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A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION



REMEMBERING
the Ogoni 9

A CAUTION ON
the Blue Economy

**POSITIVE GREEN
CRIMINOLOGY:**
Becoming Ecologically
Awake System Changers

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Home Run



NNIMMO BASSEY

Director, Health of Mother
Foundation

Welcome to the last edition of our Eco-Instigator for 2020. It has been a remarkable year in many ways.

We have moved from the cover story in the first edition, in March, which linked the issue of hunger in Africa to climate change – to that of the second edition, in June, which focused on the novel COVID-19 and its impact on the environment, food systems and human rights – down to the cover story in the third edition of September, which contested power sources worsening the impact of climate change in Africa, proposing alternative power.

November 10, 2020 marked 25 years of the inexcusable execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, Niger Delta's foremost environmental activist, and other Ogoni leaders. We join the call for their exoneration.

This year also marked 22 years of the tragic Jesse Pipeline Fire over which the Federal Government of Nigeria has remained silent on its actual cause.

In addition to stories on these environment-related anniversaries, this edition also presents a variety of articles from across the globe, ranging from biodiversity, biosafety/biosecurity, green criminology, water resources to flooding. For example, an interesting article all

the way from India thematises climate-induced migrations.

We also bring you a report from HOMEf's School of Ecology on Blue Economy Blues in this edition.

We are happy to welcome Nduka Otiono as a member of our Editorial Board. Otiono is an outstanding writer, Associate Professor and Graduate Programme Coordinator at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada.

He is the author and co-editor of many books of creative writing and academic research. We are convinced that his entry will enhance the quality of your favourite Eco-Instigator.

Along with the articles and reports, we have infused poems for your entertainment and for ventilating disturbing issues.

Drop us a line or share your stories, articles, photos or poems at editor@homef.org. We always look forward to hearing from you.

Until Victory!
Nnimmo Bassey

25 years Gone: HOMEF Calls for **EXONERATION OF KEN SARO -WIWA AND 8 OGONI LEADERS**



Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) has called for the exoneration of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight Ogoni leaders (Saturday Dobee, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuate, Baribor Bera, Barinem Kiobel and John Kpuine), who were tried by a kangaroo military tribunal and killed in 1995 by the Nigerian State on false murder charges.

These Ogoni activists who were members of the Movement for

the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) were accused and executed under the Military dictatorship of Gen. Sani Abacha. The accusation of complicity in the murder of four Ogoni chiefs was directly tied to the activists' strong and unflinching stand against the polluting activities of the Royal Dutch Shell oil company known for their atrocious ruination of the Niger Delta.

Years later, even after the witnesses recounted their

statements, admitting that they were bribed to bear false witnesses against Ken Saro-Wiwa and the 8 others, there still has not been justice for the masterminded killing of these men. The execution of these men brought sanctions on Nigeria from the international community and, in particular, led to Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations. The cause for which these men fought and were killed was validated by the August 2011 report of the Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland by UNEP which revealed the depth of destruction of the soil, waters and air in Ogoniland.

It has been 25 years since the gruesome execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the 8 Ogoni leaders. HOMEF, in a statement, called on the Nigerian government to exonerate Ken Saro-Wiwa and the 8 others as a necessary first step towards bringing the gruesome history to a closure.

Nnimmo Bassey, the director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation, stated that ***“exonerating Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni leaders is the least the government can do to acknowledge the travesty of justice against the victims, the Ogoni people and humanity.”***

He also called for the recognition of these men by the Nigerian government as heroes of environmental justice. Bassey added that “exonerating these men will bring a sense of recognition to the environmental struggles of the Niger Delta people and highlight the needed accountability on the part of the government and companies operating in the region while also showing the world that Nigeria is no longer a state that criminalizes dissent.”

HOMEF believes that if Ken Saro-Wiwa were to be alive today, the demands captured in the Ogoni Bill of Rights of 1990 would still form the bedrock of demands for the respect of environmental rights, cultural dignity and resource democracy. He would not be silent in the face of continued ecological degradation. And we must not be silent, because as Saro-wiwa wrote, Silence Would be Treason.



It is hard to believe it has been 25 years since Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists were hanged in the yard of Port Harcourt prison, on the morning of November 10, 1995.

Their only crime was their effectiveness in organising non-violent resistance against Shell, Chevron, and their "unholy alliance" (Ken Saro-Wiwa's words) with the Nigerian military dictatorship. The execution of Saro-Wiwa and his eight colleagues led to international condemnation, and Nigeria was briefly suspended from the Commonwealth.

As Ken said to me the last time I spoke with him, it was "all for Shell".

The first time I talked with Ken, in 1993, I remember listening with some initial scepticism as he told me of the constant gas flares, the oil spills not cleaned up for years, and the active collusion between the Nigerian military government and the oil companies, in particular, Shell.

Two years later, when he was hanged in November of 1995, I was not sceptical anymore. I was convinced, deeply concerned, and devoted to exposing the true costs – human and environmental - of oil production. climate goals.

Their only crime was their effectiveness in organising non-violent resistance against Shell, Chevron, and their "unholy alliance" (Ken Saro-Wiwa's words) with the Nigerian military dictatorship.

REMEMBERING THE OGONI 9

Statement by Steve Kretzmann



The truth is, the oil industry has always depended on structural racism and the violent institutions that support it. Saro-Wiwa often spoke of the "double standards" of Shell, Chevron and the other oil companies. That they could never get away with operating in the Netherlands or the UK or the US the way they did – and still often do – in Nigeria.

It has been clear for decades how much African, and Latin, and Asian lives mattered less to these companies, and to the public and private investors and governments that had the power to intervene, if they chose. Today, the oil & gas industry is (too slowly) dying, but racism is not. The fossil fuel industry will, **MUST** stop expanding and begin to phase out if we are to reach our The question that will be decided over the next decade is how that transition goes.

Carbon is obviously not the only problem with oil and gas production. Will governments take care of the richest, whitest investors and executives, while leaving frontline communities and workers to fend for themselves? Or will there be justice for those communities, like the

Ogoni, who have paid the price while Shell and others profit? Will there be recognition? Will there be reparations?

In his last statement, Ken Saro-Wiwa predicted that "Shell's day will surely come. The crime of the company's dirty wars against the Ogoni people will be punished." That day is near, my friends.

Solidarity with #EndSARS, with #BlackLivesMatter and may we all muster enough power to challenge the systems of structural racism, environmental destruction, and violence all over the world.

The Ogoni 9. Say their names: Ken Saro-Wiwa, Saturday Dobee, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuate, Baribor Bera, Barinem Kiobel, and John Kpuine

Rest in power.

Steve Kretzmann is the founder and former Executive Director of Oil Change International. He is currently the editor of The Critter (an independent platform for arts reviews/news), a publication of West Cape News CC.

25 LONG YEARS:

Time to Exonerate Ken Saro-wiwa

By Ogechi Okanya Cookey



Twenty-five years ago, on 10 November 1995, the Niger Delta and other marginalized regions across the globe suffering from environmental degradation and human right abuses meted out by multinational oil corporations lost one of the loudest voices for environmental justice. This voice, the person of Ken Saro-Wiwa together with Saturday Dobee, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuate, Baribor Bera, Barinem Kiobel, and John Kpuine stood up against Shell's loathsome environmental practices in Ogoni, Nigeria. The uncountable and immeasurable oil spills from the multinational's exploration activities left the lands, waters and air of Ogoni polluted.

Seeing the devotion of the environmental activists towards stopping their destructive activities, Shell nefariously plotted to silence them. And the tyrannical government of Sani Abacha served as the “hangman”. Shell has since denied involvement in the killing of the Ogoni 9 as much as they consider the devastating impact of their activities in Ogoni as a mere allegation.

What remains true is that Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow activists protested against Shell's devastating pollution of their lands and waters. This led to their arrest, detention, and unjust and gruesome execution. The murder of four former MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People) leaders in May 1994 was the premise on which the activists' arrest was made. This murder was pegged on Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight colleagues

Evidence of Shell's pollution, till date, lies in the rivers, wells and farmlands of Ogoni, which justifies the struggle of the executed activists. The commencement of the clean-up and remediation of Ogoni following United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP's) August 2011 report proves it all.

Standing on the unjust grounds on which the activists were killed, environmental activists in Nigeria and across the globe are calling for the exoneration of the Ogoni 9 through series of activities that marked the 25th anniversary of their execution. This is a long overdue call. Why should the Federal Government of Nigeria answer this call?.

No Justice can be derived from a Kangaroo Court

Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other eight activists were tried by the Federal Civil Disturbances Special Tribunal, a 'kangaroo court', established under the oppressive regime of Sani Abacha. This was a regime that had no regard for human rights. Prior to the inception of Abacha's abusive regime, the 1960, 1963 and 1979 constitutions of Nigeria had guaranteed and instituted mechanisms for the enforcement of human rights.

The rights to freedom from torture, cruelty, inhuman and degrading treatment; freedom from arbitrary arrest and detentions; fair and public hearing within a reasonable time; freedom of expression; and peaceful assembly and association among others were well enshrined in Nigeria's constitutions. All these human rights were abused by the kangaroo court that tried the nine activists.

On 1 March 1996, Amnesty International reported that Baribor Bera, one of the Ogoni 9, showed the 'kangaroo court' scars from torture while in detention. According to Bera's accounts, he was stripped naked, tied to a pillar, flogged with a horsewhip and forced to swallow teeth knocked out from his mouth while he was being beaten. This account, as well as all other accounts of the defendants, was ignored and on 31 October 1995, the activists were sentenced to death.

In the morning of Friday, 10 November 1995, against all pleas by the international community, especially international human rights groups, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other

eight Ogoni activists were hanged. In furtherance of their abuse, the murdered activists' bodies were dumped in an unmarked grave, and the hangmen "viciously desecrated their bodies with acid," environmental and human rights activist, Nnimmo Bassey, recounts in a 2015 report published in Premium Times. It is public knowledge that many of the tribunals set up during the Abacha regime operated in ways that constituted a grave violation of standards for both national and international fair trial. Ironically, Nigeria signed to uphold many of these standards.

It is surprising that Nigeria has continued to ignore human rights abuses even when it has acceded to most human rights treaties. Some of these treaties include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, and The Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention Against Torture) of 1984. Nigeria is equally a signatory to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is highly unreasonable and irresponsible for a country to append its signature to so many human rights treaties and yet turn a blind eye to calls for justice whether for past or present crimes against the dignity of the human person.

The present regime cannot wish away the yet fresh grievances held by the Ogoni people and activists across Nigeria and the world at large.

The responses of the international community to the killings are clear evidence that the Ogoni 9 should be exonerated

Before the execution, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights made repeated appeals to the Nigerian Government not to go ahead with the execution. Special rapporteurs of the Commission also made several joint appeals to the Nigerian Government. World leaders such as Nelson Mandela, former South African President, appealed for a stay of execution.

Angered by the manner in which the activists were executed, the Commonwealth and

It is surprising that Nigeria has continued to ignore human rights abuses even when it has acceded to most human rights treaties.

some other international bodies and organisations severed either or both economic and diplomatic ties with Nigeria.

The UN passed a condemnatory resolution in December 1995. Several countries, for example, Britain and the United States, recalled their ambassadors from Nigeria and initiated sanctions. If the Nigerian government cared about projecting a better image for the world to see, the Ogoni 9 should have been exonerated by now and their families compensated.

Shell claims on its website that it “has publicly called for ...reconciliation among Ogonis and between the Ogonis and SPDC (The Shell Petroleum Development Company), and continues its community development programme in the area despite the fact it is no longer an oil-producing area.” The question is: In the absence of justice and exoneration of the Ogoni 9, can there be reconciliation?

Nnimmo Bassey, in his poem Justice now passed across an undisputable message:

execution of the Ogoni 9.

The present democratic dispensation, though proven not to be authentically democratic, cannot erase all the evils of the past military regime, especially those of Abacha. The Ogoni people and environmental activists are not about to sweep the heinous crimes of the Abacha regime under the carpet.

According to a BBC report in 2015, Ken Saro-Wiwa's supporters requested that he be posthumously pardoned. It has become clear in 2020 that what is needed is not pardoning but exoneration.

Hence, the response which environmental activists are calling for in this 25th anniversary of the wrongful killing of the Ogoni 9 by the Nigerian State instigated by Shell is “Exonerate Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni activists.” Ken Saro-Wiwa, Saturday Dobee, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuata, Baribor Bera, Barinem Kiobel, and John Kpuine deserve complete exoneration from the false charges levelled against them.

National institutions whose responsibility it is to monitor the implementation of international and national human rights instruments starting with the office of the Presidency, the National Assembly (and its various committees), State Assemblies (and their relevant committees), the Judiciary, National Human Rights Commission down to academic institutions, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the media and other relevant ministries and extra-ministerial bodies have to see to the exoneration of the Ogoni 9.



“No reconciliation...without justice.”

