AFRICA CAN FEED NOURISH HERSELF

COASTAL COMMUNITIES' CLIMATE CHALLENGES

SEEKING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN INDIA
ADVISORY BOARD

The Advisory Board is composed of women and men who have distinguished themselves in the struggle for environmental justice and the rights of Mother Earth

Chris Allan (USA) – Environmental health campaigner and philanthropy activist
Akinbode Oluwafemi (Nigeria) – Environmental justice campaigner
Siziwe Khanyile (South Africa) – Environmental justice campaigner
George B.K. Awudi (Ghana) – Climate justice campaigner
Evelyn Bassey (Nigeria) – Environmental justice campaigner
Esperanza Martinez (Ecuador) – Environmental justice/Political ecologist
Nnimmo Bassey (Nigeria) – Environmental justice advocate
Pablo Solon (Bolivia) – Climate justice campaigner, diplomat and movement builder
Liz Hosken (UK) – Mother Earth rights advocate
Lim Li Ching (Malaysia) – Agro-ecologist and rights advocate
Mariann Bassey Orovwuje (Nigeria) – Food sovereignty campaigner
Kwami Kpondzo (Togo) – Environmental justice campaigner
Articles & Reports

04 Home Run

05 Coastal Communities’ Climate Challenges

08 The Environmental Peacebuilding Role of Literature

12 Seeking Environmental Justice in India

17 Books You Should Read

18 Let Me Help You

20 Destructive Coal Mining in Benue State, Nigeria.

22 Hope for Mother Earth

Articles & Reports

23 Fiddling in Nairobi While Africa Goes Hungry

27 Comparing a Decade-long Debate over the Safety of GMOs with anti-COVID-19 Vaccination: A Cynical and Callous Manipulation Attempt

29 SoE: Shifting the Power Lines

32 Nigerian Civil Society Position on the Petroleum Industry Bill

37 A Chat with Medical Practitioners on GMOs and Biosafety in Nigeria

41 Politics of Turbulent Waters

45 Upcoming Activities

46 Africa Can Feed Nourish Herself

50 SoE: Politics of the Sea

54 Feedback from SOE
Welcome to another information-packed edition of eco-Instigator. Critically relevant events have been unfolding in rapid succession. Just as wild fires and unusual storms and floods were ravaging the world, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its sixth review, by which it unequivocally affirmed that climate change is the result of human activities.

While the world strives to digest the import of the damning climate change report, Nigeria got a brand new Petroleum Industry Act that took over a decade to enact. We see the law as a gift to the polluting oil and gas companies. Related to that is the gale of divestment plans by international oil companies operating in Nigeria's Niger Delta area. No, they aren't leaving Nigeria, neither are they divesting for the dirty energy sector. The oil majors are attempting to sell their “assets” to Nigerian companies and swim into deeper offshore waters, hoping to shirk responsibility for their dastardly ecological misbehaviours in the poor communities onshore. We insist that they must clean up their mess, restore our ecosystems and compensate impacted persons before slithering into the deep.

Another momentous event is the acceptance of culpability by Shell for an oil spill that occurred in 1970, known as the Ejama Ebubu case, which the oil mogul fought against in court for 30 years! This case should help stop the oil companies' refrain from always claiming that virtually every oil spill is caused by third-party interferences. This case has helped burst a big fat lie.

In this publication, we bring you interesting articles and reports from around the world that will spur you to take deliberate actions to protect Mother Earth. We also serve you with evidence-based information on the contentions and gaps in the Petroleum Industry Act just signed into law by the president of Nigeria, as well as the Nigerian civil society’s position on the law in terms of its wider implications.

As ever, we bring you poems that thematise Mother Earth and the environment, as well as suggested books addressing topical issues, which we think you should read. We hope to challenge you to question the current economic and development models and instigate you into acting to save the planet and our collective existence.

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

Until Victory!

Nnimmo Bassey
It should be noted that within regions, as among nations, climate impacts are unevenly distributed due to differential exposure to certain physical and socio-economic factors. Other factors that affect the distribution of impacts include community structure and organisation, risk perceptions, economic systems, and available resources.

Climate change and variability in Nigeria are starkly illustrated in the northern region by desertification and in the south by coastal erosion. These phenomena in the north and in the south often receive a great deal of attention, implying that the extent of climate impacts in the region(s) between the north and south is often under-reported. These emblematic phenomena do not; however, tell the full story of the impacts of environmental changes in the affected communities in Nigeria's northern region and in the coastal communities. Nigeria's 850 kilometres coastlines are notably challenged by the activities of the oil industry in the Niger Delta and the mammoth refinery.
being constructed in Lagos. Deforestation is another key factor as the shoreline protection provided by mangrove forests is rapidly being depleted. Canalisation and sand filling for infrastructural and urban development are other major factors.

