protected areas in suitable locations and support fishers to lead efforts to protect such areas.
3. Fishers are ready to collaborate with government in any effort geared towards mangrove ecosystem restorations as that would enhance fisheries recovery in the region.
4. Government should put adequate measures in place to help fishers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Traditional knowledge of fishing practices, including those that help mitigate climate change impacts should be adopted in policies.
6. Polluting corporations should be held liable for the harms created and should be required to clean-up their pollution and to duly compensate the affected people and communities.
7. Fishers should unite and engage in further dialogues to equip members with skills to serve as environmental defenders and to take actions to mitigate climate change.
8. Government should support fishing communities with housing and business facilities such as storage equipment and properly built fish markets.
9. There should be more exchange of knowledge between fishers in Nigeria and their counterparts in other African countries through the FishNet Alliance.

## SHORT STORY

# Murfu



The doctor at the general hospital had warned Nana to stay away from the fumes. It wasn't good for her health and the pains in her eyes were signs that could very much be signs of cataract. But she had a family of 10 to feed. Her husband was retired early because of an arthritis caused by a bike accident.

Nana hails from a small community in Kaduna state. Married with six children and two children from her husband's late second wife, she had the weight of responsibility on her shoulders.

Her famous waina attracted several persons who regularly lined up in front of her house to buy breakfast.

Today, however, seemed to be different. The pain in her eyes was so intense she thought at some point she could not make out the colour of her bedroom curtain. She definitely couldn't light the Murfu – a stove, made of three or more large stones, that props her cooking pot.

"Abdul!" she yelled for her son. "Go and light up the firewood for me please. We have customers to feed today!"

She continued to stir the rice mixture as she hummed a local song. She had sung halfway into the song when she heard the sound of an explosion, followed by the loud cry from Abdul. Her heart skipped a beat and, in a bid to rush outside, she knocked off the

BY FAITH AMADI

bowl in which she had the slightly fermented rice mixture. She could barely keep her balance as she slipped on the mixture, pouring it on the floor.

A crowd had already gathered. What had happened? Where was Abdul? Fear swept through her and suddenly streams of sweat coursed down her face. Abdul was sprawled on the floor, screaming in pain from burns on part of his face and arm.

Her family must be under a curse, she thought as she waited in the lobby of the hospital where Abdul was rushed to. She had been selling waina for five years. Her husband's condition had forced her to take up the reins and become the provider for the family. They didn't have much resources available to them and this business has been the source of subsistence for her family. What was she going to do? Abdul usually helped her set up the fire in the Murfu because of her eyes. Now he would be disfigured. If he survived the burns.

She felt a gentle tap on her shoulder.

"Nana," the doctor said. "Your son is stable. However, he may need to undergo surgery."

"Thanks to God," she quickly replied, wiping tears from her face with her wrapper.

"How did it happen?" the doctor asked.

Her son had poured some kerosene on firewood to light a fire for her Murfu. He kept the jerrycan with kerosene close by as he blew air on the embers to get the fire started. That was when the jerrycan exploded. I am told this was no ordinary kerosene. She wept uncontrollably.

"Enough, enough," the doctor said patting her shoulder.

Just then, her sister ran frantically into the hospital. The doctor excused her.

Nana let the tears roll down again. Her sister who lived in the next village had heard the news. The whole family would be talking about her now. They must think she is the worst mother on earth.

"The doctor said he is stable," Nana told her sister. "But that they might have to do a surgery. I am really scared and uncertain. What if things got more complicated?"

"Ah, God forbids it!" her sister replied.

She hugged Nana and they chatted about her waina business, family struggles and life in the COVID-19 pandemic. The restriction of movement was seriously hindering economic activities. Citizens were required to wash their hands under running water, but many did

not even have standing water. COVID-19 added a layer to illnesses in Nana's community and surrounding ones.

"You see, health conditions like cataract, tuberculosis, lung cancer and even asthma are caused by the air pollution from unclean cooking. Unclean cooking is responsible for several premature deaths annually. Let's not even forget to mention the sexual violence our young girl's face when they go to farm to collect firewood," Nana's sister said.

Nana then remembered the stinging pain in her eyes and her mother's early blindness that was said to be a result of many years of cooking with firewood. Her mother had earlier complained about the same stinging pain she now had.

Nana shifted her thought back to her sister and listened with rapt attention.

"Did I tell you about the incidence with my neighbour's daughter?"

"No," Nana said. "What happened to her?"

"Hmmm... their thirteen-year-old daughter went to fetch firewood for the evening meal and wasn't back home till dusk. She was later found bleeding and unconscious along a bush path close to the family's farmland. Another victim of the increasing violence against girls and women this season.

At this point Nana held up her hands in shock, imagining the pain the girl's parents must

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*Her son had poured some kerosene on firewood to light a fire for her Murfu. He kept the jerrycan with kerosene close by as he blew air on the embers to get the fire started. That was when the jerrycan exploded.*

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have felt and also recalling the painful incidence with her own son. Her attention shifted once again to her son, her boy of eleven years. The pain he must be feeling and the disfigured look he would have to live with for the rest of his life. She fought back the tears that burned in her eyes.

"Nana," her sister called. "This is probably the right time to tell you this."

"Tell me," Nana responded, drawing closer.