Some errors can never be forgiven until justice is served. Nikki Giovanni, a renowned poet from Knoxville, Tennessee, had said that “it is the response to error that counts.” The Nigerian government is yet to make a response that counts as regards the

POETRY

UNHAPPY EXCHANGE OF **A SISTER** FOR POTS OF FLOWER

Who?
Who is he?
Who told us Who is Who
Who we are when we live and when we die

Who told us Who they are
Who named the 'tribes' of the massacred?
Who refused to name the girls abducted?

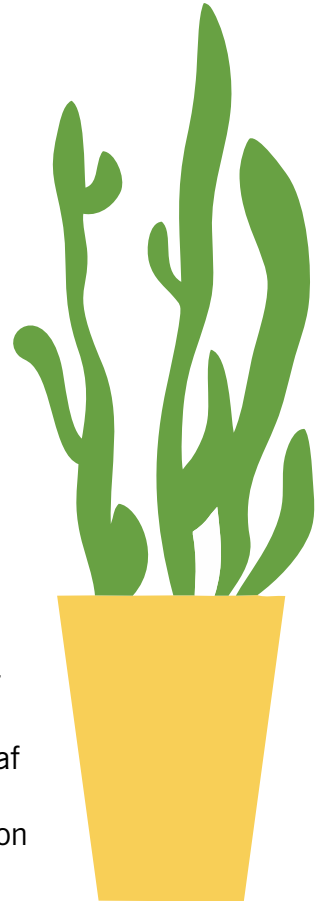
Who said they are none
Whose ethnic identity ruptured
As if they were not kidnapped for who they are

Who summoned us to fathom they're
mere schoolgirls

Who?
Who is he?
Who evoked his mother, partner and daughter?
Who declared who he is – the keeper of brother and sister?

Who shielded the murderer?
Who overlooked our sister's despair,
casually turn his deaf ear?
Who fixed his gaze on the vessels of sister flower?

Who?
Who is she? ...
And who auditioned the drama –
Unhappy exchange of a sister for the stolen pots of flower?
What is thissss? A conundrum or a metaphor?



By Tekletsadik Belachew

Respond to Demands for Justice:

HOMEF tells Government

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) has called on the government to respond swiftly to the demands for justice by Nigerian youths.

This call was made by the ecological think tank in a press statement issued on Monday, 19 October 2020 as the #EndSARS protest intensified across Nigeria and echoed in other nations of the world. HOMEF lends her support to the voices and demands of Nigerian youths against the brutality of the “disbanded” Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), especially in recent times.

The organisation supports the demands by protesters for justice for victims of SARS brutality, improved security in the country, immediate Police Force reform, and an inclusive government.

According to Nnimmo Bassey, HOMEF's Director, the calls for the allocation of more funds to the education sector, placement of elected politicians on minimum wage to attract genuine public servants, increased remuneration for teachers, doctors, nurses, police, military and civil servants, speak to

some of the structural problems we must address as a country. “The deep-seated inequalities should be uprooted and the dignity of our people upheld,” Bassey contended.

HOMEF believes that we must address the systemic root causes of the crises, stressing that the renaming of SARS as SWAT [Special Weapon Tactical Team] was an unconvincing rebranding effort, a smokescreen which got no one convinced. The disbandment of SARS, as announced by the Inspector General of Police following the agitation of Nigerian youths, does not address the real problem. Rather, it gives the offenders a new platform to continue on the path of oppression.

The Director reiterated on the need for justice in all spheres of our existence, including our environment, our food systems and social/economic wellbeing. In his words, “We should note that without environmental justice, there is no solid platform for political progress and enjoyment of human rights.

HOMEF believes that the injustices experienced in Nigeria specifically, and in the world generally, are direct results of political decisions, actions and inactions and a jaundiced relationship with Mother Earth. This is an opportunity for a radical transformation of our politics and a thorough overhaul of socio-economic structures to promote justice and the dignity of our peoples.”

While we do not support any violent actions during these protests, we demand that the government protect peaceful protestors from hoodlums and take decisive and effective steps to ensure the safety of citizens. “We must end all forms of injustice! It is time for a new Nigeria!” the statement concluded.





Jesse Pipeline Fire

Tragedy: 22 Years of Silence

By Nnimmo Bassey

Pipelines convey goods, especially liquids, from one location to another. For example, pipelines are used to convey water to households in cities and other human communities. They can be used for irrigation purposes and for a variety of purposes.

Today we remember the tragic pipeline fire that occurred at Atiegwo, near Jesse, Delta State, on the 17th day of October 1998 killing over a thousand people in the community. The pipeline is a 16-inch petrol pipeline owned by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and linking the Warri refinery to Kaduna. The fire raged for about five days and was eventually put out by American fire-fighters.

Blaming the Victims

Without any investigation, the Petroleum Products Marketing Company (PPMC), a subsidiary of the state-owned NNPC and the Military Government alleged that the cause of the inferno was sabotage.

However, this charge was not substantiated. The oil companies and the then military government were quick to blame the victims. The basins that littered the death scene were interpreted to have been taken there by pipeline vandals to scoop spilt petrol.

The military government of General Abdusalam Abubakar declared that no

compensation would be paid, and the situation turned into one in which the surviving villagers became afraid that they may be prosecuted. The fear led some families to prematurely discharge their relatives from hospitals, a situation that may have led to an increase in fatalities. We repeat, the root cause of the conflagration is yet to be established, 22 years after the tragic incident. Twenty-two years is long enough to bring closure to this unfortunate incident.

A mother who lost her daughter, Eunice, in the inferno had this to say to environmental monitors that visited the scene:

She said she was going to the farm. She left us happy. We were expecting some red cassava for dinner. She never came back. We saw the basin of the cassava. We saw the “karta” (head pad). We recognised our basin and her clothes. Her body we did not see. Her voice we did not hear. The fire took her from us.

They say we are vandals. How? Can Eunice be a vandal? It is the oil people who have been vandalising our means of livelihood. It is the government that has stolen from us and continues to do so even to this minute.

What Caused the Fire?

Former Chief of Army Staff, Major General David Ejoor (Rtd.) was particularly piqued by the massacre and addressed the press in very strong terms. According to him, the evidence suggested that oil companies and the government caused the fire.

He said that

“when the spillage became general knowledge, the oil companies moved in to cover the cartel that was siphoning petrol from a joint valve near Idjerhe in tankers. Towards daybreak, the saboteurs failed to put the pipes back properly and hence the spillage of petrol.”

According to the general, the spilt products got into farmlands as well as into the Ethiopia River. This attracted the attention of the community people. “People going to their farms discovered that they were wading in petrol instead of water. There was a rush to fetch the petrol from the farm and the floating petrol in the river.”

Eyewitnesses recounted that five minutes before the fire, there was a Shell helicopter hovering overhead and urging the people to evacuate the scene. Analysts believe that since the victims were mostly Urhobo, if the officer in the helicopter had shouted the information in their language, they would have escaped the tragedy. One interpretation of this is that the employment pattern in the companies is skewed against the oil field communities. Thus, the indigenes are hardly ever employed.

Moreover, General Ejoor stated that after warning the people from the helicopter, “the officials followed up their threat with firing nerve gas at the crowd, which made it impossible for them to run. Those who attempted to run could not move their limbs with agility. The horror came; the place was set on fire with the intention of killing everybody and preventing anybody from giving evidence.”

Unending Pipeline Fires

Many pipeline fires have been recorded in the Niger Delta. Some can be traced to poor facility management—including the non-replacement of corroded pipelines or those that had reached their optimal lifespan. Most pipelines in Nigeria are designed for a limited lifespan of 20 years. Other incidents have been traced to vandalism or oil theft.

Recently the General Manager of the NNPC stated that oil pipelines in Nigeria are all compromised, which is a very troubling situation. It shows that pipelines can leak out volatile petroleum products at any time. Another worrying statistic came through when the NNPC stated that there have been 45,347 pipeline breakages and/or explosions in Nigeria over the past 18 years.



While speaking on this, the Group Managing Director of the NNPC, Mele Kyari, fingered pipeline vandalism and crude oil theft as major challenges for the oil industry for years and attributed this to “poverty in surrounding communities, community-industry expectation mismatch and corruption.”

The analysis by the NNPC largely misses the point and heaps the blame on the victims, on the hapless communities. Crude oil theft is big business that requires technical knowledge and equipment, layers of security and other protections within the system to thrive. The theft has been said to be at an industrial scale. And, because the country does not really metre or measure the actual amount of crude oil extracted, the measure of the volume of crude being stolen on a daily basis remains in the realm of speculation.

The Nigerian Extractive Industries Initiative (NEITI) reckoned that Nigeria lost about \$42 billion to crude oil theft in nine years. According to NEITI, about \$38.5 billion was lost to crude theft alone, while \$1.6 billion on domestic crude and a further \$1.8 billion was lost on refined petroleum products.

Figures that have been bandied around range from 200,000 to 400,000 to 1,000,000

barrels a day. A top government figure once speculated that as much oil as is being officially exported is also being stolen. One thing is clear: the humungous amount of crude oil could not be stolen by poor villagers or even by those engaged in bush refining. Indeed, it has been said that oil companies are involved in the business and that the international community is complicit.

Pipelines in Nigeria have largely been carriers of “pipe dreams”. Water pipelines are largely dry and those installed to convey crude oil to the refineries run largely empty as the refineries are comatose.

Lives and the Living

The loss of lives in the inferno of 1998 was, and remains, painful. However, we must not fail to mention that one regular blind spot associated with accidents of this nature is the lack of focus on what happens to the environment as a result of the incident. The environmental assessment of Ogoni by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) clearly illustrated the harms of irresponsible extractive activities in the Niger Delta.

The report submitted to the government in 2011 and leading to the establishment of the Hydrocarbons Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) showed that ground and surface waters in Ogoni were contaminated beyond acceptable levels. Groundwater was found to have benzene, a known carcinogen, at 900 times above World Health Organisation (WHO) standards. In some places, the hydrocarbon pollution had seeped into the ground to a depth of 5 metres. By the time remediation was carried out in 2020, the pollution had sunk down to a depth of 10 metres.

The National Oil Spills Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) announced that Nigeria recorded 1,300 oil spills between 2018 and 2019. This amounted to an average of 5 oil spills per day. Not surprisingly, life expectancy in the Niger Delta is a paltry 41 years compared to an equally embarrassing national average of 55 years.

The point we are making is that the living who survive oil fires remain in the grip of deadly pollution and their lives are thus highly discounted. For the living to have a fighting chance of living in dignity, the pollutions from the petroleum extractive activities must urgently be remediated across the Niger Delta.

Farewell to Fossil Fuel Fires

There have been oil spill and pipeline fires across the Niger Delta over the past decades. The best way to honour the memory of our people that died in the fire of 1998 is to ensure that there is no repeat of such a horrific incident.

The steps towards achieving this include:

1. Replacing all pipelines that have outlived their lifespan and are liable to corrode or leak.
2. Companies should conduct regular integrity tests on their pipelines.
3. The companies and the government must prioritize the safety of human

lives and not be solely concerned with protecting pipelines and crude oil for the sake of petrodollars.

4. Free Prior Informed Consent must be obtained from communities before hazardous facilities such as oil/gas pipelines are allowed on their lands and territories.
5. Where there are existing projects and/or proposed new ones, operating companies must post a reasonable deposit for covering costs of remediation in case of accidents or on the decommissioning of their plants at the end of their lifespan.
6. Environmental and social impact assessments must be carried out and fully debated by affected communities before any fossil fuel project is permitted in their communities.
7. It is also essential to ensure that pipelines are not laid on the surface and that associated facilities are adequately protected and secured.
8. Incident reporting and response should be immediate and transparent.
9. Companies must adhere to the best international standards and end the reign of environmental racism in our lands.
10. Urgent assessment or audit of the entire Niger Delta environment should be done and followed by a thorough remediation of the pollution accumulated over the 6 decades of oil exploitation in the region.

Talking points used at a Symposium hosted (18/10/2020) by Achoja Research Council on 22 Years After the Idjerhe Pipeline Fire Disaster under the theme Farewell to Fossil Fuel Fatalities in Our Lands.

Lives and Water Resources at Risk in Namibia and Botswana

By Ogechi Okanya Cookey



Following the licensing of more than 13,600 square miles of land in the Okavango wilderness region of Namibia and Botswana for oil and gas exploitation by ReconAfrica, life can never be the same for the human and wildlife population in the region. Even the region's scant water resources face threats of pollution and further shortage.

According to Jeffrey Barbee and Laurel Neme's report in National Geographic,

"The company's licenced region ... is home to some 200,000 people and abundant wildlife, including important migratory routes for the world's largest remaining elephant population."

The region houses "the largest herd of African elephants left on Earth and myriad other animals—African wild dogs, lions, leopards, giraffes, amphibians and reptiles, birds—and rare flora." The waters in the region are home to hippos, sitatungas, or African fish eagles.

The Okavango River is particularly "the

lifeblood of the region," the report reads. It is an important water resource for not only Namibia and Botswana but Angola as well.