The attention paid to coastal communities also varies depending on whether such areas are urban or rural. The flooding and projected impacts of the refinery on Lagos, a mega city, have attracted global attention, while smaller towns such as Ibeno and communities such as Uta Ewua, Ibaka or Ago Iwoye hardly get a mention, even though they all suffer similar—if not worse—environmental degradation.

Coastline communities depend on aquatic ecosystem resources to secure their livelihoods and maintain their cultures. A distortion of this environment brings about both subtle and direct impacts on the social, cultural and economic lives of the people. Canalisation, for instance, and sea-level rise, bring in salt water from the sea, thus contaminating freshwater sources. This brings about the stressful contradiction of living on water and yet having none to drink. Besides the pressure on potable water, the intrusion of salt water also alters the diversity of aquatic and terrestrial species in the territories.

The threat of sea-level rise to the Niger Delta is compounded by the fact that the region is naturally subsiding. This means that the net sea-level rise here is higher than in other parts of Nigeria’s coastline owing to a unique combination of factors.

We often hear some ecosystems being described as fragile. That fragility is not attributed to such areas because of an inherent weakness in the ecosystem but due to the harm visited on them by corporations and individuals. Perhaps we should speak of sensitive ecosystems rather than fragile ones. In this sense, sensitivity places a duty of care and respect on humans and institutions led by them.

That hydrocarbon pollution on the coastal communities of the Niger Delta is not restricted to communities that host oil company facilities is a well-known fact. When an oil spill occurs at an offshore rig or at a Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel, the extent of the spread of the pollution cannot be predicted and can only be determined after the act?

Mobil offshore oil spill in 2012, which occurred off the Ibeno coastline, spread as far as 32 kilometres from its source, devastating fisheries in the area. Multiple oil spills in the same area in 2012 and 2013 led to the coating of the entire Akwa Ibom State coastline with crude sludge.

“**The threat of sea-level rise to the Niger Delta is compounded by the fact that the region is naturally subsiding. This means that the net sea-level rise here is higher than in other parts of Nigeria's coastline owing to a unique combination of factors**”

Other incidents include the rupturing at the Forcados terminal of Shell Nigeria Production and Exploration Company (simply known as Shell) in 1979, where 570,000 barrels were emptied into the estuary and adjoining creeks. Similarly, Chevron (then Texaco) had a major spill in 1980 at Funiwa, where 400,000 barrels of crude oil were emptied into coastal waters, destroying 340 hectares of mangrove forests. Mobil also had 40,000 barrels of oil spilling in January 1998 at their Idoho offshore platform, which affected at least 22 coastal communities.

One major offshore oil spill recorded in Nigeria is the Bonga oil spill of 11 December 2011 at Shell's Oil Mining Lease 118, located 120 kilometres offshore. The oil company reported that 40,000 barrels were spilt, but the significance of this spill goes beyond the volume of oil spilt. It is significant because Shell claimed that it pumped the 40,000 barrels into the Atlantic Ocean in error, thinking they were pumping the oil into a tanker, MV Northia.
An investigation of the incident found that the pumping of the crude oil into the ocean was because of an equipment failure at the FPSO. The oil spill spread over a large extent of the coastline. It was reported to have impacted 168,000 persons in 350 communities in Delta and Bayelsa States alone.

Following the Bonga oil spill, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) slammed a fine of $1.8 billion on Shell “as compensation for the damages done to natural resources and consequential loss of income by the affected shoreline communities.” NOSDRA also fined Shell another $1.8 billion as punitive damages. Shell refused to pay the fine and instead brought a case in 2016 to a Nigerian federal court challenging NOSDRA's power to impose any fine on it.

Two years down the road, the court dismissed the suit filed by Shell and found that NOSDRA was right to impose a fine of $3.6 billion on the offending oil company. To date, that fine is yet to be paid by the oil major. While Shell and NOSDRA engage in their tug of war, the communities are left high and dry, suffering the impacts of the oil spill and getting a signal that succour may not come after future incidences. The Artisanal Fishermen Association of Nigeria (ARFAN) continues to urge Shell to pay the fine imposed on it by the Nigerian government.

Of the 7 million artisanal fishers in Nigeria, 80% are found in the Niger Delta. These fishers produce about 9 million tonnes of fish locally, meeting only a fraction of the fish needs of Nigeria. Interestingly, some of the offshore oil fields are named after animal and fish species, probably to preserve the memory of species destroyed by oil company activities for posterity.