"I have always worried about the smoke you inhale as you cook waina with the Murfu. You are asthmatic and you know bad air isn't good for you."

"That's why I asked Abdul to make the fire," Nana replied. "To add to that, this morning I was feeling a lot of pain in my eyes. The doctor said it could be signs of cataract".

"Wow!" her sister exclaimed. "You really should pay more

attention to your health Nana. It is good that you asked Abdul to assist you, but it is definitely not good enough". "No one is exempted from the evils of unclean cooking."

"Some women who cook with the Murfu in my village use a kind of cooking stove that does not emit much smoke. They don't even use those huge logs that you call firewood."

"You are not serious, my sister," Nana was incredulous. "What kind of fire is that? Is there fire without smoke? You must be trying to make me forget about Abdul's impending surgery. Let me tell you something. You can tell me those magical tales after Abdul gets well. You met me crying not only because of his injury, but because I cannot afford the hospital bills for the surgery. I have no money. Without making and selling waina I cannot afford the medical bills. Can you see why I cannot stop using the Murfu?"

"You can learn how the women in my village make waina without tears and sweats mingling on their faces," her sister told her.

"Fire without smoke? What would the food taste like? The smoke is what gives my waina a special flavour," Nana argued. "Smoke, firewood, asthma, eye pain. I can bear these until Abdul graduates from secondary school, gets a job and takes care of me."

Nana's sister knew how stubborn she was and how difficult it would be to draw



her away from the firewood smoke-flavoured waina. Was that not the same reason men misbehave at wedding parties when they swoop on smoke-smothered jollof rice? Most Nigerians will swear that jollof cooked with firewood has no rival and that's why Nigerian jollof is better than the ones made in other countries including the famous wollof.

"Nana," she called after a long period of silence. "I didn't tell you, but I have started making waina also!"

"Please don't joke," Nana replied. "The hospital may have a theatre, but this is not the type where they entertain people with comedy shows."

Just then a nurse interjected, shouting loudly. "Yes, here we have medics, not comics."

"Come nearer, let me whisper something to you. This

busybody nurse should have been a newscaster."

"I heard that," the nurse quipped. "Be careful about what you say as it may be added to your bill." She laughed as she picked her phone, dialed a number and began to focus on whoever she had called.

Nana's sister narrated that she learned how waina was made when she had a friend come visit her. Then she got to learn of the improved stoves that did not use firewood but in fact cooked with dust from the sawmill. She got some youths to make briquettes that she uses to cook.

"And, do you know what? Uncle Waziri ate my waina one day he came over to my home and was delighted that he could find waina that did not smell of firewood smoke. Would you believe that? And



then he placed a standing order for me to supply his hotel with smoke-free waina! That's not all. Now other hotels are coming to me. My sister, I cannot even meet the orders.

I had planned to come tell you about the improved stove and ask you to partner with me before this sad incident."

Nana looked at her sister, mouth agape. "Smoke-free waina?" She muttered.

"Yes, Nana," and I came with one of the stoves and some briquettes. They are at your house. I also brought some cash as an advance for the supplies we need to meet."

Just then the doctor stepped into the waiting room. "Excuse me, madam," he said walking towards Nana. "I'm happy you have dried your tears. Your son doesn't need surgery, after all. The

burns were superficial, and the explosion did not do any serious harm."

"We thank God. Thank you, doctor," Nana replied. "Can we see him?"

"Yes. In fact, you can take him home," the doctor answered. "He would only have to come to dress the burns as an outpatient."

"Thank you, doctor," Nana repeated, nonplussed at her good fortune. "Can we have the bill?" She was now confident to ask since her sister had pressed a wad of notes into her hands.

"You won't have to worry about the bill," the doctor replied, turning to the nurse. "Did you say she makes smoke-free waina? She should make a supply for the breakfast meeting we are having next week. Deduct her bill and pay her the balance."

Nana was overjoyed. She thanked the doctor again and whispered to her sister, "this nurse must have a radio antenna in her ears."

"I heard that!" the nurse interjected.

They all laughed...

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*"Fire without smoke? What would the food taste like? The smoke is what gives my waina a special flavour," Nana argued. "Smoke, firewood, asthma, eye pain. I can bear these until Abdul graduates from secondary school, gets a job and takes care of me."*

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# GROUPS WARN AGAINST THE RELEASE OF GENETICALLY ENGINEERED MOSQUITOES IN NIGERIA



Over 75 Civil Society Organisations from Nigeria, Africa and other countries in the world have condemned moves to open the way for the release of genetically modified mosquitoes in Nigeria.

On Friday, 6 June, 2020, at a virtual meeting of the West African Integrated Vector Management Programme, Rufus Ebegba, who is the Vice Chairman of the Programme and Director of Nigeria's National Biosafety

Management Agency (NBMA) stated that "there is the need to accelerate the development of regulatory pathways for genetically based vector control methods such as transgenic mosquitoes."

On 30 June, 2020, NBMA held a meeting to review the National Guidelines on the Regulation of Gene Editing. The Director of the agency stated during the meeting that the guidelines "are not to impede on the technology but

to see how this technology is applied to enhance our economy and to assist the government..."