Conservationists and community leaders in the region have already raised an alarm over the threat that the proposed oil and gas exploitation and production activities would pose to their water resources and already endangered wildlife. Communities in the region, especially those that are far from the town, depend on their rivers for drinking water. Some get their drinking water from hand pumps and wells that are hand-dug.

According to two community members quoted in the report, *"if these people [ReconAfrica] come with a system that will damage the water, this is life-threatening to us"*; "what happens if the company drops the groundwater table and people who live there can no longer access the water they have relied upon for generations?"

The wildlife reported to be under threat include the endangered grey crowned crane, African wild dog, black rhinoceros and white-backed vulture as well as 20 other vulnerable species (like martial eagle and Temminck's pangolin). ReconAfrica, which is a petroleum exploration company headquartered in Canada, believes that the region also referred to as Kavango Basin may house about 31 billion barrels of crude oil. Plans to drill test wells to ascertain the presence of exploitable oil and gas in the northeast of Namibia in December 2020 has already been approved by the government while drilling permit in Botswana is in the works.

Once oil is found, drilling of hundreds of wells in the area is bound to begin as ReconAfrica's plan revealed. Aside from this, it is feared that some of the wells will be opened using modern frac stimulations. This entails fracking which is a contentious practice whereby underground shale is injected with high-pressure fluid to crack open the rock and release more oil and gas.

Studies have shown that fracking leads to groundwater contamination, use of large amounts of water which has worse effects in water-deficient areas, exposure to toxic chemicals, release of greenhouse gases (e.g. methane) and general air pollution, blowouts due to gas explosion, earthquakes, infrastructure degradation, food-chain poisoning, congenital disabilities, illnesses like cancer, habitat destruction, mass fish death, and the death of other marine species. It raises concerns for workplace safety, community loss of land and water, and in

oil and gas infrastructure can negatively impact animal habitat, migratory pathways and biodiversity.

broader terms, contributes greatly to climate change.

Besides the ruinous impacts of fracking, the construction and installation of oil and gas infrastructure such as roads to oil fields, pipelines, drilling platforms and other buildings have their devastating effects on the environment. Noise from oil exploration sites can change the living pattern of animals in the area from diurnal to nocturnal. This is the case of forest elephants in Central Africa, according to the report. The elephants no longer come out in the day time

In the report of Jeffrey Barbee and Laurel Neme, it was noted that oil and gas infrastructure can negatively impact animal habitat, migratory pathways and biodiversity. This is the experience in Nigeria's Niger Delta region where Shell's roads and other oil and gas infrastructure constructions have led to the destruction of water bodies and forests. According to the National Geographic contributors, "if the broader interconnected region is pocked with oil wells and associated roads, infrastructure, and workers' camps, habitat inevitably will be degraded and fragmented."

Environmental devastation is not all that awaits the Okavango region if oil and gas exploitation and production kick off; social disintegration is also a consequence. A predicted social outcome is that: with the arrival of oil and gas workers with huge remuneration, there is bound to be a high inflow of alcohol and sprouting of joints that market them, more roads and pollutions. The traditional way of life of the indigenous people in the region will begin to erode. Another possible negative outcome of the influx of oil workers is poaching for high-value animals like lions, primates and elephants. Other normal-value species are equally unsafe as there may be an untenable demand for them as meat - what is called bushmeat in the local Nigerian parlance.

The above effects should be captured in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of oil and gas exploitation plans. Nevertheless, the EIA of ReconAfrica's exploration plan in the

Okavango region has been faulted by expert reviewers. Knowing the limited available water resources in the region, experts who reviewed the EIA expected to see a detailed assessment of the company's water usage for the test drilling, which is suspected to include fracking. Information in the public domain shows that the amount of water expended on fracking now is 28 times more than what was used about 15 years ago. This development is dangerous for arid regions.

There are alternatives to fracking. Experts quoted in the National Geographic report criticized the failure of ReconAfrica's EIA to capture the possibility of using solar and wind power which are sustainable renewable alternatives to fracking.

It is in the character of big polluters—oil and gas multinationals—not to go for sustainable alternatives. They are yet to be innovative enough to seek out ways of doing business within the ecosystems' limits. Advocates of alternative and sustainable approaches are sidelined and often silenced. Take as an example, the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni environmental activists whose wrongful execution was masterminded by Shell and the dictatorial government of late Sani Abacha. With all the looming consequences of ReconAfrica's plan in the Okavango region, the company's EIA did not include the assessments of interested and impacted stakeholders. It is, thus, not surprising that a vast majority of the people in the Okavango region are mostly unaware of the oil and gas exploitation plan in their own region. The National Geographic report has it that “even many who live in the affected region were unaware.” The chairperson of

George Mukoya Conservancy was quoted to have said that he did not know there was any company coming to drill oil in the region. George Mukoya Conservancy, which generates revenue from tourists and through sustainable hunting, is one of the sites that will be impacted negatively by the proposed oil and gas plan. This conservancy is 50 miles away from one of the test well sites. According to Barbee and Neme's report, the law in Namibia supports the involvement of interested and affected stakeholders (including people, organisations and agencies) in the EIA of projects of the oil and gas nature. This notwithstanding, ReconAfrica's EIA has failed to uphold the provisions of the law, yet ReconAfrica claims it follows the regulations and policies of Namibia as well as international best practices.

This is a clear indication of the double standards displayed by oil and gas multinationals, which environmental activists in Nigeria's Niger Delta have decried for decades. They keep to best practices in more advanced regions and implement worst practices in Africa. If the Namibian test wells prove productive, ReconAfrica's plan is to strike a deal with oil and gas multinationals like Exxon, Total, and so on. The company is confident that it will cut a deal with the multinationals. The ominous question is: Will the Okavango region come next to Nigeria's Niger Delta region with regard to environmental degradation resulting from oil and gas exploitation and exploration if ReconAfrica succeeds? It is hoped that the Okavango region will not suffer the pains of Nigeria's Niger Delta – a fate that should not be wished even for an enemy zone.



ExxonMobil Shortens Our Lifespan

By Diamond Akpanika



ExxonMobil stands right in the heart of Ibeno, my village in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Thick billows of smoke constantly eddy out from the multinational Oil and Gas Corporation into my village. ExxonMobil flares gas day and night, never ceasing, like hellfire.

This thick, black carbon has been circling my village since I was a child. It forms the air we breathe. It drops into our streams, most of which are semi-stagnant. As children, we

drank stream water.

My people still drink stream water to date. While growing up, I remember a girl who had a gash which turned into a sore that never went away. She wore a bandage which showed the sore as it smeared through. She would be the first to come to the stream every morning. We drank the droplets from her ancient wound. She was our crucible. We hated the witch who punished us through

Our corrugated roofs are not spared by this extremely dangerous carbon. Within three years, your brand new roof becomes rusty, and not long afterwards, they rot out. In Ibeno, your father's Swan Brand zinc roof must leak during your growing days. In Ibeno, poverty became our second nature.

ExxonMobil produces light from its turbines. They could give light to the whole of Akwa Ibom State if they wanted, but they cannot even spare any for my community.

ExxonMobil treats and recycles water from the ocean. It would have been nothing, it is actually nothing for them to give water to the community, but they do not! Ibeno faces a challenge that is worse than her stagnant streams.

And that challenge is that our waters are either saline or oily.

My people have a very short lifespan. Only a few people in my community live beyond 60 years. thing comes from ExxonMobil to the people. They breathe in air filled with carbon every day. I just read a beautiful but touching story of a strong and healthy 90-year-old woman from a friend's Facebook wall. In my village, people do not live to be 90 years. How can they? The level of environmental degradation in my entire community is unimaginable.

The rate of spillage is alarming. ExxonMobil controls most of the eastern area. When there is an oil spill, they deny it.

The ocean, our almost only source of livelihood, is degraded. Effluents and other exploration demons affect aquatic lives, impoverishing fishers as a result. Yet, till date, there is no Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ExxonMobil and my community as envisaged by the Oil and Gas Content Development Act, 2010.

Contracts are packaged from Lagos, signed, sealed and delivered to either strangers from outside Ibeno and Akwa Ibom State or foreign companies. Youth corpors from Lagos will serve along with others (from other States) in ExxonMobil's Qua Iboe Terminal (QIT). After



The constant Thick billows of smoke from ExxonMobil facility- Desmond Akpanika

the service year, the other youth corpors will leave along with the ones from Lagos. One year later, the Lagos corpors will return to my community as ExxonMobil staff. Year after year, this is the cycle that goes on in my village.

ExxonMobil is one of the highest contributors to the revenue of the Federal Government of Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State. But nothing in Ibeno reflects such stupendous wealth; abject poverty is all you see. Year in, year out, they tell you that oil price is low. They tell you that they do not sell oil, that they give oil out for free. But every single month, it is their money that forms the revenue base of the government.

An ExxonMobil staff told me in a meeting the other day that they have a health centre in Ibeno. I plan to post pictures of the health centre that they boast about on Facebook.

Diamond Akpanika is a Lawyer, with keen interest in Labour/Manpower development and hire.

THE CALL

By Ken Saro-Wiwa

Hear the call of the ravaged land

The raucous cry of famished earth

The dull dirge of the poisoned air

The piteous wail of sludged streams

Hear, oh hear!

Stunted crops fast decay

Fishes die and float away

Butterflies lose wing and fall

Nature succumbs to th'ecological war.





Climate 'Migrations'

in the Indian Sundarbans

By Sonali Narang

The Sundarbans is host to one of the largest chunks of mangrove forests in the world, spreading over India and Bangladesh. The Sundarbans mangrove forest is being increasingly reported, especially in the media, as the 'First Climate Hotspot' in South Asia. The Sundarbans region could become the epicentre of the future flow of millions of climate migrants within the region and across borders.

This flow of migrants has brought about new border reinforcement practices. Being at ground zero in terms of development, multiple challenges from the lack of economic and educational development, inappropriate governance system, water conflicts, refugee problem and environmental challenges are the foremost causes of backwardness in the Sundarbans. From observations made during

field visits to Islands of Gosaba, Bali, Bak Khali and Sagar on the Indian Sunderbans Delta, one can argue that the absence of legal frameworks in favour of climate migrants makes it difficult to estimate the impact of climate change on migration, to identify problems of climate migrants and to rejuvenate the moral principles of responsibility, care and protection with regard to climate migrants.

The Indian Sunderbans Delta, which is located in the delta of the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin, is designated as a UNESCO world heritage site. The western part of the delta is spread over about 9630 square kilometres and is home to over four and a half million, largely rural, people.

The larger (eastern) part of the Sundarbans delta is in Bangladesh. It is a well-known fact that as early as 2006, nearly two-thirds of Ghoramara Island in the Sundarbans had been permanently inundated due to sea-level rise. And Lohachara Island, once inhabited by ten thousand people, and Supribhanga island (both located southwest of Ghoramara), had been submerged. Those displaced from the Lohachara Island fled to an island called Sagar, which is said to be equally vulnerable to rising sea levels.

Over the past two decades, four islands (Bedford, Lohachara, Kabasgadi and Suparibhanga) have been permanently flooded and 6,000 families made homeless. Many of these poor people now live in the slums of Dhaka, and Sagar Island already houses 20,000 refugees. In 2010, there was submergence of the New Moore Island which both India and Bangladesh claim as their territory.

Factors like severe erosion, embankment failure, and cyclone and storm surge are leading to habitat loss, resulting in migration of people from the Island. It has been observed by the local inhabitants of the Island that rainfall has become erratic and its intensity has increased, causing further damage to agricultural yield and environmental degradation. The result is the loss of livelihood and belongingness that further accentuate insecurity at multiple levels. As a result, migration becomes an adaptive response, given that the islanders do not have any alternate skills and options.

Climate and People

The people of the Sundarbans have been witnessing changes due to sea-level rise, hazards and change in weather patterns, and utilizing their traditional knowledge for adapting and mitigating the changes. According to a 2014 World Bank report, more than two-thirds do not have access to safe water and only 17% of the population is connected to the electricity grid. Poor environmental conditions cause 3,800 premature deaths and 1.9 million cases of a range of illnesses every year. On May 25,

2009, the most devastating cyclone 'Aila' hit the people, leaving 199 dead and affecting 4.8 million in India and Bangladesh. Cyclone Aila was an event which, according to Mukhopadhyay, 'marginalizes the marginalized'. This connects to the idea that what displaces a people and makes them refugees is what they have gone through not necessarily the actual displacement or the crossing of boundaries and borders. The story of homelessness and displacement in the region is, thus, that of a world which is still truculent.

**migration becomes
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After talking to inhabitants of the region, it was observed that they had no feelings of despair from disasters but had hope of believer gnosis which truly reflects their story of courage, integrity, gratification and adventure. There is a need to build capacity among climate refugees so they can work as masons, plumbers, electricians, farmers, workers etcetera in their communities of engagement.