An oil field is named after bonga fish, and another is named ebok or monkey. A lot of monkey business obviously goes on at those locations.

With the recalcitrant attitude of the polluting oil companies operating in Nigeria, coastal communities cannot depend on them in the struggle to maintain their aquatic ecosystems and defend their livelihoods. While communities are forced to live with these companies in their territories and off their coasts, they must take steps to protect their environment, livelihoods, cultures, and overall dignity. Some of the necessary steps include a mapping of their ecological resources and preparing a matrix of what they had before and what have been lost due to multiple factors. Communities must equip themselves with knowledge on how to monitor their ecosystems as well as how to organise and advocate for the changes they wish to see.

Groups such as Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), the FishNet Alliance and others work to learn from the existential struggles of vulnerable coastal communities and to support efforts to expose ecocide and end destructive extraction, overfishing and other harmful activities. We recognise that healthy aquatic ecosystems ensure the security of communities when their knowledge and conservation norms are respected. Community wisdom provides essential platforms for protecting shorelines from the ravages of raging waves, protect aquatic species and promote the wellbeing of the people. Efforts of communities to hold individuals and corporations who wilfully inflict harm on their ecosystems to account must be adequately supported.
THE ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING ROLE OF LITERATURE

By Fidelis Allen
I reflect broadly on the actual and potential environmental peacebuilding role of literature in Nigeria. This includes how literary works can help or are helping to shape efforts at finding solutions to environmental problems at the local, national and global fronts.

I also reflect generally on the extent to which literature has captured the existential conflict between humans and nature. I argue that this role (of literature) has to be situated in the context of the growing conflict, which has its root in civilisation's anthropocentric view of the environment, of which the oil industry, and the political, economic and community leaders in the case of Nigeria have remained largely implicated. Lessons have to be learned from the life and environmental writings of Ken Saro Wiwa, for example, by giving more attention to the subject in the interest of the environment.

The subject of 'Environmental Peacebuilding Role of Literature' is significant in many ways. First, I believe it is part of the growing discourses on the African continent where a literary response to local and global environmental issues, no matter how slow, is assuming new meaning. It is also an acknowledgement of the intellectual and social debt that writers owe society when it comes to environmental awareness and reducing the risk of environmental triggers of conflicts.

The environmental peacebuilding role of writers may then relate to whether literature is contributing to the analysis and solutions to the conflict between nature and humans. Literature is used here sketchily to mean the totality of environmental writings without discounting the nuanced reference to art, fiction, non-fiction, drama, and oral elements in the meaning of the concept. The environment, on the other hand, refers to the entirety of conditions surrounding human and non-human life.

The discursive category of environmental writing makes no real sense if it is not intended to change the way humanity—individuals, organisations, and governments—relates to nature. It is a category that yields to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary practice. It is high time we realized this reality in dealing with humanity's many ecological woes at all levels of society.

Environmental Peacebuilding

The historical injustice that groups like those in the Niger Delta have been fighting for decades is related to the environment. I use the environment broadly here and exhaustively to include issues emanating from it, for example, the struggle for the control of resources such as oil and gas, land, forest, rivers, creeks, and so on. It also includes issues such as control of decisions about who benefits from these resources.

Response to environmental conflict or resource wars from the perspective of peacebuilding by the literary world means that writers can use peace studies and peace activism to seek justice for those reeling from environmental grievances. This, in turn, reinforces the notion of multidisciplinarities and interdisciplinarities of peace studies.

Environmental conflicts in Nigeria assume various shapes, including the violent wars waged by militants against oil companies and government security agencies in the 1990s, the current herdsmen and farmers clashes, banditry, and terrorist attacks. Climate change, as seen in the increasing loss of pastoral fields in the north of the country, makes the recruitment of terrorists easy.

The growing incidence of erosion and the threat of it in many communities in the southeast fuel grievances among locals, especially in the absence of government intervention. There are various actors involved in environmental conflicts — community versus business, community versus government security agencies, community versus community, and humans versus natural resources. The existential environmental conditions point specifically to a human-nature conflictive kind of relationship.
What role for literature?

This is like asking those in the field of literature what they can do to make the discipline transformational. The idea is that no field of study can be seen to be useful to humanity if it neglects its problem-solving role.

I searched rigorously for book listings of the global environmental literature on online databases. The result was an amazing number of works at the intersection of literature and environmental issues, distributed across specific areas such as fossil fuels, food security, preservation of landscape, air quality, war and environment, nuclear weapons, green economy, politics and extractives, livelihoods, and so on.