Reacting to the above, the groups in a press statement made available to the media on 7 July, 2020 warned against introduction of the transgenic mosquitoes (as well as other risky and unproven technologies) into Nigeria as such releases pose serious risks to humans, biodiversity and to ecosystem balance. The

groups noted that presently, there is no peer reviewed assessments for these transgenic mosquitos; no international protocols for evaluating their safety implications and; the technology is dependent on and controlled by corporate bodies.

According to the Director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, the said regulatory pathways for genetically engineered vector control of mosquitoes are actually rigged pathways to make our environment the test ground for the risky and needless experimentation. "From our experience with genetically modified food crops in Nigeria, having the provisions in place to regulate the release of such organisms is equivalent to express permits for their introduction as the agency responsible for this regulation acts more like a promoter of the technology than a regulator. Nigeria must show leadership in the protection of African biodiversity and not allow an agency of government run amok with whatever technologies promoters suggest to it."

Bassey added that tampering with genetic materials of living organisms is already creating problems in the world with the emergence and spread of zoonotic infections occasioned largely by loss of genetic diversity and habitat losses due to such manipulations.

The shortcoming of these transgenic mosquitoes is already evident from the experiments done in Brazil and in Burkina Faso,

**NIGERIA MUST SHOW LEADERSHIP IN THE PROTECTION OF AFRICAN BIODIVERSITY AND NOT ALLOW AN AGENCY OF GOVERNMENT RUN AMOK WITH WHATEVER TECHNOLOGIES PROMOTERS SUGGEST TO IT."**

stated Mariann Bassey-Orovwuje, Coordinator of the Food Sovereignty Programme of Friends of the Earth, Nigeria and Africa. "The release of millions of genetically modified mosquitoes in Brazil between 2013 and 2015 by the biotech company, Oxitec with the plan to reduce the number of disease-carrying mosquitoes is shown to have resulted (in addition to the fact that the population of mosquitoes bounced back after a few months) to unexpected transfer of genes from the gene-edited mosquitoes to the native insects which gave rise to tougher hybrid species", she explained.

Furthermore, the statement noted: "In July 2019, the genetically modified mosquitoes were released in Bana village in Burkina Faso by the Target Malaria research consortium as an initial test run before the open releases of gene drive mosquitoes, with the aim to reduce population of Anopheles mosquitoes that causes malaria. The failure of this release includes the incidental release of some biting female mosquitoes during the experiments which put the community people at risk.

Also, Target Malaria made claims of community acceptance for the project whereas testimonies from community people reveal that they have not been properly informed about the project or its potential risks. This is not different from the experience we have had with genetically modified cowpea and cotton which have been approved for commercial release in Nigeria.

Third, there is no published environmental risk assessment, besides an incomprehensive one published by Target Malaria. Again this has been the case in Nigeria with acclaimed risk assessment done on genetically modified crops as results of such assessments are not made available to the public or subjected to open and transparent consultation. We have no confidence that the situation will be different with the transgenic mosquitoes or that requirements for liability and redress will be enforced."

It was noted that the release of the GM mosquitoes in Burkina Faso is the first open release in Africa. Nigeria has reviewed (in 2019) its biosafety law to include definitions on extreme technologies including gene drives, so as to pave way for their adoption. This review

was speedily proposed and approved despite strenuous objections sent by groups including HOMEF, whereas there have been calls over the years to review the law to close existing fundamental gaps which make it impossible for it to serve the interests of the people.

“While we appreciate that malaria is a problem in Nigeria and many other nations and that urgent measures to address it are needed, we believe that transgenic mosquitoes are not the solution. GM mosquitoes are a relatively new application of GM technology and present very different risks, and for which the international community has had virtually no risk assessment or regulatory

experience. Nigeria does not need GMOs and no matter what their sponsors claim, we don’t have the capacity or experience to dabble into this new, unfamiliar and risky technology.” The statement stressed.

The undersigned groups condemn any move to introduce the transgenic mosquitoes or any other gene edited organisms into Nigeria. They assert that our regulatory agencies should not sell us off as guinea pigs for risky technologies such as gene drives which have potential to wipe off whole populations of species and to be used as a biological weapon. Rather, let government support natural vector control measures which are safe and effective, and include providing better sanitation and housing for underserved Nigerians.

**WHILE WE APPRECIATE THAT MALARIA IS A PROBLEM IN NIGERIA AND MANY OTHER NATIONS AND THAT URGENT MEASURES TO ADDRESS IT ARE NEEDED, WE BELIEVE THAT TRANSGENIC MOSQUITOES ARE NOT THE SOLUTION.**





# Liberating African Agriculture

BY JOYCE EBEBEINWE



Our continent is blessed with vast natural resources and is equipped to produce enough to feed its population. With more than 60% of the world's arable land, rich biological and cultural diversity, and its unique economic and political realities, Africa can sustain itself and compete in the global food market. The continent has about two-thirds of its population employed in the agriculture sector with the majority as small holder farmers who produce over 80% of the food consumed.

It is true that there are challenges in agriculture today that must be addressed. Among these challenges, climate change is one of the most influential with attendant

desert encroachment, flooding/ unpredictable weather patterns and pests and disease invasions. The twist is that while there are diverse agro-ecological practices that ensure resilience to the impacts of climate change, the phenomenon itself is caused partly by the industrial, fossil fuels dependent agriculture that is now being promoted as a way out.