This would enable them to source for their livelihood; and given the booming economy of Sunderbans and India-Bangladesh, their skills would certainly be in demand. Schemes of this kind would not cost much for both countries' economy. It is bizarre, however, that neither the Indian government nor that of Bangladesh or any other country within South Asia region has ever announced any skill development programme for the displaced or climate migrants.

institutions, development agencies, international NGOs or common people regulating through online portals or visiting the field, could step in. India has made it a rule that large corporations must spend two per cent of their net profits on corporate social responsibility, following an amendment to the Companies Act, 2013 in April 2014. Five Indian companies (Essar Oil, Larsen & Toubro, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Wipro) made it to the list of Climate Performance Leadership Index 2014 and have shown leadership in adopting

in 2019. India has a history of managing refugees and asylum seekers from across several communities and regions including Zoroastrian community, i.e. Parsis, Chakmas (a Bangladeshi Buddhist community), Afghanistan, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar and so on. India is geopolitically well positioned to work jointly with its neighbours to tackle environmental/climate change-related future migration.

The former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, stated that the new voluntary Global Compact on Refugees which 164 nations signed would “allow for better burden-sharing among host countries while raising the voices of refugees and civil society groups.” Though the United States withdrew from the Compact in 2017, it is a framework for international cooperation, rooted in an inter-governmental process of negotiation in good faith.

Time to Envision Protection Recourse for Climate Refugees

There are considerable uncertainty and ambiguity in the existing international law regarding terms like 'Environmental Refugee' and 'Climate Refugee'. In other words, the status, treatment, and protection of people displaced due to the effects of climate change remain mired in legal debate and controversy. And yet these issues must be addressed by law both in the domestic and international legal contexts. In South Asia, there is a need for a regional framework under which all countries of the region could possibly work collectively and make policies.

We might call this a regional structural approach. To make this task possible, a collective institutional building would be needed. South Asian countries should promote already existing multilateral structure of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in order to manage the multiscalar challenge of climate displacements and migrations.

measures to cut their climate-damaging emissions.

Countries accepting Migrants on Moral Grounds

Europe accepted millions of Africans from the Sahel region pushed by droughts, desertification, erratic rainfall, land degradation, population growth, political instability, insecurity and lack of coherent environmental policies due to climate change in 2015 and 2016.

The Sahel region has become a barren land with poor soil and no water resources. Germany's acceptance of one million refugees and Angela Merkel decision to open German borders to unregistered refugees in 2015 had shown the country's friendly gesture to the world. Germany played a leadership role in refugee resettlement as the government announced that the country would accept 4,600 resettled refugees in 2018 and 5,600



unsplash.com/Atul Pandey

We also need to examine the desirability and feasibility of using a revived SAARC, which is the only regional organisation in South Asia, to put into place a regional plan of action on climate change, with special reference to displacements and migrations.

A good deal has been said and written about how refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in South Asia often find themselves at the heart of the politics of all kinds of fears and anxieties, and at times even hostile attitudes emanating from real and imagined religious-cultural differences between neighbours like India and Bangladesh. The fact that South Asian nations have neither ratified the international 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 protocol relating to refugees' status creates its own dynamics, dilemmas and difficulties.

The current legal, social and moral protection regime in the Sundarbans is not equipped to protect climate migrants, as there are no legally binding agreements obliging countries to support climate migrants. Being the largest and most powerful country in the region, India should take a leading role in ratifying the international treaties relating to refugees.

Historically, India has been a melting pot for different cultures and civilizations and has accepted refugees from many parts of the world on humanitarian grounds as earlier stated. India's size, its economic strength and its stature at international level make it more obliged to show the way for an institutional building mechanism that can govern the process of migration, particularly that caused by climate change.

At the international level, India, along with China, regards itself as a vanguard of developing countries. This point also compels India to resolve the issue at its doorstep, that is, South Asia. India must not let this historic opportunity slip off. It must work consistently towards evolving a regional consensus which would not only help address very important common climate change-related issues but also help it to rebuild its image as a caring and considerate neighbour and not be seen as a haughty regional hawk.

Policy recommendations

An Indo-Bangladesh Sundarbans Eco-System Forum should be made functional. The forum, which includes non-governmental and civil society organisations of both countries, would aim at and draw up plans for coordinating efforts in afforestation, management of mangroves and conservation of the tiger. This is an innovative idea which would necessitate bilateral agreements for solving environmental

The current legal, social and moral protection regime in the Sundarbans is not equipped to protect climate migrants, as there are no legally binding agreements obliging countries to support climate migrants.

problems and at the same time foster broader regional cooperation between India and Bangladesh.

Regional cooperation for the governance of refugee protection is necessary to ensure that human rights protections are not undermined. The government should promote adaptation policies that would bring forth programmes for awareness-raising, skills acquisition training, capacity building and education for climate migrants. These would be valuable in helping the migrants cope with the challenge of Climate Crisis.

There is a need to develop countries' capacity building on how legislation and policies relating to refugees and uprooted people can be promoted and implemented at the national level in conformity with the principles of international law without encroaching on the local culture. Nations' representatives must interact at world level with practitioners and experts on refugee protection, so as to obtain ideas on how to resolve the refugee problem in a practical and pragmatic manner.

The protection of the ecosystem and livelihoods of the people of the Sundarbans is important for global commons stewardship. South Asian nations need to discard the limiting notions of determining boundaries and state sovereignty. They should rather extend cooperation and institutional arrangement for the management of the shared ecological landscape, which is important for the survival of humankind. Policymakers and planners have to consider projections of future internal and external climate migration trends and work out strategies to cope with the consequences, such as in case of the Indian Sunderbans. The government should help the locals by (a) promoting tourism and honey cultivation to boost the local economy (b) preventing environmental degradation in order to stamp out Climate Migration and (c) rehabilitating and resettling the locals in a post-climatic calamity period.

A new national, regional and international legal mechanism for safeguarding the interests and human rights of climate migrants is, therefore, needed sooner than later. What is, however, critically important is that the new legal definitions and policy frameworks for climate migrants and refugees should be firmly rooted in the ethical framework of universal human rights, including the right to life, food, health, water and housing. This should apply to all those who are already affected and the millions who will be affected by the change in our climate.

The recommendations to address the challenge of climate migrants presented here and a solution-oriented response to it will (re-

)define international relations and geopolitical equations in the 21st century.

Conclusion

Developed countries need to play critical roles in addressing the climate crisis by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing technical assistance to the affected regions. In the meantime, we must also do more to accommodate migrants, especially climate migrants within the region.

There is a need to adopt preventive approaches by limiting the impacts of environmental change where it is not yet a threat. By amending existing laws and reinforcing mechanisms to resettle migrants, many developed and developing countries have accepted refugees on moral and humanitarian grounds.

These countries have to continue to live up to their reputation as welcoming lands for refugees who are being forced to migrate for survival. Climatic moral and adaptation education needs to be expanded in the Sundarbans Delta in order to solve the uncertain future of millions of climatic migrants crossing regions and borders.

A vast majority of migrants and refugees, who are already suffering enormous difficulties and violation of human rights, are likely to be further victimized in global climate change. The new category of 'climate migrants' will further add to the identity crises for displaced people.

There is a need for policymakers to design and implement appropriate and socially just adaptation strategies for climate change in the Sundarbans and distressed regions. Empowering communities with information, technological skills, education and employment is the best way to address the problem and reduce social vulnerability so as to increase capabilities for coping with climatic change.

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A CAUTION ON THE BLUE ECONOMY

The eighth School of Ecology session of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) was held on 10 and 11 September 2020, with the theme Blue Economy Blues. The session interrogated the top-down Blue Economy concept, drew attention to the red flags tied to it and proposed a people-to-policy approach in relating with our aquatic resources as an alternate route.

The session was a combination of in-person and virtual participation with participants joining from clusters in Port Harcourt, Abuja and Calabar and virtually via Zoom and Facebook live streaming.

Presentations covered the gender component of marine ecosystem restoration; the AU position on the Blue Economy; sea grabbing and lessons from Operation

Phakisa in South Africa; the state of biodiversity in our aquatic ecosystem; mangrove restoration as key for a peoples wetland economy; oceans, geo-engineering and new threats; issues of industrial trawlers in the high seas; and energy from the sea. The question of who will benefit from the Blue Economy was addressed.

From the presentations and extensive discussions, the following observations were made:

- The climate crisis which currently engulfs the world is a result of a deeply flawed economic model which sees nature as an inexhaustible source of materials including the non-renewable coal, oil and gas.
- It is based on this economic model that the Blue Economy seeks to promote more rapacious exploitation of aquatic resources
- Added to the land grab that results from current economic models of accumulation by dispossession, the Blue Economy has the potential to unleash sea grab in Africa.
- Over-exploitation of aquatic resources, pollution and introduction of alien species lead to destruction of biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems. This causes our ecosystems to lose their resilience and capacity to adjust to major threats such as climate change or to serve as carbon sinks.
- The over-concentration on economic gains has caused South Africa to lease 95% of its oceans to oil and gas drilling and deep-sea mining without public consultation while instigating a ruinous competition with Nigeria.
- The beneficiaries of the Blue Economy scheme are people of the Global North and pockets of elite in the developing world who have hoarded the benefits of our shared natural capital and grown gluttonous therefrom.
- Drilling of oil and gas in the oceans results in the extinction of endangered species, destruction of habitats, oil pollution, climate change and negative socioeconomic impacts on fishers, on tourism as well as on other recreational activities.

- Geoengineering techniques do not address the root causes of climate change, such as dependence on fossil fuels, unsustainable consumption, and waste. They instead aim to lock in the polluting modes while creating captive markets.
- Mangroves which provide a wide spectrum of goods and services (including acting as an efficient carbon sink and being spawning ground for fisheries), which contribute significantly to the people's economy, are increasingly being destroyed due to oil pollution, overexploitation, conversion, dredging and canalization, untreated effluent discharge, plastic pollution, fragmentation and spread of alien invasive species.

At the end of the session, the following resolutions were made:

- 1) The Blue Economy concept should be rejected as it portends great danger for Africa. Besides the illogic of limitless aquatic resources, the economic template will open our oceans for risky geoengineering experimentations supposedly to flight global warming. We do not need approaches that further compound the problems but a completely overhauled economic system that is just, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable.
- 2) Geoengineering and similar experiments should be banned because of their high risk and potential to create unpredictable consequences. Real solutions to climate change are those that address its root causes.
- 3) It is time for Africa to move away from a racist colonial economy to a peoples' economy.
- 4) Our governments should urgently set up policies/implementation measures for the management, conservation

and restoration of mangroves, especially in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. These policies and processes must be pro-communities and citizens led.

- 5) Our governments should focus on a just transition from the dependence on fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy and just labour systems.
- 6) More research should be supported to increase knowledge on aquatic ecosystems to promote effective management.
- 7) As a people, we must recognize our aquatic ecosystems as legal entities possessing rights, rather than treating them as mere resources for appropriation, transformation and consumption.
- 8) We should not be bystanders in the processes that determine our future. We must unite, take back our lands and our oceans and hold the polluters responsible.

The speakers/instigators included **Nnimmo Bassey** (Health of Mother Earth Foundation), **Patrick Bond** (University of the Western Cape School of Government), **Bamikole Williams** (Department of Fisheries Resources, Nigerian Institute for Oceanography and Marine Research), **Morris Alagoa** (Niger Delta Resource Centre (Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria)), **Desmond De'Sa** (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), **Nenibarini Zabbey** (Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD), Rivers State, Nigeria.), **Neth Dano** (Action on Erosion, Technology and Concentration-ETC Group), **Liziwe McDaid** (Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)), **Ken Henshaw** (We the People), **Sherelee Odayar** (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), **Irikhefe Dafe** (River Ethiope Trust Foundation), **Tijah Bolton** (Policy Alert) and **Jerry Chidi** (Author-Man and Mangroves).



BAYELSA FLOODED AGAIN

By Alagoa Morris

Annual flooding has been part of the weather and environmental features of the Niger Delta, especially Bayelsa State which is renowned for its low topography. Observers have opined that since the great floods of 1969 and 2012, the current flood situation in Bayelsa is more devastating than those of 2018 and 2019. As the years go by, flooding incidents in Bayelsa have become more frequent and more devastating than expected.

Despite regular weather predictions (since the 2012 flood) by the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) and Nigerian Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA), preparedness and action by the authorities have declined rather than improve. In Bayelsa State especially, responses from government authorities, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other corporate bodies have been very poor. Bayelsa State has eight

Local Government Areas out of which seven (namely Ekeremor, Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw, Kolokuma/Opokuma and Yenagoa) are mostly affected by flooding. During the annual flood seasons, whole communities and streets are usually submerged, families become displaced and migrate; crops are hurriedly harvested and some destroyed; and deaths often occur. The 2020 flood experience is no exception, in terms of negative impacts on the people and communities.

There is a need to ascertain the impacts of the 2020 flooding in Bayelsa State. Time and other resources could not allow visits to all the affected communities. Also, field monitors could not go into some of the communities to interview victims but only made keen observations while traversing the environment. For instance, in Ogbia LGA, field monitors only stopped at Otuabagi and Oruma (Yima-

ama) communities though it was obvious that communities like Kolo, Imiringi, Otuasega and others along the same route were affected too.