The Nigerian case, compiled by William Slaymaker, as of 2009, includes Wole Soyinka's Collected Plays (1973-74) and Niyi Osundare's Eye of the Earth (1986). Others are Ken Saro Wiwa's A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary (1995), Tess Onwueme's What Mama Said (2003), and Tanure Ojaide's The Activist (2006) (Slovic, 2009). A lot more have been published since these works, along with the emergence of ecocriticism as a specific literary response to trends in interdisciplinary studies on the environment (Tapio & Willamo, 2008).

The environmental literature in Nigeria has two discernible features, namely, a tacit acknowledgement of the link between the environment and other aspects of life, including economy, politics, education, and livelihoods, and the potential voice it provides for those affected by environmental problems in communities.

The role of literature, however, appears to have significantly faded since the passing of Ken Saro Wiwa, who exemplifies what environmental conflict waged with literature and activism can do to and for a people. Courage, however, is needed, now and in the future role of writers in environmental peacebuilding.

On a broader scale, African literary scholarship on environment or ecocriticism has been anthropocentric. It has focused on the impact of environmental problems on humans while sidelines non-human life. The point is that scholarship on the environment that focuses only on humans works in opposite directions. It interprets human-nature relations mainly in terms of what humans can gain and not what the non-human element should also gain as a matter of rights.

The late arrival of environmental literature on the African continent is due partly to the fact that African literature, like other knowledge systems in Africa, has been influenced by imperial knowledge systems and tools. Claude Ake was clear on this in his work titled “Social Science as Imperialism.” Nigerian writers, therefore, must adopt a decolonial approach to their work.

The post-independence era is not yet free from coloniality at all levels of life, including in knowledge systems and tools used for the production of knowledge. Ideologically, knowledge systems were structured to look less into environmental issues.

“The idea is that no field of study can be seen to be useful to humanity if it neglects its problem-solving role”.

10 / ECO ~ INSTIGATOR #33
The preoccupation with the pain of colonialism and decolonisation by African literature in the immediate postcolonial state gave only a little space for environmental problems. Generally, Nigerian literature was mainly devoid of significant environmentalism until oil and gas became key national and international commodities of interest.

The reasons for the late arrival of environmental literature in Nigeria are not far from the fact that early green movement activities were seen as part of a capitalist order that could not possibly justify substantial opposition to a colonial state, which itself was a product of the global imperial order.

The dynamic nature of environmental conflict and the fact that the economic growth aspirations of the local and national political elite have continued to grow indicate that a lot more is required in conveying the relevant messages of what is and is not valuable for society. Environmental writings in academic and civil society spaces have been observed to have limited visibility. There is, therefore, a critical need for improvement in the number and content of literary works on the environment.

The Task Ahead
The framing of literature and the environment for a discussion anywhere means that writers can use literature as a tool for environmental peacebuilding. This does not only entail critiquing existing approaches to human-nature relationships. It must be done from perspectives capable of exposing the postcolonial ideological and conceptual contents working against the environment to inform an agenda for environmental action and policy.

The conflict between humans and nature in its diverse forms and manifestations makes this task an unending one because of the dynamic nature of the conflict and the danger that improperly managed environment-related issues pose to peace and humanity. Literature itself is potentially a tool for waging war against the perpetrators of environmental problems as part of a peacebuilding role.

What should literary writers in Nigeria investigate and do as part of environmental peacebuilding? There is a legion of areas, as can be inferred. Solutions to the problem of climate change deserve better attention. This is a global problem with local and global solutions. Writers can be more involved with making issues of climate change, mitigation, adaptability, policies and impacts more visible in poetry, novels, drama, and fiction.

The literary community scores very low on this problem at the moment. It can change by being more transformational through writings based on a climate-justice approach to dealing with the threats. This approach requires integrative policy strategies that support direct actions against the present energy and economic development models and are in favour of the wellbeing of people and the rights of nature.

The sad story of the unwillingness of some countries in the Global North to take decisive actions concerning the Paris Agreement and subsequent negotiations at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on the urgent need for significant emissions reduction needs more visibility in literature. This is also to galvanise more actions away from the lack of commitment on the side of governments, individuals, and corporations.

As a final example, no one knows the extent of damage the shower of soot in Rivers State has caused to the health of victims. The mental and physical health of people who are faced with this problem daily in their homes and everywhere else in the city of Port Harcourt remains a concern which writers can take more literary steps to investigate and call the attention of relevant policymakers for effective response.