The population of Africa is projected to reach 9 billion in the year 2050. Although research has shown that we currently produce food enough to feed the projected population size and more, majority of it is lost to post harvest losses. Majority of our people due to poverty have no access to the food.

Farmers have over time lost support in terms of credit schemes, extension services, infrastructure and market for their produce. The advent of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s contributed its fair share to the problems.

Instead of addressing the root of food insecurity on the continent, our governments are led to adopt and invest in programmes and agriculture models that worsen the situation for farmers and for African households. One of such programmes is that of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). Founded in 2006 by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, AGRA promised to double



the agricultural yields and incomes of 30 million small-scale farming households by 2020 and thereby halve hunger and poverty in the 13 countries of focus. To attain this, AGRA received as much as US\$1billion, mainly from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, but also from governments of nations like the US, UK and Germany. African governments have supported this programme with \$1billion a year on items including subsidies for fertilizers.

On 6 August 2020, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in collaboration with the African Faith and Justice Network (AFJN), Navdanya International and the Institute for Research and Promotion of Alternative Development (IRPAD), convened a webinar themed AGRA's Failed Promises: Liberating our Agriculture.

The conversation was inspired by a recent report released by a coalition of groups including Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Bread for the World, IRPAD and Biodiversity & Biosafety Association of Kenya (BIBA). The report – False Promises: The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa – outlines the promises that AGRA dangled before African countries and what the result has been in over 14 years after the launch of the so-called Green Revolution in Africa.

The webinar outlined ways by which African Agriculture can be liberated from under the thumb of institutions that may be “well meaning” but are utterly and even dangerously

wrong in their approaches.

Panelists included Timothy Wise, co-author of the report and senior advisor at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; Mamadou Goita, also a co-author of the report, a development economist and Executive Director of IRPAD; Vandana Shiva, an environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, and renowned anti-globalization author; and Devinder Sharma, one of India's leading agriculture, food and trade policy expert, researcher, and writer. Participants from across the world joined the conversation via Zoom and Facebook.

Speaking at the webinar, Timothy Wise pointed out that there is no evidence of 100% increase in productivity or income doubling as AGRA promised. Instead, there has been a 31% increase in the number of undernourished people in the 13 focus countries.

Maize was heavily supported by the program but it showed just 29% yield growth and even where production increased, as in Zambia, the near-tripling of maize production did not result in reduction in rural poverty or hunger. Small-scale farmers were not benefiting; poverty and hunger remained staggeringly high with 78% of rural Zambians in extreme poverty.

According to Wise, the focus on maize drove land use out of more nutritious and climate-resilient traditional crops such as millet and sorghum, eroding

food security and nutrition for poor farmers. He added that the use of artificial chemical fertilizers has led to the degradation of soil quality.

He noted that the Green Revolution model is failing and stressed that agroecology offers higher net returns, diverse and nutritious crops, lower costs to governments and farmers, soil-restoration and other environmental benefits.

### **Time for Africa to wake up!**

The Green Revolution (GR), according to Vandana Shiva, from the beginning was not about feeding the world but about selling fertilizers. She stated that the programme should more appropriately be termed war chemical revolution.

The GR uses more land and water to grow commodities

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*Instead of addressing the root of food insecurity on the continent, our governments are led to adopt and invest in programmes and agriculture models that worsen the situation for farmers and for African households.*

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(which do not indicate nutritional content or cost of inputs) and this translates to less food for the people. Agribusiness models are driving hunger. The industries produce for industries while the people hunger.

According to Vandana Shiva, “We should measure true productivity not pseudo productivity; measure total output and true yield not the fiction of high-yielding varieties; and measure the true costs of production and not hide cost with a commodification measure like GDP which only measures commodification of an economy not the true production, not how much food people have, not how healthy the soil is. That is why there is questioning of GDP around the world.”

“The Green Revolution is a failed model; it failed in Europe, in India, in America and the best ways to understand this is in what it has done to the environment, to human health and nutrition and to farmers’ income”, explained Devinder Sharma.

He further explained that in India, over 50 years after the programme was introduced, farmers, despite producing record harvests every year are still living in distress. In Punjab, about 1000 farmers commit suicide yearly. This model of agriculture has kept farmers in poverty and small scale farmers are the worst affected. In 2007, the government of India reported that the average annual income for farmers was US\$250 – an amount



that can't rear a cow or dog for a year. Between the year 2000 and 2016, farmers are reported to have lost up to US\$600 billion and in the last 2 decades farmers' income has either remained negative or frozen.

Sharma advised that “Africa should learn from India's mistake. We see that this model has not only failed in the developed countries but also in the developing countries. This tells us that we need a new model of agriculture, different from the chemical intensive industrial farming model. Farmers need a kind of farming system that is ecologically sustainable and economically viable and that provides them with assured income. Farmers shouldn't be left alone to face the volatility of markets.”

African farmers can feed Africa, have surpluses and contribute in a sustainable way to global food trade if post-harvest losses are curtailed. Mamadou Goita

emphasized that and stressed on the need for food producers to be adequately supported in terms of infrastructure, extension services and favorable markets.

According to Goita, “We don't need the homogenization of policies in the continent that the AGRA programme promotes because the contexts are not the same, the farmers are not at the same level of production. Africa is diverse and we need to consider the territoriality of African food systems.