Most parts of Yenagoa, the state capital, and its environs were seriously affected – from Igbogene to Yenagoa and nearby communities like Swali, Obogoro, Azikoro, etc. The University community of Amassoma is one of the worst affected communities in Southern Ijaw LGA, just like Odi, Kaiama and Sampou in Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA and Anibeze and Adagbabiri communities in Sagbama LGA.

In Yenagoa LGA, communities along the Taylor Creek and Nun River of Ekpetiema, Gbarain, Okordia and Biseni clans are all affected, including Zarama. Biseni has always been the worse hit with houses, streets and main access roads submerged.

At Oruma (Yima-ama) in Ogbia LGA, a former Deputy Paramount Ruler of the community, **Chief Fidelis Ayoro Oguru** narrated his ordeal, experience and fears:

I returned from the Netherlands and met the 2012 flood and saw my flooded room up to the bed level. We only managed swimming to the bed and coming out. But unfortunately we are experiencing exactly the same thing this year, like 2012. Farms are all flooded. Community folks are struggling to harvest whatever they can from their cassava farms to ferment and process into garri or what is locally referred to as loloi. Movement in the community is restricted too by the flood; even from one house to another. There is a creek behind the community called Ogba. When that creek overflows its banks, it covers the road leading to Oduai in Rivers State. Apart from some residential houses being affected, other places in the community that are flooded include our church and school premises. And due to the fear of children getting drowned, families are taking extra care for safety. Elderly folks are also not safe, moving in flooded environments all the time. They may fall into the gutter and sustain injuries. As it is, in my present condition, if I fall into any such places death might not be far. I heard a Reverend Father died in similar circumstances at Kaiama while walking on a monkey bridge (improvised raised wooden structure).

Concerning the impact of the flood on crops and sustenance, Chief Oguru stated that:

“The flood is really affecting the community, mostly food crops. And everybody is hungry. Right now there is nowhere we can go and get food to come and eat. We are just waiting for the flood to recede to enable us to prepare new farms and get food for ourselves.” According to the chief, all that the farmers do now is

“to rush to the flooded farms and bring whatever is available as food from what was planted previously.”

Commenting on the way forward, the Chief appealed to the government to come to their aid even as he hinted on the threat posed by the Ogba Creek. In his words,

[The] government should also come and assist us in addressing the overflowing of the Ogba creek which is the main source of water affecting the community. Dredging it and opening it up to link up with other communities might help. The water is really punishing us.

At Ikarama in Yenagoa LGA, Chief (Mrs.) Ayibakoru Warder made remarks on the flood and the adaptive measures taken by the affected community members/residents. According to her:

The big flood is here again and it has affected us badly. It is bigger than those of the past two years. Most people have relocated from their houses either to other parts of the community to share with relations, get available spaces to occupy in vacant buildings until the flood recedes. Some have chosen to adjust within the same building and keep life going. As you can see inside our house and the surrounding environment is flooded. If not for this elevated terrace, it would have been difficult to even find a place to cook. We have hurriedly harvested what we could from our farms. One of my farms I never expected the flood to get to is also affected now. We have lost so much harvesting crops when we were not prepared for such. That is why you can see so many families carrying cassava about, peeling cassava or frying garri. Is it Climate Change? It was never like this, this frequent high flood.

Luckily it appears it has started to recede gradually. We are observing the signs for three days now [23 October 2020 being the date of the interview marked the third day of observation]. We have not heard anything about relief materials from anywhere - not even from the government.

The Youth President of Ikarama, Benjamin Warder, had this to say: "The flood sacked me and my family over a week ago and I am managing at the Health Centre for now."

At Igbogene community still in Yenagoa LGA, Emmanuel Ezue explained how the flood has affected him:

I live in Igbogene and own two buildings very close to the JTF - having a common boundary with them. I feel that we are the most affected by the flood. I packed out of my house with my family over ten days ago due to the flood (19th October 2020 being date of the interview was the 10th day). By now, I don't think someone who doesn't know how to swim can go to my house.

The youth president also shared his thoughts on the possible causes of the flood in his area:

Some of us are of the view that the flooding of this environment was caused, majorly by the Ecumenical Centre built by the Bayelsa State Government at the Igbogene/Glory Drive Roundabout. There was a very big canal passing through that area but they blocked it without making any provision for the culvert to allow the free flow of water. Also, there was a bridge crossing the Igbogene Road before the junction - they converted it to culvert instead of leaving it as the former bridge it used to be. These are two main things that have caused our environment to be so affected by flood.

On the issue of government response to the flooding and the plight of affected persons, Emmanuel Ezue had this to say:

Unfortunately we are not getting anything from the government. Even when palliatives were given in the past, we see people who don't own any submerged house coming to take everything. For instance, last year we heard the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) was bringing food aid, some persons from other places bearing government tags positioned themselves at the Roundabout and took everything and left.

At Obogoro Community also in Yenagoa LGA, David Igwele, former Youth President of the community and representative of Atissa Clan in Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) described the flood situation as sympathetic. He reported that:

Where the 2019 Governorship election took place has been washed away. There were two standard fields there. Field meant for the St. John's Primary school. Polling units 3 and 4 were there. But right now you cannot see any sign of a building, a school premises or even a Corpers' Lodge.



The field has eroded away, the Corpers' lodge has eroded away, including the primary school has gone into the water. Private houses and community roads have also been washed into the river - not to talk about farmlands. Sometime in April 2020, we lost a 21-year old boy to this coastal erosion. The boy fell into the water and that was the end of the boy.

David Igwele explained his misgivings about an awaited receding of the flood. According to him,

When it is receding, that is when you will experience the challenge of the erosion. Now the water level and the land level are equal so you won't observe any sliding. But when the flood is going, the areas that got in contact with the flood at the bank of the river (Ekole River, a tributary of River Nun) will be cutting off into the river. We are expecting that more houses and other property would go along with the receding flood.

Talking about the response of the government, the IYC representative mentioned that:

We have called on the Federal and State governments to come to our aid several times. Up till now, we are still calling on them to intervene and arrest this flood and erosion threat the community is facing. As a peaceful community, we don't want to take certain actions. But if we are pushed to the wall, we have to do the needful.

Through the interview medium, he once again called on the State and Federal governments to “do the needful by reclaiming this land for us and follow up with shoreline protection.”

The testimonies obtained directly from primary sources in the field were not different from what made headlines on radio stations in Bayelsa State. Besides guests in the

studios, voices captured around the state confirmed the challenges posed by the raging flood. Sources revealed how two schoolchildren died at Azikoro community, in Yenagoa LGA. Also, another 23-year old male was reported to have drowned in the flood in the same Azikoro community. Another 13-year old JSS3 (Junior Secondary School Class 3) student was reported missing in the flood at Elebele community, Ogbia LGA. A Reverend Father was reported to have drowned as he fell into the water from the wooden platform that he was walking on at Kaiama, in Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA.

Up until the time of this report, the only reaction of the Bayelsa State Government has been to close primary and secondary schools in the state after much outcry by concerned indigenes in addition to his going round to appraise the situation by himself. Although the state government made pronouncements that victims of the flood would be assisted, no action has been seen in that direction.

In terms of government's response, this year can be considered the worse, as there are no relief camps and nothing like relief materials from the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). This is irrespective of the early warnings by NiMet and NIHSA about the impending flood.

Response from Civil Society/NGOs and corporate bodies has not been different from the government agencies this year. There has been no information, unlike in previous years, about victims/communities receiving relief materials. However, on 23 October 2020, the Ijaw Women of America were seen taking some relief items, especially foodstuff to the people of Biseni, in Yenagoa LGA.

Although it is yet to show significantly, there are observable indications that the flood has started receding. As at the date of concluding this report, on 26 October 2020, signs of the receding flood were obvious on roads leading to Okordia/Zarama and some other communities as well as inside the communities. This was attested to by indigenes too. Nevertheless, in the flooded



home of the former women leader of Ikarama as of 26th October 2020 some fishes were seen coming to the doorstep of the house.

Consequent upon the findings made during this field trip, the following are recommended:

1. There is need to bring the twin environmental issue of increasing flooding and coastal erosion to the front burner to find practical solutions, or at least, to minimize impacts.
2. The need for effective flood and erosion commission has become most obvious. Part of the 13% derivation allocation and entire ecological funds meant for affected states should be directed at such commissions when established. Besides working independently, state commissions of flood and erosion can collaborate with Federal Government interventionist agencies and other national and international development partners to pursue their mandates.

3. Since the flood is causing hurried harvesting of crops as well as the destruction of crops, the related issue of food security threat should be tackled.

4. The school calendar should also be reviewed instead of closing schools because of yearly flooding in affected states.

5. SEMA and NEMA should send relief materials to affected communities and individuals to ameliorate their plight. The pains of Covid-19 lockdown and its attendant devastating flood crisis cannot be overemphasized. As such, these government agencies should do the needful in line with the purpose of their establishment.

POETRY

HUMANS GREATEST SIN

By Jay Vergara

Mother! Father! My little child said,
As she rushed into my bedroom and
leaped onto my bed
With a look of excitement and wonder
“What are these creatures?” she
pondered

Images of creatures, which existed long
ago
Rushed into extinction from the damage
humans did so
We invaded their homes, and took their
resources

If they fought back our way we would
force in
We've famished our Earth, our
greatest sin
“But Mother, Father surely we
humans have done great!
“Humans are Prefect” said in
Christian Faith

A lie it is, it's far from the truth
Does the des
truction we've done make us
absolute?
Not a single patch of nature
seen in our cities

Our plan of action is only
feeling pity
Our Buildings and factories
standing in nature's way
Nowhere to expand, left to
decline and fade away

The air we respired, is
corrupted and twisted
There was once a time it wasn't

as misted
Now with every breath, feels like you're
choking

Without a cigarette, you're basically
smoking
Disappear if we would, life would thrive

Stay if we would, life would die
With the look of excitement no longer on
her face

She bitterly said “What is wrong with
the Human Race?”



THOUGHTS ON LAGOS FLOODING

By Margaret Aligbe

A Swedish Institute Scholar studying Sustainable Development at Uppsala University Sweden.

All over social media, there are clips and photos of flooded roads, houses and drainages, muddy footpaths and heaps of debris, mostly plastics, gathered by the flood resulting from recent heavy rainfalls in Lagos, Nigeria.

A heavy downpour which occurred in June 2020 left many people stranded, especially those who rely on public transportation, thus limiting mobility and causing huge traffic jams on the barely motorable roads.

The flooding which followed left many parts of Lagos submerged. The flooded areas included communities like Ikeja, Agege, Alimosho and most parts of Lekki. It is a case of when it rains, it pours. Lagos flooding is no longer news. This has become a yearly normal for many Lagos residents. Somehow, people have become used to it. They consider the flooding incidence as a phase that passes as the raining season fades away. This typifies the ironical situations which



Nigerians have become used to, a situation where something which would be considered an abnormality elsewhere is being perceived as normalcy.

We are in the age of sustainable development and climate change. An age in which many cities aim to become circular with distinct city planning models designed to improve the living conditions of residents. Yet, Lagos, Nigeria's biggest economic hub, with millions of residents, is still far behind in this regard.

Lagos, a city located on a narrow coastal flood plain, is not resilient enough. Instead, the pattern of houses built and the expansion of slums due to high prices of decent accommodation have left the city vulnerable to disasters like overcrowding, pollution, illegal slum expansion and flooding. With an official population of over 22 million residents, about 2,000 industrial complexes and 15,000 commercial ventures, there is massive pressure on public infrastructure in Lagos.

Most houses in Lagos are built with very little consideration for flooding and other sustainability-related metrics – it is all about demand and supply. This is why people live in buildings on flood plains, pipelines and slopes, thereby putting unsuspecting residents in danger without any insurance cover. Many residents appear to be ignorant of the disadvantages of renting apartments in flood-prone areas. It is mostly about affordability, proximity to work, security and better access to more social life. Lagos State faces the problem of increasing population growth and poor management of the expansion as many people figure out ways to survive in Lagos on their own. Many of the middle-low income migrants who come to Lagos with the dream of being established settle in the poorest and most affordable neighbourhoods which are mostly overcrowded with poorly constructed apartments prone to flooding and the spread of diseases.

Many factors escalate the annual flooding situation in Lagos, causing loss of properties spanning into millions of Naira, loss of livelihoods, shelter and the spread of diseases. This notwithstanding, rather than embrace the situation as normal, Nigerians should know

Perhaps, Africa does not need a Dubai, and investment should be redirected to more sustainable projects to improve the wellbeing of people in Lagos.

that the situation can be improved upon.

A More Inclusive Lagos

The state government should prioritize investments that aim for a more inclusive and resilient Lagos. There is no point providing housing that many Lagos residents cannot afford or approving projects that push the fragile coastal areas beyond the threshold.