Fidelis Allen is a Professor of Development Studies at the University of Port Harcourt (UniPort), Nigeria; Former Head of UniPort’s Centre for Conflict and Gender Studies, and Coordinator of the Port Harcourt Right Livelihood College Campus.
Seeking Environmental Justice in India

By Sonali Narang
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the United States defines environmental justice as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice is growing momentously as a social movement in regions that have continually borne a disproportionate impact from ecocidal activities.

India's first environmental justice movement is usually considered to be the Chipko movement or Chipko Andolan, a forest conservation movement that started in 1973 in Uttarakhand, then a part of Uttar Pradesh (at the foothills of Himalayas). Chipko Andolan became a rallying point for many future environmental movements all over the world. It became a good example of non-violent protest in India, as one of its main strategies was organising people to hold trees to show that they would not allow them be cut down.

Sunderlal Bahuguna, a Gandhian activist, is recognised as the person who gave the movement a proper direction. He used the slogan “Ecology is the permanent economy” to promote the movement. The recorded success and non-violent approach of Chipko Andolan attracted the attention of the global community. The movement inspired many similar eco-groups by helping to slow down the rapid deforestation, expose vested interests, increase social awareness on the need to save trees, increase ecological awareness, and demonstrate the viability of people power. Above all, it stirred up the existing civil society in India, which began to address the issues of marginalised people. Another interesting thing about Chipko is that its support base was mainly the womenfolk.

However, before Chipko Andolan, there was a sign of environmental justice movement in India traceable to the era of British rule (pre-independence era) when people at the grassroots mounted resistance against British rulers. One of such resistance which carried ecological undertones was the 1859-63 Bengal peasant revolt against indigo plantations.

Gandhi’s freedom movement also championed the protection of the ecosystem and the people who inhabited seven hundred thousand villages by advocating a self-sufficiency model and opposing industrialisation.

After independence, there was a boost in large infrastructures such as multipurpose dam projects and steel plants for nation-building. The drive for rapid industrialisation ushered in a wave of environmental justice movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), the Appiko movement, and the Silent Valley protest, which all fought for the preservation of water, forests and land (jal, jungle, and jameen). The NBA is an Indian social movement spearheaded by the natives (adivasis), farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists standing against a number of large dam projects across the Narmada River, which flows through the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

One of the first focal points of the movement was the Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat, one of the biggest dams that is part of the Narmada Dam Project (on the Narmada River).

The dam was to provide irrigation and electricity to people of the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
The modes of the campaign used by the NBA include court actions, hunger strikes, rallies and garnering of support from notable film and art personalities. The NBA, with its leading spokespersons Medha Patkar and Baba Amte, received the Right Livelihood Award in 1991 in recognition of their contributions to environmental justice.

The Appiko Movement is similar to Chipko Andolan. Appiko was launched in September 1983 by the representatives of Yuvak Mandali to save the Western Ghats in Southwest India. The objective of the Appiko Movement is three-fold: to protect the existing forest cover, to regenerate trees in denuded lands and to utilise forest wealth with due consideration to conservation. These objectives were implemented through ideally established Parisara Samraksha Kendras (environmental conservation centres).

The Appiko Movement has created awareness among villagers throughout the Western Ghats about issues surrounding the destruction of forest wealth. As a result, people in the area now closely monitor the exploitation of forests by the forest department and are able to show the discrepancy between the professed and actual practice of forest management. The Appiko Movement forced the government to change its forest policy. Some specific changes enforced include a ban on clear-felling, no further issuing of concessions to logging companies, and a moratorium on felling of green trees in the tropical rainforest of the Western Ghats.

Save Silent Valley was yet another social movement aimed at the protection of Silent Valley, an evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala, India. An NGO led by school teachers and the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) started the movement in 1973 to save the Silent Valley from being destroyed by a hydroelectric project. The valley was declared as Silent Valley National Park in 1985.
More recent movements include those against corporate giants such as Vedanta operating in Niyamgiri, Odisha and Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu.

Environmental justice movements in India usually have Adivasis, the indigenous population, at the forefront. The movements are characterized by uncertainties, multiple layers of injustices and inequalities. In India as well as in other parts of the world, environmental justice movements are usually struggles against Ecological Distribution Conflicts (EDCs) arising from environmental costs and benefits based on inequalities in power and income and embedded in the broader context of race, class, caste, and gender asymmetries. The struggles can also be described as social conflicts borne out of unfair access to natural resources and the unjust burdens of pollution.

In the last five decades, these conflicts have evolved, and in recent years, are spreading to new spatial and symbolic spaces. They are no longer limited to rural areas.

Rather, they are manifesting in different contexts and settings, such as the struggles against the expansion of the Mormugao Port for importing coal in Goa and the protests to save the Aarey forest (the last green space) in Mumbai from the creation of the metro car shed which will destroy this ecological space.