We need to change our way of investing in agriculture. We cannot rely on foreign investments that lead to land grabbing. Investment in agriculture must be based on a vision and that vision is agroecology which is not an imported system but an African way of farming in tune with nature. The agroecological perspective that people are pushing forward on the continent will be a key instrument in feeding

the world and in creating wealth.”

**The webinar noted and endorsed the key recommendations of the report- False Promises.**

Among the recommendations are:

Donor governments should withdraw their funding from AGRA and shift it to programmes that help smallholder farmers, particularly women, develop climate-resilient ecologically sustainable farming practices such as agroecology, which is increasingly recognized

and supported by FAO and the international donor community. Secondly, African governments should withdraw from AGRA and other Green Revolution programs, including input-subsidy programs, and transition their agricultural development programs toward a more robust array of policies that respond to smallholder farmers’ expressed needs.

It was also recommended that all governments and donors should respect the right to food, peasants’ rights and other internal organisations. Seeing how AGRA has failed, it was agreed that it did

not make sense for AGRA’s head, Agnes Kalibata, to be the special envoy of the UN Secretary General to the UN 2020 World Food Summit.

At the conclusion of the webinar, Nnimmo Bassey, Director of HOMEF encouraged African governments to “take the recommendations to heart and remember that when we move in the wrong direction, no matter how far or fast we go, we will never get to the right destination. When one makes a mistake and takes a wrong road, wisdom says turn back.”





# Stakeholders Propose Energy Alternatives for Africa:

## *Outcomes from Dialogue on Climate and Power Alternatives*

On 22nd and 23rd June, 2020, local and international CSOs/NGOs from Ghana, Togo, Senegal, Brazil, Philippines, Algeria, Kenya as well as from Nigeria, joined Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in a two-day virtual dialogue/School of Ecology on Climate and Power Alternatives.

The event which also had students, community representatives and the academia participating interrogated the impacts of Climate Change as it relates to energy and power alternatives in Africa and across the world. The dialogue highlighted alternatives to fossil fuels while challenging peoples/communities to see themselves as climate actors to demand an end to dirty energy dependency and the accompanying environmental degradation.

Speakers at the event included Nnimmo Bassey (Nigeria), Ken Henshaw (Nigeria), Fatima Diallo (Senegal), Marcelo Calazans (Brazil), Ikal Angelei (Kenya), Philip Jakpor (Nigeria), Chibezie Ezekiel (Ghana), Babawale Obayanju (Nigeria), Hamza Hamouchene (Algeria), Enteng Bautista (Philippines) Emem Okon (Nigeria) and Kwami Kpondzo (Togo).

Participants agreed that oil dependency has spelt a big challenge for African governments which has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Series of climate change impacts such as extreme floods, cyclones, droughts and locust invasions that our reliance on fossil fuels to drive our economies has wrought were discussed.

It was noted that Africa certainly needs better energy access as over 640 million Africans



(according to the African Development Bank) have no access to energy, corresponding to an electricity access rate for African countries standing at just over 40 percent and as the lowest in the world. It was however stated that we need to ensure better energy access based on a climate justice mindset which drives the political will to draw an immediate and long-term plan to power Africa from the abundant renewable resources she has while ensuring that these do not come with green land grabs and diverse dispossessions of poor communities and peoples.

We need a new mindset to build alternative power structures that would birth continent-wide distributed renewable energy micro-grids managed by communities and associations and not by shylock private companies. The failure to deliver power to the majority of Africans increases and locks in energy inequalities.




From the presentations and interactions, the following observations were made:

1. For a sustainable energy transition, there must be full understanding of what energy and power is needed for, autonomous determination of what constitutes development, progress and wellbeing
2. It is fundamentally necessary to develop the right analysis of Africa's political economy in order to draw up medium- and long-term plans for energy transition.
3. Communities are largely side-lined, ignored or left out in decision making in the energy sector.
4. Government/policy makers are more interested in markets rather than energy democracy which embraces people at the grassroots
5. The fossil fuels industry promotes the false narrative that fossil fuels are infinite
6. Women are at the receiving end when it comes to the impacts of fossil fuels extraction and are not given a seat on the table when decisions relating to the sector are being formulated by government/policy makers.
7. Communities and environmental defenders across the world are being suppressed and denied opportunities to assert their rights to choose energy forms that are useful to them.
8. The alliance between African governments and extractive companies has led to the thinking that the continent can only produce power and develop by use of fossil fuels
9. The struggles of communities in Africa, Latin America and South East Asia for energy democracy and to free their territories of polluting fossil fuels activities provide key learning opportunities.
10. Learning from other regions is important for the development of wholistic responses to power/energy challenges taking into account the colonisation of natural and mental territories and environments by the fossil fuel industry

Following the rigorous deliberations and observations, the dialogue concluded with the under listed outcomes/demands:

- a. The people should be given the opportunity and space to decide on the kind of power / energy system they need and how they get it. Their rights to live in harmony with nature and have their knowledge respected should be taken into account in national, regional and international negotiations on climate change and energy issues.
- b. There is urgent need to review our energy needs along the lines of renewable technology that are cheap, available, community-led and not imposed.
- c. Access to energy must be a fundamental right and not driven by markets or market-based solutions that present the same social and ecological problems that dirty energy sources generate.
- d. Governments must incentivize the use of renewables through eliminating taxes and tariffs on quality solar products and other renewable products.
- e. Civil society groups, faith-based organisations, women groups and the academia must continue to develop new strategies for engagement to promote of alternatives to meeting our energy and to stop the oil civilisation and needs.
- f. In planning energy projects, the free and prior informed consent of communities must be obtained while they retain their right to say no to such projects.
- g. Energy transition planning must be gender and socially inclusive at local, national, regional and international levels.
- h. Plans by the Nigerian government to build nuclear power plants in Akwa Ibom and Kogi States should be halted in line with the stand of the people.
- i. Africans and governments must engage in decolonisation of power narratives including by overturning the imaginary that presents oil, gas and coal as the unchangeable energy sources for Africa.
- j. Peoples all over the world were called upon to reject energy colonialism, predatory extractivism and to build/connect movements from below for a truly just energy transition.





The outcomes were endorsed by the under listed organisations

1. We the People (Nigeria)
2. Algeria Solidarity Campaign (ASC), / Environmental Justice North Africa (EJNA)- (Algeria)
3. Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre (Nigeria)
4. Friends of Lake Turkana (Kenya)
5. Friends of the Earth Togo –(Togo)
6. Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND) – (Ghana)
7. Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment (Philippines)
8. FASE- ES (Brazil)
9. Centre de Recherche et d'Action sur les Droits Economiques Sociaux et Culturels (Senegal)
10. Corporate Accountability & Public Participation Africa
11. Oilwatch Africa/International
12. Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)- (Nigeria)



# *No Room for Inaction on Climate: Nnimmo Bassey*



In this interview originally from Greenhouse PR, Nnimmo Bassey speaks on the movement he helps to lead, the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF). HOMEF is a Grassroots International grantee from West Africa that tackles climate and environmental justice.

At a time when climate justice is under the spotlight, hearing from Black voices within the environmental sphere has never been more important – for there can be no climate justice without racial justice. Nnimmo Bassey, Director of the Health Of Mother Earth Foundation in Nigeria, is a crucial figure in our movement. We caught up with Nnimmo to find out more about his work resisting exploitative international corporations, confronting big polluters, and challenging racist and colonialist structures still at play.

## *1. Tell us, in 20 words or fewer, about your organisation – what's your mission?*

The Health Of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) is an ecological think-tank tackling the roots of environmental injustices particularly in the areas of fossil/hunger politics.

## *2. What drives you?*

The main propelling inner drive is the quest for justice and connecting with grassroots struggles, and especially standing with marginalised, oppressed and exploited groups. A

consciousness of the fact that things that have gone wrong did not have to go wrong, but for the human and corporate agencies that benefit from the misery of others and allow profit to trump the health of the planet and other beings we share spaces with. The colonisation of nature and the deep-seated problems of colonialism leave no room for inaction in the struggles against irresponsible exploitation.

Added to this is the reality that dramatic ecological changes and environmental racism are widespread around the world. This reality requires that we build solidarity across borders. Building bridges through shared stories and experiences keep the fires for the work burning. This is so because we can only be stronger when we are together. The forces of oppression are basically glued to each other by their greed and creeds. The grassroots must connect struggles, sharing tears, hopes and strength.

### *3. What is your greatest achievement to date?*

I cannot say I have achieved anything as an individual. I am immersed in collective thoughts and collective actions. The struggles we have been engaged in, for over three decades now, always involve standing with victims. However, I can say that becoming increasingly invisible is a great mark of progress. We have to become catalysts, rather than standing as the poster images of struggles. I get particularly excited when I get to see community gatherings organise, speak and lead. That is the nearest claim to achievement that we can see. Seeing exploited, marginalised, ignored and weak social groups standing strong and confronting huge corporations and public institutions can be remarkable.

A case in point will be the resistance to the superhighway project of the Cross River State Government. It purposed to cut through critical areas of the remaining tropical rainforest in south eastern Nigeria, destroying biodiversity and displacing community people. The result of mobilisation and strong resistance mounted against this project led to its realignment and the reduction of its expanse from 10km on either sides of the road to about 75m as stipulated by law.

A second project is building what is known as the FishNet Alliance. This alliance of fishers is protecting our waters (creaks, rivers, ocean and

wetlands) against extractive activities. It is inspiring to see them taking the front seat in the struggle against harmful activities, to preserve biodiversity and healthy ecosystems for the benefit of all. So far we have units in Cameroon, Congo DR, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Togo. Credit goes to the communities and the teams we work with, not to any individual. These struggles continue due to the global geopolitical power structures that assign particularly exploitative international division of labour.

### *4. What are the challenges you face?*

The biggest challenge is an ingrained sense of entitlement built on the substructures of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. All these have emerged from military might and continue apace even as we hold this dialogue. So, our challenges are both local and global. The mindset substructure ensures wilful blindness of the wielders of power to the simple truth that

all beings and elements on earth interconnect. They can work in harmony or they can have violent clashes. Some of those violent manifestations include the climate and general socio-ecological crises that have engulfed the world today. Is it not shameful that corporations and entities massively responsible for the vast proportion of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at the same time funding climate denial?