The consequence is that many more will be displaced to make room for these choice properties, thereby leaving millions homeless and at risk in Lagos. Perhaps, Africa does not need a Dubai, and investment should be redirected to more sustainable projects to improve the wellbeing of people in Lagos. It is good to admire top cities like Dubai, New York or London and desire to replicate some of their designs in Africa. However, it is even more important to note that the dynamics always differ and that replication without a reflection on the complexity of the modus operandi of local systems will amount to a waste of resources and poor execution in the end. Moreover, having more projects that cater to the top one per cent in the society is nothing short of Eco Gentrification – a process that diminishes, weakens or dislocates middle- and low-income communities who constitute the highest percentage of the population.

The effects of global warming and dredging for construction which pushes the Atlantic Ocean to invade the coastline coupled with heavy rainfall put many residents at risk now and in the future.

What is needed is a focus on affordable housing for all. A focus on affordable housing for more people in Lagos will reduce the expansion of slums, manage population growth and help in executing sustainable city plans that can make drainages work efficiently.

Once the drainage gets blocked in one area, it creates a ripple effect in other areas. Despite the high cost of living in places like Lekki, Victoria Island and Surulere, residents still suffer from flooding just like people in Jakande, Alimosho, Agege, Ikorodu and other less expensive areas.

The idea of fanciful architecture without any thought of systemic drainage, waste or flood management is no longer sustainable. The city planning must create room for the annual heavy rainfall, effective drainage systems management and the enforcement of land-use planning in every level of development.

More on Waste Disposal, Recycling and Possible Plastic Ban

Looking at the debris in blocked drainage systems, it is easy to notice the vast number of plastics (nylon bags and PET bottles) that go into the drainages during the raining season. Despite efforts to recycle plastics in Lagos, there is still massive plastic waste in the state. Notably among the efforts is the set-up of Wecyclers and the enlisting of beverage companies to kickstart recycling. In an interview with BusinessDay Newspaper, Wale Adebiyi of WeCyclers estimated that out of the 15,000 tons of waste generated daily in Lagos, 50 per cent is plastics out of which only 30 per cent is recyclable. With a massive generation of 2,250 tons of plastics daily, only a tiny portion of that is recycled; a large chunk ends up in the drainages and dumpsites. In late 2019, an exercise held by Break Free From Plastic (BFFP) movement formed by the Sustainable Research and Action for Environmental Development (SRADev) Nigeria together with Beach Samaritans and Kids Beach Garden, revealed five top plastic polluters in Lagos as Bigi,

Pepsi, Nova, C-Way table water and Cola-Cola. The groups called on the government to establish a Plastic Task Force, among other recommendations.

In January 2020, the Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA) announced that it was set to ban single-use plastic bags within its premises from Monday, 13 January 2020. The General Manager of LASEPA, Dr Dolapo Fasawe said "As the Environmental police of the state, LASEPA should set a good record for others to emulate, hence the reason why we are using our facilities as a pilot scheme to drive home our zero plastic waste campaign and its attendant effects on human health and the environment. This move would later be extended for wider implementation in all government premises and the state as a whole."

A bigger challenge with plastic recycling is that not every plastic can be recycled. This automatically means that for the cycle to be complete, the whole process, from manufacturing to consumption, must be included in any recycling programme design for Lagos.

It is not enough to just pick up empty plastics, the type of plastics manufactured must be recycle-grade-type, and manufacturers must take responsibility in initiating the process which can motivate the end consumers to complete the cycle.



wecyclers plant, Lagos -Babawale Obayanju

Everyone is Involved

Waste management infrastructure in Lagos must be improved upon to cope with the rising population and indiscriminate dumping of refuse. Initiatives like Cleaner Lagos did not quite deliver on the promise as many of the infrastructures were hijacked by private individuals. This was in addition to the controversies surrounding the weekly pick-up of refuse by private contractors in the state. Popular dumpsites are old and are no longer able to contain the massive waste from the growing population. Lagos State Waste Management Agency (LAWMA) has, no doubt, made a great deal of effort to manage the waste problem in Lagos but the waste management situation in Lagos must be made to include citizens also. Indiscriminate dumping of refuse, littering on public roads and in drainage system must be checked continuously. The painstaking efforts of LAWMA workers to clean the road do not discourage people from littering as many still do this unbothered. The public must be made to understand the ripple effect of their actions and be encouraged to take responsibility.

Most countries that have successfully built recycling and effective waste management systems within their society do not only recycle plastics but have a culture of recycling both liquid and solid waste. It is a system where nothing goes to waste. A very high standard of accountability is required from companies in these societies.

They are required to include recycling in their business models. The public is integral to the whole system which is designed to work with flexibility. People are encouraged to focus on just needs to check overconsumption in households. Secondhand shops are all over Sweden, and there is a high demand for recycled items. Like Sweden, many countries in the West have made recycling a lifestyle. When Lagosians are motivated (as is the case in many advanced countries), they can play an active part in recycling and eventually reduce plastic waste.

- The culture of shaming people for buying secondhand must be discouraged. Instead, there should be

opportunities created for recycling like a market for secondhand items where products manufactured locally can be used and resold to create demand and encourage recycling.

- The lifestyle of overconsumption, excessive use of polythene bags after every purchase must be discouraged. Consumers must be educated on the impact of plastic waste, and the yearly flooding is an example of ways to educate the public.
- People must understand that empty PET bottles or wraps of biscuits can contribute to drainage blockage. Public waste management infrastructures must not become private property. If waste bins are made available within walking distance, a culture of littering can be discouraged.
- Public enlightenment on floodplains and the environmental dynamics of Lagos State must be taken seriously to discourage people from residing or buying properties in these areas. Without demand, there will be no supply. When people are enlightened on the dangers of living or building on flood plains, there will be fewer incidences of loss of lives and properties or even displacements. With the massive housing deficit in Nigeria and poor access to finance, the need for shelter puts many Lagos residents in vulnerable situations where there is little or no background check before any transaction is made.

If nothing is done to effectively manage the yearly flooding disaster in Lagos, residents will continue to suffer, and Lagos may end up being just another expensive slum, where millions cannot afford expensive accommodation. The state may also find herself in a situation where a few residents will be paying so much for choice properties with no insurance against natural disasters while the slums keep expanding. That might already be the case.

CONVERSATIONS ON BIOSAFETY AND BIOSECURITY IN AFRICA



Image credit: Babawale Obayanju

modern agricultural biotechnology would be the key to solving the world's and Africa's hunger problem, arguments as to why we have to accept modern agricultural biotechnology, and ways that farmers can grow their crops without agrichemicals.

The CBD that led to the development of the African Model Laws by the OAU (now AU) was convened out of concerns

Food safety, biosafety and themes around biodiversity are key issues that Africans have been deeply concerned about. Added to these is the issue of biosecurity as manipulated organisms can easily be weaponized.

for world development, the bastardisation of the earth, the depletion of earth resources without adding any value to it and the fear of possible annihilation of the earth.

To address these concerns, we were pleased to have a Conversation with Professor Johnson Ekpere, one of the pioneers and iconic intellectuals and public officers with deep knowledge of the history and developments in these sectors. The Conversations took place on 8 October 2020 under the banner Africa: Biosafety and Biosecurity. The following were addressed in this Conversation series – the concerns of African and developing countries at the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), major reasons behind the formulation of the Model Laws juxtaposed with what is currently available, efficacy of the impression that

Considering the adoption of the modified version of the Model Laws in 2003, Prof. Ekpere addressed the issue of whether the Laws have lived up to the initial purpose with scepticism. According to him, what they tried to do was “to disaggregate the OAU Model Laws and remove the components that were at variance with popular thinking at the international level.” This was how the modified version of the Model Law came to be. Prof. Ekpere held onto the hope that at the right time, some critical issues covered in the original version of the law would be unearthed and “the spirit of the original document will become obvious.”

There were lots of threats to issues raised in the laws. These include issues such as indigenous rights and the possibility of biotechnology without biosafety. Despite the challenges, the document still considered critical concerns related to indigenous and traditional knowledge.

It was noted that in the preamble to the modified Laws, African Union (AU) gave the impression that modern agricultural technology would be the key to solving hunger problems. The Professor vehemently objected to the blanket acceptance of biotechnology on such a premise. He insisted that the impression was misplaced. "It could provide some respite but cannot be considered as a panacea," he stressed.

His position was that it was impossible to "appropriate rights through biotechnology to the national wealth of nations." This position is based on discussions at the international level, which brought two concepts to the deliberation table.

The first concept was Precautionary Principles which suggest that "if you are not absolutely sure of what the outcome of a scientific experiment/technology is going to be, do not give a 100% acceptance". The second was Liability and Redress which proposes to hold "the proponents of biotechnology accountable for whatever went wrong.

This is due to scientific evidence that biotechnology was harmful to animals, humans and the entire environment in several ways," Prof. Ekpere explained. It was gathered that the notions of precaution, liability and redress were never completely adhered to as they represented a minority opinion.

This has led countries like Nigeria into accepting biotechnology and the cultivation of genetically modified plant varieties, as farmers are falsely promised wealth on acceptance of genetically modified (GM) seedlings.

This promise has been a mirage as the cultivation of GM crops has brought the farmers no gains. Concrete examples were cited in Burkina Faso, Ghana and other Sahel

countries (highly involved in cotton production) where GM cotton seeds which were promoted by companies like Monsanto were cultivated but today are not being grown anywhere in the countries. In India, farmers were cajoled into taking loans for GM cotton seeds and cotton production. When the crops failed, many of the farmers committed suicide. Farmers involved in soya bean production in Brazil were also caught up in the GM seed failure.

There is a great deal of scientific evidence that GMOs are injurious to human health though much of the evidence is suppressed by those who profit from the GMO industry. The use of GM feeds to feed mice proved to have adverse effects on their reproductive system and have been found to cause limited growth in rats.

**Zambian
government
rejected grains
from the US
despite food
shortages
experienced
in 2002 and made
it through the
crisis without
succumbing
to pressures.**



The Professor maintained that if countries stuck to the natural breeding processes for high yielding cotton and crops generally, they would have ended up with a sustainable agricultural system. It was established that if adequately supported, small-scale farmers can solve the problem of hunger in Africa.

Arguments that harvest losses and the need to control pests are justifications for accepting modern agricultural biotechnology were also refuted.

Our scientists were encouraged to explore sustainable alternatives like the use of natural plant breeding techniques to tackle the problems. There are already cowpea varieties that have pericarp that insects cannot penetrate. Another sustainable solution is to go back to traditional ways of storing seeds.

It was stressed that agricultural institutes, agricultural science and allied departments should be better supported with the necessary equipment to produce well-trained agricultural officers. According to the Professor, this would enable the training of agricultural officers that have both cognitive and psychomotor skills.

Protagonists, however, argue that the above effects of GMOs have not been observed in countries which have been using them. Prof. Ekpere, thus, speculated that “the low immunity that is being observed, for the past seven months, in some countries during this COVID-19 era may be traced to the consumption of GMO products.”

The Professor and Nnimmo Bassey, Director of HOMEF, commended countries like Uganda, where the president initiated legislation that holds producers of GMO products liable for consequences that may arise in the immediate or long term.

It was also pointed out that the Zambian government rejected grains from the US despite food shortages experienced in 2002 and made it through the crisis without succumbing to pressures. Again, it was noted that some scientists reject the idea of liability and redress on the premise that such legislation may stifle science.



LIVING A LIFE OF DIALOGUE WITH NATURE

The major sources of the conflict in the world today are traceable to our exploitative relationship with Nature. The predatory and destructive activities of humans (including the mindless extraction of resources) have continued unchecked because we have lost the capacity to actually talk with Nature and hear Nature. Bearing this in mind, we asked the question—is it possible to have a dialogue with Nature or have we lost it completely?

This was accompanied by other questions like What are some of the ways humans have exploited/are exploiting Nature? In what ways does Nature fight back? How do we reconnect? What does living a life of Dialogue imply? What can we define as a good life in terms of our relationship to Nature? What forms of energy and production will ensure we do not misuse or exploit Nature's resources?

These queries were put forward and

responded to during the 3rd series of Health of Mother Earth Foundation's (HOMEF's) 'Conversations' held on 28 September 2020. The Conversations series was tagged 'Living a Life of Dialogue with Nature'. It was co-hosted by Gloria Ekpo (Facilitator at the Agriculture and Food Policy Commission of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG)) and G. G. Darah (a professor of oral literature and folklore at Delta State University).

Kicking off responses to the queries, Prof. Darah stated that “sometimes instead of engaging in a dialogue of mutual benefit, we engage in warfare with Nature; we abuse, alienate, hate, exploit, oppress and try to dominate Nature. These behaviours disconnect humans from Nature.” Nevertheless, Darah intimated that environmental and cultural factors determine how people understand, appreciate

, relate to and befriend Nature. For example, some see Nature as a central bank of resources which we must plunder to make wealth. This was buttressed with reference to industrialized countries that tend to be more ruthless in their destruction of Nature due to the focus on acquisition, accumulation and increase of material comfort. Such industrialized countries contrast with societies that relate with Nature in a respectful way. These societies see Nature as a companion, thereby advancing the understanding of humans as part of Nature, not separate from it.