According to the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas), an inventory of environmental justice movements across the globe, India has the largest number of environmental justice movements (concerned with about 300 reported cases of conflicts). Out of these conflicts, more than 57 per cent of the reported environmental justice movements from India have Adivasi (indigenous) communities at the forefront. The involvement of Adivasis in such movements gives rise to multiple levels of oppression due to historical exclusion and marginalization that the communities have been subjected to.

Despite this, they have continued to protest and safeguard the jal, jungle, jameen (water, forest, land) that sustain them. As a result of these grassroots mobilisations, an important legislation was passed which ensures tribal land rights. This law, known as The Forest Rights Act (FRA) or the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, is a key piece of legislation that recognises the historical injustice meted out to scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers. It seeks to secure their traditional rights over forestland and community forest resources and to establish democratic community-based forest governance.

The FRA emerged as a legislative response to a national grassroots movement to record the rights of forest-dwelling communities whose rights were not recorded during the consolidation of state forests in the colonial regime. In the post-independence period, many of these communities are being labelled as “encroachers” on forestland, thus have been displaced by industrial and conservation projects. The process of recognition and verification laid out in the FRA is currently the only legal process for determining genuine rights-holders and their rights to forestland.

The process is meant to ensure that companies or states cannot legally begin their projects until the recognition and verification process is complete. This renders the Act a very powerful tool. However, in the last ten years, there have been multiple cases across the states where the process has not been followed, including cases where there have been clear violations of the FRA.
A report about the effectiveness of the FRA after ten years of its implementation recorded that only three per cent of the minimum potential of Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights have been achieved.

The reasons for this poor implementation ranged from an absence of the political will (at national and state levels), inability to build capacity at the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (the central nodal agency), constant opposition at the ground level from forest bureaucracy as well as poor investment in the implementation and monitoring necessary for the rights to be granted. On 13 February 2019, a Supreme Court verdict that would displace an estimated 10 million Adivasis who have had their FRA claims rejected sent shockwaves across environmental justice activists and tribal communities, leading to massive mobilizations against the violation of tribal rights in the name of conservation.

As a result, a stay order was passed on February 28 until the next hearing. This order directed states to show evidence of the due process of the law being followed where claims had been rejected. Since then, the hearing has been postponed multiple times, and the central government has been absent to defend the FRA. In the last hearing, held on 12 September 2019, all states except Sikkim submitted their evidence, and it was decided that the final arguments would be heard on 26 November 2019.

A number of recent global studies have looked at the level of direct and indirect incidences of violence meted out to environment defenders. Many of the studies found that indigenous communities involved in environmental justice movements have significantly higher exposure to criminalisation, violence, and assassination attempts for defending their land and the environment, with mining and extractive industries contributing to the highest number of killings.

According to the latest Global Witness report, released in July 2019, titled “Enemy of the State?”, India had the third-highest number of recorded murders of people defending their homes, rivers, and forests against extractive industries. Along with such direct violence, the court verdict of 13 February 2019 can be seen as a form of slow, procedural violence.

To build more knowledge and in-depth understanding of the involvement of Adivasis in environmental justice movements that are often characterised by violence, a critical environmental justice scholarship is needed. The focus of this scholarship should be on an approach that intersects the motives and methods of environmental justice movements with particular forms of pre-existing oppressions. This would entail contextualising concepts of environmental justice in the local setting to understand the formation of environmental justice movements by Adivasis and the latent and manifest circumstances surrounding the disproportional brunt of direct and indirect violence that falls on their path.

This would be one way to advance and decolonise environmental justice scholarship as it would take into account different local epistemologies and experiences. Across the globe, the protection of the environment is an area where the gap between law and practice is especially wide. Environmental justice scholarship can help reveal bright paths to bridging this gap.

Dr Sonali Narang is an Assistant Professor at Parul University, India. She is a climate change researcher and can be reached via snarang68@gmail.com
The Riddle of the Oil Thief
by HRM. King Bubaraye Dakolo

The Riddle of the Oil Thief unveils the riddle of how a region so richly endowed has been so much impoverished. It unveils the hypocrisy of the government and the oil companies who continually engage in perfidy and blame the victims.

It is the untold story of several decades of oil and gas exploitation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. It x-rays the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria and presents the recipe for the restoration of peace in Nigeria and the entire West African sub-region.

King Dakolo has scored a monumental achievement with this treatise, deftly deploying the tools of fiction and a healthy dose of research to present the Niger Delta that the world must know! It is a duty for everyone to get a copy of this book and read it.