The race to secure nature's resources and externalising social and environmental costs can only be enforced by instigating conflicts, including needless warfare and thereby further weakening the already vulnerable. How can nations continue to engage in warfare, destroying lives, wreaking havoc on socio-economic structures and physical infrastructure at a time when the cry should be for the construction of resilience? The big challenge is political, and this is driven by the lust for nature's resources and the quest for capital and power. Everything else tracks back to

***The forces of oppression are basically glued to each other by their greed and creeds. The grassroots must connect struggles, sharing tears, hopes and strength.***





these.

### *5. What are you working on that's getting you fired up and excited?*

Everything I work on is quite exciting, although they can be depressing at the same time. The unending struggle to halt the expansion of fossil fuels extraction and burning is one. What is exciting about this is that impacted communities are becoming increasingly resolute in the opposition to ecocide in the territories. Two is the work against dependence on extreme techno-fixes as means of tackling global warming and the hunger problem in the world. These techno-fixes in the form of geo-engineering or extreme genetic engineering threaten to lock-in current power structures and doubly damage the victims. Our proposals of simple but effective alternatives, working with fishers against fossil extraction in our waters and with farmers in promotion of agro-ecology, are all quite exciting.

Creating spaces for

learning is also exciting! This entails generation and sharing of knowledge from the grassroots for food sovereignty and opposing agricultural and food systems that impoverish our soils and farmers. Furthermore, our use of stories and poetry as tools in this quest is, metaphorically speaking, like icing on the cake.

### *6. Where do you want to take organisation next?*

The vision is to be further immersed in movements and help replace failed global structures. We have to crack up and disrupt socio-ecological and economic systems that lock in deprivations, inequality and also domination. As the repression heightens judging by the high fatalities among environmental defenders, the resistance therefore must get stronger. We must own our narratives and work for a just transition that means more than a shift in forms of power, but manifests in the shifting of power to the working poor, farmers and communities. This

is not a short term project. Predatory extractivism, inordinate consumption and fixation on unrestrained growth on a finite planet is not going to end easily — although the COVID-19 pandemic also shows that the current system is not iron-clad.

### *7. What can we, as individuals, do to make a difference?*

We can do a lot to make a difference in many areas. Some matters, like climate change, require binding actions determined by science; they cannot simply be voluntary actions.

Individuals actively seeking knowledge about socio-ecological problems in their communities are contributing significantly to solving problems. This knowledge helps us recognise the interconnectedness of problems and break the silos so we see things holistically. We see our political economies impact on environmental decisions and also on our health and well-being. Shared knowledge brings us

diverse perspectives of well-being and even of notions of development and progress. We should as individuals be politically active and vote for leaders that have a sound environmental agenda.

Individuals can make a difference by checking their consumption patterns – in terms of energy and foods, their forms and origins. We should support local food production, and go green in terms of energy.

Speaking up and being part of mass movements are also great contributions. We should support youth groups. The future is theirs! We should help them halt ongoing intergenerational crimes.

#### *8. How is what you are doing inspiring change in others?*

The truth is that everyone wants to own their story. We see this as the fundamental base for transformation. If someone is responsible for diagnosing your ailment, the prescription and treatment may be against your best interest. This informs knowledge work, especially through our grassroots diagnostic dialogues. This approach is inspiring and also empowering. It gets people to realise the commonalities among the struggle irrespective of the disparate geographies. Lasting change is built on the basis of knowledge. This approach is broadly inspiring.

#### *9. Can you recommend a life-or game-changing book for our readers?*

## ***We have to crack up and disrupt socio-ecological and economic systems that lock in deprivations, inequality and also domination***

There are many books I have read that have been highly inspiring and instructive. They include *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon and the autobiographical works on Nelson Mandela (*A Long Walk to Freedom*), Fidel Castro (*My Life*) and Malcom X (*A Life of Reinvention*). By far the game-changing book for me and which I must recommend is *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* written by Eduardo Galeano. As the subtitle suggests, the book took on the precolonial and colonial pillage of Latin America as well as the erection of the structures that perpetuated the system whether remotely or by comprador elements. It is a provocative book with controversies, but capable of firing the imagination.

#### *10. What do you listen to when you're cooking dinner?*

You would probably catch me humming a Bob Marley song. *War*; *Redemption Song*; *Get Up, Stand Up*; *Talking Blues*; *Stop that Train*; *Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)*.

#### *11. What's the best advice you've ever received?*

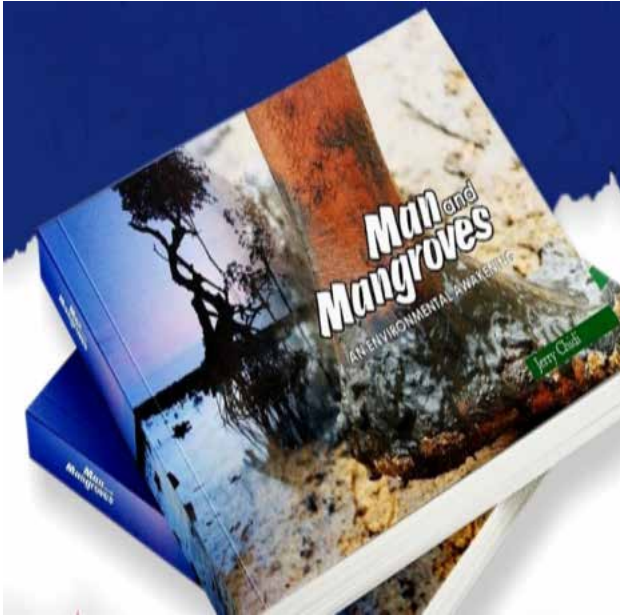
Be clear about what you don't like and what you don't want. Refuse them. Never be crippled by the lack of clear alternatives as that could force you to accept what you know is wrong. No is a powerful alternative.