According to the Professor, it is based on this understanding that humans in pre-capitalist societies established principles which manifested sometimes in festivals, prayers and the imposition of sanctions. Examples of these sanctions are those which prevented people from entering a particular forest or harvesting particular plants for a specified period. Such sanctions are seen as a reflection of the respect that human beings extended to Nature. The distinction between capitalist/profit-driven societies on the one hand and those who are more in tune with Nature on the other hand is necessary for us to locate the point where we missed it.

In continuation of the conversation, Gloria Ekpo stated that “we have a stake in whatever happens in the planet because we only have one of it. And knowing this will help us in building a system that is truly resilient.” For this reason, there is a need for us to go back to what we used to know—that is, our indigenous knowledge—to see how we can tweak our interaction with Nature to put an end to the ongoing war with Nature. She emphasized that we are part of Nature not apart from it, and we need this understanding to make peace with Nature.

Attending to the question of how humans can reconnect with Nature, Gloria Ekpo commented that the foremost thing that needs to be done is: a re-orientation - an understanding and going back to our value system. This entails the understanding of the value of our natural resources - that the resources are God's gifts to us. Further on reconnecting with Nature, Professor Darah stressed the need to redesign our educational curriculum to include programmes and courses/subjects that encourage the understanding that humans are part of Nature and must relate to it in a manner that is self-

replenishing. Bringing the conversation home to Nigeria's Niger Delta, Nnimmo Bassey, HOMEf's Director, commented on the challenged state of Nature in the region which is listed among the top 10 most polluted places on earth. This led to the question - What do you think Nature is telling our oil companies, our government and the people?

“Although Nature is patient, it ought to have pronounced a death sentence on all the governments and companies that have rampaged the Niger Delta for the past 60 years.” Professor Darah responded.

Going further, there were flashbacks to the fire disaster of October 17, 1998, popularly called Jesse Fire which resulted from a pipeline explosion; and to other conflicts in communities like Umuechem and Odi as well as in Ogoni where, according to United Nations, the purification of just the water in their wells will take up to 36 years. The conversation considered what forms of energy and production would ensure we do not misuse or exploit Nature's resources. The answer to this was clearly renewable energy. We must quickly invest in and transition to renewable sources of energy in ways that are socially inclusive and sustainable.

Other recommendations on the way forward in living a life of dialogue with Nature includes embracing and investing in agricultural systems such as agroecology which replenish ecosystems and support natural cycles instead of the destructive practices of the industrial system of agriculture. Also, it was stressed that we must desist from overconsumption and waste. We must live and act in sustainable ways; in ways that are in line with the limit of the ecosystem. Doing this would ensure a good life for all. A good life/wellbeing, as stated by Professor Darah, is not just about a full stomach but the state of physical, emotional, ethical and spiritual wellness. Wellness is linked to the principle of coexistence.

The event had participants on both Zoom and Facebook. HOMEf plans to have more conversations on Living a Life of Dialogue with Nature so as to promote understanding of the importance of the subject while harnessing different perspectives from various eminent resource persons.

POSITIVE GREEN CRIMINOLOGY:

Become Ecologically Awake System Changers

By Femke Wijdekop



unsplash.com/Stefano Pollio

Introduction

It is heartening and inspiring to see the legal innovations that lawyers have come up with in response to biodiversity and climate crises. Particularly of interest is their use of the legal notion of 'duty of care'. Lawyers use this notion to force governments into climate action such as in the Dutch Urgenda climate-case. The notion is also used to advocate the criminalization of massive environmental destruction, for example, Stop Ecocide movement or to establish a governing body to safeguard the rights of future generations such as the Future Generations Commissioner

for Wales. In my opinion, these developments indicate a movement away from the 'right to exploit and pollute' natural resources towards a 'duty of care' for the environment.

A legal duty of care to avoid causing harm to others through climate change or environmental destruction is externally imposed by the justice system.

In our recent publication in the Conscious Lawyer, criminologist Anneke van Hoek and myself explore whether environmentally caring behaviour can also be stimulated in ways that speak to our intrinsic motivation.

In the words of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon that convened in October 2019, caring for our common home requires deep ecological conversion.

Positive Green Criminology

Anneke and I used the new framework of Positive Green Criminology to explore this question. Positive Green Criminology is concerned with intrinsically motivated care for nature. It is a term that Anneke and I coined for criminological research into the prevention and remediation of environmental harm, and is related to the fields of positive psychology and positive criminology. Positive psychology studies how people can flourish and live their best lives. Positive Criminology was coined by the Dutch criminologist Marc Schuilenburg. It researches how we can create safety by strengthening positive feelings such as connection and security, care and belonging.

Positive Green Criminology is informed by insights from ecopsychology, restorative justice, research into eudemonic values, affective commoning and stimulating care through storytelling. I will now shortly describe each of these elements.

1. **Ecopsychology:** This term was coined in 1992 by Theodore Roszak in his book *The Voice of the Earth*. It studies the relationship between human beings and the natural world through ecological and psychological principles. It seeks to develop and understand ways of expanding the emotional connection between individuals and the natural world, thereby assisting individuals with developing sustainable lifestyles and remedying alienation from nature.

A central premise of ecopsychology is that human beings have an innate instinct to care about and connect emotionally with nature.

Evidence suggests that many environmentally damaging behaviours are addictive at some level, and more effectively addressed through positive emotional fulfilment rather than by

inflicting shame. Ecopsychology has developed various methods of positive motivation for adopting sustainable practices in its applied practice called Ecotherapy. These methods include psychotherapy, forest bathing, garden therapy, wilderness therapy, green mindfulness and involvement in outdoor conservation activities. Such interventions from ecotherapy can assist in developing an intrinsic attitude of care towards the environment.

2. **Restorative justice:** Restorative justice is a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offence voluntarily come together to collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future. Restorative justice emphasizes the healing of damaged relationships, searches for the roots of harmful behaviour. Its community- and forward-looking orientation makes it well-positioned to address environmental harms. In countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Brazil, restorative justice has been successfully applied to environmental offences. Some beneficial outcomes of these cases include apologies, restoration of environmental harm and prevention of future harm through environmental training and education of the offender; environmental audits of the activities of the offending company; compensatory restoration of environments elsewhere and community service work. In New Zealand and Canada, trees and rivers have been recognised as victims of environmental crime in their own right and have been represented by indigenous organisations in the restorative process. In Brazil, Dominic Barter's work with restorative circles in the aftermath of the Rio Doce ecocide has contributed to the awakening that the river Doce is an entity with its own rights which needs to be restored to health.

3. The confrontation with human and represented non-human victims during a conference can educate the offenders about the harmful environmental effects of their behaviour and ideally contribute to his ecological awakening. Engaging in environmental restoration work following a conference can also foster a sense of belonging and connectedness to the natural world in the offender, according to insights from ecopsychology.
4. Researchers of the EU-funded BIOMOT project recognised the importance of eudemonic values (expressing the meaningful life) as a motivating force for nature conservation. The researchers interviewed 105 committed actors for nature and found out that the key concept for understanding their committed action for nature is meaningfulness. People act for nature because nature is meaningful to them, connected to a life that makes sense and a difference in the world. All the committed actors in the study had intense encounters with nature in childhood. Such experiences during childhood seem to be essential for the development of a relationship with nature, and for inspiring action for nature later in life.
A way to connect to nature encounters in childhood is by writing down your green life story. Guided by questions, you return to early childhood experiences of connection and interaction with the Earth, but you also look at patterns of alienation that caused ecological woundedness and possible 'unfinished Earth business'. One of the recommendations of the BIOMOT researchers to policymakers is to ensure in educational curricula and town planning that children have access to nature. And would it not be interesting to ask people to write their green life story as part of an ecotherapeutic intervention or as part of ecoliteracy coaching?
4. Associate Professor and Geographer Neera Singh (University of Toronto) in her research found that through community-based conservation, villagers in Odisha, India, developed "affective ties with the growing plants, trees, birds and animals," and in so doing, "forests are transformed from nature out there and become a part of the self that is nurtured through care." She calls this 'affective commoning': people who are engaged in the conservation of their natural environment, through the act of taking care of their environment, become "environmental subjects" who apply their subjective human talents, imagination and commitments and become stewards of elements of nature (rather than owners or users). For clarity, commoning is the practice of collaborating and sharing (outside of the State and market) to meet everyday needs and achieve the well-being of individuals, communities and lived-in environments. I can send links to her research and to David Bollier's work on the commons to those who want to read more. If you are interested, drop me a line using my email at the end of this piece.
5. Finally, a study from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that sharing personal anecdotes about how the climate crisis is changing our lives for the worse can invite people, including conservatives, to care for nature. In two experiments, people listened to a short radio clip from 2015 about Richard Mode, a 66-year-old North Carolinian who enjoys hunting and fishing. In heartfelt tones, Mode describes how he has seen the climate changing first-hand as ducks migrate later in the year and trout disappear from their old territories. After listening to the segment, the study participants — who identified as conservatives or moderates — reported greater concern about climate change and greater acceptance that climate change is happening and caused by humans. This study suggests that storytelling, rather than relying heavily on facts and evidence, can motivate people to care for the environment.

These five elements give clues about how we can stimulate intrinsically motivated care for nature. Through childhood nature-experiences, touching encounters in restorative justice settings, empathic listening to moving narratives, writing our own green life stories, affective commoning and ecotherapy interventions, we can nurture and enable feelings of belonging and connection to the natural world, potentially giving us positive emotional fulfilment and a sense of meaningfulness. As Earthlings, we are wired for connection with each other and with the Earth, so when we re-connect (overcome our alienation) to the Earth community, it feels emotionally fulfilling and profoundly meaningful.

Quantum Social Change

But how does such embodied care for nature on the level of the individual relate to the system change we so much need? Professor Karen O'Brien's (Oslo University – Dept. of Human Geography & Sociology) theory of Quantum Social Change comes to mind.

According to O'Brien, history tells us that progressive social changes, such as the abolition of slavery, equal rights for women and marriage equality, have been the result of small groups of individuals who see their world in new ways and act from deeper and more inclusive values. These groups, with an expanded sense of social consciousness, ascribed rights to previously excluded groups and worked for social and political change. Could this apply as well to groups with an expanded sense of ecological consciousness who ascribe rights to nature? O'Brien's theory of Quantum Social Change explains why their agency could generate such transformative change and, more importantly, how we might access this same quality of agency in response to the climate and biodiversity crises.

According to O'Brien, Quantum social change means being self-aware and self-reflective about the beliefs we hold about the future. When we ground our speech and actions in universal values (such as Polly Higgins' credo 'first do no harm'), we generate quantum fractals that replicate these values across all levels and scales. When we connect to others from a place of interconnectedness (also known as 'interbeing'), we transcend separation and are able to access our collective intelligence; our

actions will be impactful beyond linear logic and help materialise new realities that reflect a culture of interbeing; and the potential for an equitable and thriving world exists in every moment, and we can realize this potential by consciously choosing to "be" the new paradigm. The more often people embody the fractal of interbeing, the sooner we will notice a transformative change in society.

This raises the question: When we connect to the Earth from an experience of interbeing, are we able to access the intelligence of the Earth herself? Polly Higgins and Cormac Cullinan the author of Wild Law told me that they experienced this and that their innovative ideas on ecocide law and rights of nature came to them after spending time in nature.

There are also lots of stories about meaningful 'coincidence' or synchronicity. A bigger intelligence – the Earth herself - seems to be at play and bring ecological change-makers together at the right time and place in order to help generate system (and quantum!) change.

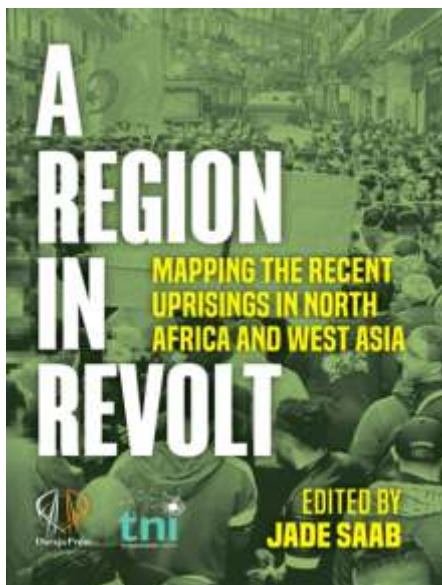
Conclusion

Being ecologically 'awake' – aware of our interconnectedness with the natural world of which we are an inseparable part – means to be aware of our interbeing with the natural world. O'Brien's research seems promising! It indicates that ecologically awake people have powerful agency when they put their knowledge, expertise and heart-wisdom in the service of system change. So how then could we, as ecologically sensitive citizens, be a part of the much-needed system change towards a flourishing, ecologically 'literate' civilization within planetary boundaries? What would assist us in harnessing this kind of agency with the potency to move mountains?

Readers, I'd love to hear your thoughts!