Strategic Turnaround – Story of a Government Agency
by Dakuku Peterside

This book is more than a case study of transformational change in an African maritime administration. It is a roadmap for putting agency back into your government department, a go-to guide for reinvigorating your energy-sapped public servants, and a speak-easy description of how to overcome those structural influences of culture and bureaucracy that knee-cap many a change effort.

This book is a must-read for those [having to walk the tightrope of balancing the public's expectations against the public's purse when] attempting to restore confidence in under-performing public service. Armed with Dr Peterside's inspirational book, you too will succeed in bringing about transformational change in your government agency.
LET ME HELP YOU

By Olubola Adepoju

Our inability to reckon with the earth,
To caress her skin,
Smile at her, cherish, nourish, maintain and sustain
her like we would a baby brought us here.

We liaised with her enemies,
We dined and drank to stupor with
Climate change, Large-scale displacement,
environmental pollution in mockery of Mother Earth,
We rejected and neglected her,
Now she is no longer her young, vibrant, productive self,

But an old, fragile woman
with bulging eyeballs, thin hands and legs that look
like they would break any moment,
Her once dark and beautiful skin that glowed from
absorbing nutrients from manure is long gone,
Grey and frail, she longs for safety, security, and
nourishment to end her agonizing starvation
Deep within, she yearns for love,
To love and be loved,
She shakes her throbbing head at humanity in pity with a
heart full of love,
Wishing men could understand her selfless nature,
She is not asking for manure just to regain her youthful
colour,
But to regain her vigour and solve their hunger issues,

She wishes they could count on her to minimize their waste
and keep their environment clean,
Invest in her to yield natural and healthy food,
An investment that will pay off for life,
Be humble, she cries, let me help you,
This loving Mother still has something in her for you,
Let me turn your mournings over food into dancing once
again,
Let me return the memories of eating yam with roasted
squirrels garnished with fresh pepper and onions,
"Let me help you," she cries,
I have a heart of gold and
I'm ready to serve,
JUST LET ME HELP YOU.

**Olubola Adepoju** is the author of the life-changing e-
After winning the ACEworld Writing Competition 2018
edition, her entry poem was selected for the Anthology of
Poems at ACEworld Publication in 2019. Olubola was also a
The environmental challenges developed from coal-producing communities in Benue State of Nigeria are becoming unbearable in the hands of coal mining companies operating in the region. These challenges include human rights abuse, wide-ranging climate change-causing activities, destruction of livelihoods, land subsidence, damage to the water environment, mining waste disposal and air pollution. Therefore, it becomes imperative to advocate, campaign and design remediation measures to address these issues that are hazardous to lives. There is an increasing call to protect climate defenders in the region, whose only ‘crime’ is their commitment to protecting their land, people and planet no matter the cost. The work of these environmental defenders is critical given that a healthy living environment is absolutely essential for human life, human rights and for agricultural productivity.

Decades ago, Owukpa Consolidated Mines Limited (a coal-mining company operating mainly in Nigeria’s Middle Belt region), in collaboration with the emir (King) of Muri of Taraba State and Dangote Companies Limited, started operation in Owukpa community. The Owukpa people of Benue State thought it was development in terms of employment, good road, water supplies and electricity, but the reverse was the case. What is more, the impacts of fossil fuel (coal mining) that Owukpa, Otukpa and other communities in Benue State feel is detrimental, especially for those who live on the coast. The community people are affected by the fossil fuel projects and are also facing the impacts of climate change. It’s a double hit: the villages are also experiencing a sea-level rise.

Climate change itself is a human rights violation. The fossil fuel industry violates everyone’s rights: rights to life, land, water, and air. As fossil fuel companies keep driving the climate crisis, the scale of their human rights violations continues to increase. Climate defenders bear the greatest brunt of these abuses.
For example, in August 2020, Comrade Okwori Onaji was arrested, tortured and detained for five days just because he mobilized his community people to protest against Owukpa Consolidated Mines Limited and Dangote Companies Limited in his home town – Owukpa community of Benue State, Nigeria. It’s high time to protect local climate activists/environmental/human rights activists and equip them with quality capacity building, tools for monitoring and reporting skills, and raise support mechanisms in solidarity to protect Mother Earth. Like Comrade Okwori Onaji, Comrade Jerome Idoko was arrested in Otukpa, his home town because of his environmental activism. No local, regional or international human rights activist should suffer any form of arrest, torture, imprisonment and even get wounded in the course of their peaceful action to defend and protect Mother Earth.