#### *12. Can you leave us with who'd be your Eco Hero?*

Ken Saro-Wiwa. Among other issues, he fought against the environmental devastation of Ogoniland in Nigeria's Niger Delta. He encapsulated everything about non-violent grassroots mobilisation, leadership and sacrifice. He and other Ogoni leaders were executed by the Nigerian State on 10 November 1995.

Culled from the website of Grassroots International: <https://grassrootsonline.org/in-the-news/climate-interview-with-nnimmo-bassey/>

# Books You Should Read



## **Man and Mangroves: An Environmental Awakening**

by Jerry Chidi

This book which is written by a veteran documentary photographer, is filled with absorbing photos, poems and facts of the once lustrous but now dull and damaged mangroves of Nigeria resulting from environmentally malignant activities of oil and gas multinationals especially. The book is a pictorial and factual journey from the beauty that was, the natural endowments that provided a more sustainable source of livelihood to the degrading extractive activities that have deprived the mangroves of health and life. It is a journey of truth, a wakeup call and a must read for all. GRAB A COPY!



## **A Walk in the Curfew- And Other Pandemic**

by Health of Mother Earth Foundation

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed global vulnerabilities and challenged individuals and nations to wake up from slumber and take actions that recognize our planetary limits. The responses to the pandemic have revealed a high level of unpreparedness across the world. Lockdowns and other measures crushed the poor and heightened their exposure to the virus. The informal sector, already unsupported, got thrashed by repressive response measures.

A Walk in the Curfew is a book of short stories that will keep the experience of COVID-19 pandemic fresh in our memories. It contains eleven stories which together, take the reader to a trip in the imaginaries which can be easily connected to.



# UPCOMING ACTIVITIES



School of Ecology

.....



FishNet Alliance  
General Assembly

.....



Living in Dialogue  
with Nature

.....



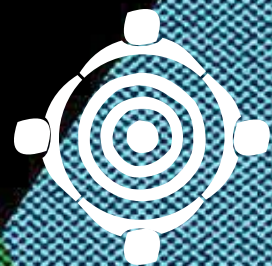
Conversations :  
Biosafety, Biosecurity  
and Safe Foods



Always visit [www.homef.org](http://www.homef.org) for upcoming events and how to participate.



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INTERROGATION OF  
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# FISHNET ALLIANCE

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FISHNET ALLIANCE TODAY**

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A yellow background with a large white speech bubble in the center. The speech bubble has a black outline and a small tail pointing towards the bottom left. Surrounding the speech bubble is a circular pattern of white dashed lines and small white circles, resembling confetti or a burst effect.

# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



## LOOKING TO HELP?

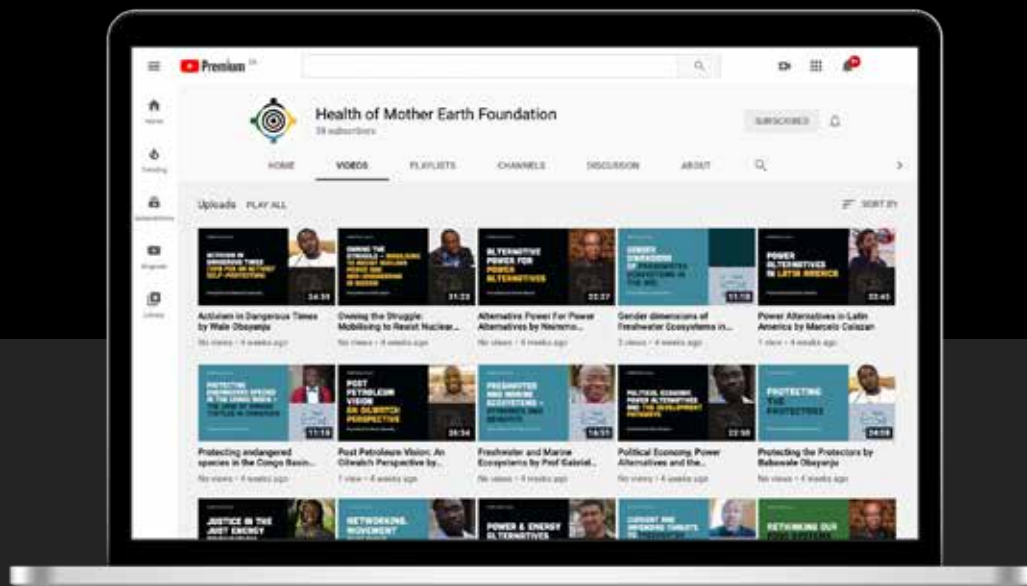
If you would like to join our team of volunteers, send an email to



[volunteers@homef.org](mailto:volunteers@homef.org)

# HOMEF CONVERSATIONS

The HOMEF Webinar series explores the areas of Climate Change, Food Systems, Fresh Water Ecosystem and other Socio-Ecological issues.



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