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Books You should Read



A Region in Revolt

Edited by Jade Saab

A wave of mass protest movements has spread across North Africa and West Asia, including Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Iran. The mass protests have so much in common, from opposing authoritarian regimes and worsening economic situations to demanding radical changes in social relations. Despite their similarities, each protest movement operates under different conditions that cannot be ignored. This book elaborates on these similarities and differences to paint a clearer picture of these movements and draw out lessons to inform future struggles.

The book comes at a time when Nigeria had just experienced #EndSARS protest staged by its youth population in different parts of the country. This protest is not recorded in this book, but from the book, lessons can be garnered for more successful future movements.

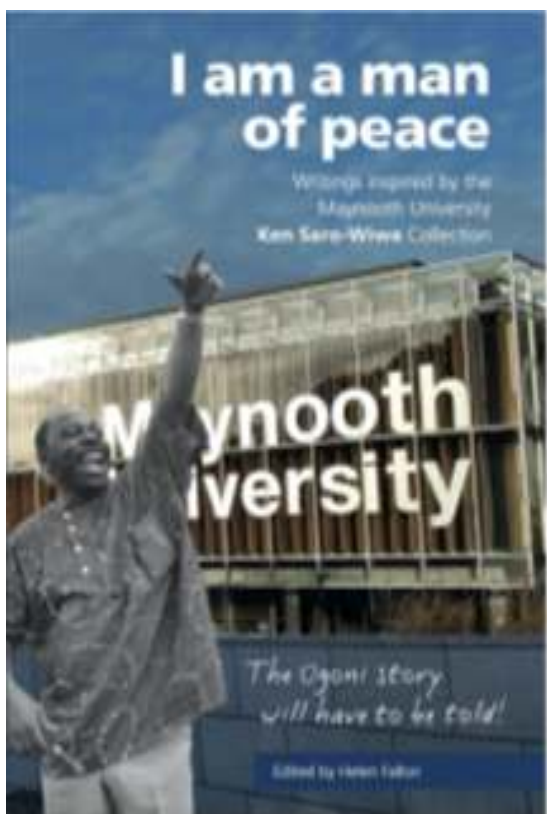
Visit Daraja Press' website at <https://darajapress.com/> to purchase this book at a discounted price (20% off) or to download on a Pay What You Can (PWYC) basis.



Dare to be Great

Polly Higgins

This book is unlike any other. It does not tell you what you must do, it does not set out a guide for the 10 definitive steps to becoming great by next Thursday. Dare To Be Great is both a playful, inspirational conversation and a heartfelt, lived call, daring each one of us and our society as a whole to become truly great. Celebrated Earth lawyer Polly Higgins was a luminary in the environmental justice movement as she worked to Stop Ecocide across the globe. She was a beacon of how to live the brave, bold lives that, at our best, we imagine for ourselves. This book shares insights from the author's own remarkable journey, inspiring us to recognise and step into a greatness within – that is not about grandiosity but something far more exciting: aligning with our unique purpose in service of a better world.



I am a Man of Peace

Writings Inspired by the Maynooth University

Ken Saro-Wiwa Collection is a compilation of essays and poems published by Daraja Press in November 2020 to mark the 25th anniversary of the execution of Nigerian activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight colleagues (the Ogoni 9). The publication contains 21 essays and 42 poems all inspired by the ideals and activism of Ken Saro-Wiwa. It echoes present-day agitations and the need to liberate minds towards fulfilling the dreams for which nations and communities were built. The publication highlights the shift towards peaceful protests as a means to a more sustainable end. It is a justification that one's dreams for the greater good can still be attained without bloodshed. The chapter contributors come from different spheres and age groups all united by the spirit of activism. The publication is not focused only on the home country of Ken Saro-Wiwa as it presents evidence of a new generation of Irish and new Irish citizens engaging with complex issues through poetry. Insights from this book will help communities across the world's regions to begin to understand more about each other, thus building a shared discourse which is essential for trust, community and hope.



UPCOMING EVENTS

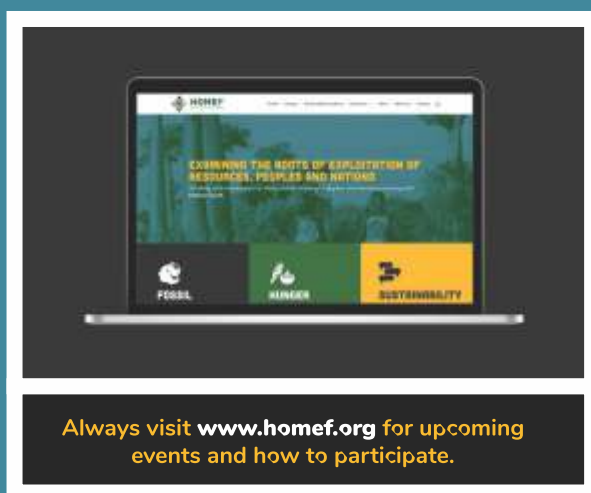
-Market Shelf Survey on GMOs

-Coastal Environment Monitoring, Reporting and Advocacy Training in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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ROUNDTABLE WITH STAKEHOLDERS ON BIOSAFETY

Biosafety entails protecting the ecosystem and human health from harmful incidents. This is achievable through dependable Biosafety laws and regulations.

Where Biosafety regulations are strong, Biodiversity is sure and food systems are secured. To intensify efforts at promoting Biosafety in Nigeria, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) organised a roundtable with lawyers and stakeholders in Abuja, Nigeria, on 24 November 2020. The major issues raised during the presentations and panel discussions included Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), Emerging Technologies such as Gene Drives and Synthetic Biology, Agroecology and Biosafety Act/Regulations in Nigeria.

In the welcoming words of Nnimmo Bassey, Director of HOMEF, he reminded stakeholders in the roundtable that the “business of genetic engineering is simply business.” This is why “GMO promoters target staple crops or varieties with wide industrial usage,” he explained. The aim of industrial agriculturists who promote GMOs is to maximize profit while taking control of markets and food systems. Food becomes a commodity and is patented instead of being part and parcel of a people's culture.

Jackie Ikeotuonye, Director of Bio-integrity and Natural Food Awareness Initiative, stressed that “there is a lot of difference between GM crops and natural seeds and food. So, the Principle of Substantial Equivalence that GMO proponents claim exists between GMOs and natural seeds is baseless.” Corroborating Jackie's point, Nnimmo informed the Roundtable that “GMOs cannot even exist side by side natural crops as they (GMOs) have dominant traits that they can easily pass across to the natural plants.”

Tatfeng Mirabeau, Professor of Medical Microbiology and Immunology at Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, Nigeria, explained that “with GMOs, the natural process of modification is disrupted and this has implications for our environment, food systems, health and economy.”

Ifeanyi Casmir, a Medical and Molecular Microbiologist affirmed that GMOs have been linked to serious health issues, soil degradation, bio- and nutritional diversity loss, impoverishment of smallholder farmers and general economic loss. He intimated that a lot of experimentation with GM seeds is taking place in Kaduna State, Zaria especially. Jackie also stated that in Akwa Ibom and Kwara States, GM Cassava has been distributed for some time now. GM rice is also currently in Kano State.

These technologically produced varieties are promoted for two main reasons. According to Bassey, the first is to create crops (e.g. HT soybeans, corn, cotton, canola and sugarbeets) that tolerate herbicides/weed killers which are produced by same companies that make the GMOs. Second is to manufacture crops that kill target pests (e.g. Bt Cotton, Maize and Cowpea). These crops produce their own insecticide, thus can be called pesticides and are unsafe. Nnimmo also explained that GMO 2.0, the next generation Genetic Engineering also known as Synthetic Biology or 'extinction technology' is being used in different sectors - agriculture, military, health and conservation. He stated that due to the use of GMO 2.0, communities that depend on the natural process of extracting fragrances from crops like vanilla are sidelined, thereby making them to lose their sources of livelihood to big technology-dependent industrial agriculturists.

Joyce Ebebeinwe, HOMEf's Programmes Manager, during her presentation, stated that rather than a GMO-driven food system Agroecology which is the pillar of food sovereignty should be promoted. Agroecology encourages diversification of farming systems, the use of local and improved crop varieties and livestock, minimal use of chemicals, mixed cropping, crop rotation, biological pest control, and other practices that increase productivity, climate resilience, biosafety and biodiversity.

The challenges of Nigeria's Biosafety was made clear during the presentation of Ifeanyi Nwankwere, a lawyer and human rights advocate who is currently handling (with a team of experts) the court case against the

approval for introduction of GM cotton and maize into Nigeria. These challenges are found in certain clauses in Nigeria's Biosafety Act. The Act is meant to implement provisions of international treaties like the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity on matters relating to GMOs. These treaties uphold the Precautionary Principle, which states that where there are threats of serious damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation. Thus, cost-effective measures such as halting the promotion of GMOs should not be solely dependent on scientific proof. Nigerian courts are yet to take the Precautionary Principle seriously.

Another issue is that domestication of the provisions of the treaties by the Biosafety Act is done by reference. Meanwhile, Section 12 of the 1999 constitution states that "No treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly." This raised the question: Is domestication by reference constitutional? The Act also gives room for regulatory capture which occurs when a special interest is prioritized over public interest leading to a net loss for society. Government agencies suffering regulatory capture are called captured agencies. This raised the question: By supporting the introduction of GMOs, is the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) a captured agency?

“ Rather than a GMO-driven food system Agroecology which is the pillar of food sovereignty should be promoted”.



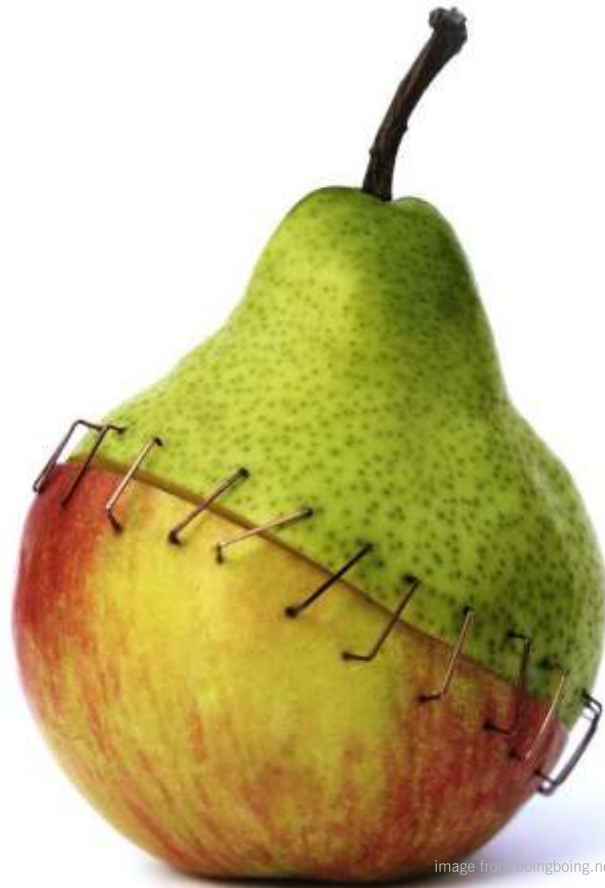
The Act promotes bribery indirectly as it allows NBMA to receive gifts. Another deficiency is that the Act institutes a fault-based type of liability and redress in which a petitioner must prove that a defendant's conduct was either negligent or intentional. This is against the principle of Strict liability which is more consistent with the principle of precautionary measure as it allows the imposition of liability on a party without a finding of fault (such as negligence). Another challenge noted by Nnimmo is the fact that no institution in Nigeria researching into the effects of GMOs has sustained the research for up to 90 days. Such short-span research cannot reveal any real impacts.

To ensure and promote Biosafety in Nigeria, panellists insisted that so long as Nigeria does not have the capacity for the conception and production of GMOs, we must stay away from it. One of the stakeholders at the

Roundtable stated strongly that a moratorium needs to be put on the speed at which government is embracing and pushing GMOs. To do this, there is a need to expand and strengthen networking with lawyers, the media, experts, farmers and other stakeholders who can speak confidently on/against GMOs.

Tatfeng warned that whatever science/technology makes possible, we must consider it on the bases of Fairness, Equity and Justice. We must ask the question: Is the invention appropriate to the masses in different quarters? Chima Williams, a Lawyer and Acting Director of Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), encouraged stakeholders to question issues of Fairness, Equity and Justice in GMO conception, development and distribution processes. The question that should be asked is: What fundamental rights are violated if the process is not equitable?

Lawyers at the roundtable agreed that threats posed by GMOs should be continuously challenged through litigations, with concerned experts on Biosafety and lawyers working side by side. They advised that arguments based on Due Process should be deemphasized in lawsuits against the acceptance of GMOs in Nigeria while infringements of fundamental human rights should be emphasized. For example, smallholder farmers suffer economic losses and their health is also affected. Many GM food products are not labelled for consumers to make a choice to or not buy them. There is therefore a need to push for the amendment of the Biosafety Act to close loopholes, and Biosafety regulation in Nigeria must be multi-sectoral. While this push is going on, more legal and scientific research should be embarked on to expatiate the principle of precautionary measure and its application in the use and deployment of GMOs.



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