Surprisingly, Comrade Jerome that led a peaceful community protest against a coal mining company owned by Dangote Group escaped an arrest and was advised to relocate from his community, Otukpa o another place for fear of the unknown. In addition to these industry abuses, fossil fuel companies are responsible for the impact of climate change and the violation of human rights across the region. Speaking at a virtual leader’s summit on climate change, President Muhammadu Buhari said, “the fight to redress the impact of climate change is the responsibility of all countries and stakeholders.” This is a purely political statement from Mr President because he has refused or neglected to back his words with climate action as a country president. If states are serious about stopping climate change, they need to enable these environmental activists to make their voices heard, and we must demand our government to stand up to Fossil Fuel Corporation and protect climate defenders.

Join to build solidarity for climate defenders today.

Nbani Friday Barilule
Climate/Human Rights Activist
HOMEF Volunteer
They came for mother-soil
Blasting dynamites to seek their selfish interests
But we knew not what an earthquake looks like
So mother-soil was buried alive.

They came for the farmer
Littering the fertile woman with the black blood
We were not farmers
So we made silence our best friend.

For these are the children of
Mother Earth
Battered and scattered by enemies of nature and nations.
Humanity is at risk with their continuous presence.

We can't continue to keep these fake friends—silence
For one day:
We will need the tree
We will need the fish
We will need the soil
We will need the farmer

Who shall we then call upon:
When we had let them cut it
When we had let them kill it
When we had let them destroy it
When we had let them deprive him.

We shall no longer have true friends
The Tree
The Fish
The Ground
The Man
We must have lost our sense of solidarity

We've seen their evils
We've heard it a thousand times
Shall we continue to nurture silence that grace may abide?
God forbid
O ye lovers of good, unite
Let's render hope to she who gave birth to us.
In light of the United Nations’ Food Systems Summit on 23 September 2021, the urgent need for structural changes in how we grow, harvest, distribute, and consume food has never been more apparent.

According to the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization’s (FAO) annual hunger report released on 12 July 2021, the world experienced an unprecedented rise in severe hunger for nearly one year (from 2019 to 2020). The agency’s annual estimate of “undernourishment” showed an increase of up to 25% over 2019 levels, rising to between 720 and 811 million people in 2020.

Sub-Saharan Africa saw as many as 44 million more people suffer severe undernourishment, leaving 30% of the continent’s residents struggling to feed their families. A stunning 66% of the continent faced “moderate or severe food insecurity” in 2020, according to FAO estimates, up from 51% in 2014. That is an increase of 244 million food-insecure people in just six years.

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), in its 2020 Annual Report released the same day as the FAO sounded its alarms. After noting the challenges of COVID-19 and climate change, AGRA’s report gushes about the “evidence of improved productivity, better crop quality, higher incomes, and more months of food from [farmers’] surplus.”

In stark contrast to the well-researched data from the FAO, AGRA’s “evidence” was a sloppy set of hastily compiled data presented with examples carefully chosen to show progress. (See my analysis of AGRA’s report here.)

AGRA seems to be living in a world different from that of the poor, rural Africans, which makes them oblivious to the documented shortcomings of its technology-focused approach to agricultural development. AGRA leaders and donors seem unaware that the number of severely undernourished people in Sub-Saharan Africa has risen nearly 50% since AGRA was founded in 2006. That is why African farmer, faith, and community organizations are now challenging AGRA’s failing model, calling on donor agencies and foundations to stop funding the 15-year-old initiative.
“AGRA seems to be living in a world different from that of the poor, rural Africans, which makes them oblivious to the documented shortcomings of its technology-focused approach to agricultural development.”

Business as usual at the Food Systems Summit

The COVID-19 pandemic was, of course, largely to blame for the steep rise in hunger in 2020, but climate change and conflict also contributed. So did misguided agricultural policies. It was the sixth straight year of increases in undernourishment, a trend that last year prompted U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to call for this year’s Food Systems Summit. The world was clearly not on track to achieve the core Sustainable Development Goal of eliminating severe hunger by 2030.

The Summit has been mired in controversy from the outset. Guterres was widely criticized for his partnership with the World Economic Forum, the corporate elite who gather each year in Davos to discuss the poor world’s problems, sidelining the Rome-based U.N. agencies that generally take the lead on such matters.
He compounded the legitimacy crisis by naming AGRA President Agnes Kalibata as Special Envoy to lead the Summit.

Major civil society networks and organizations boycotted the summit preparations, which were denounced for favouring technological solutions offered by corporations while failing to put the right to food – and COVID and climate change – at the centre of the agenda. U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Michael Fakhri recently issued a blistering critique of the Summit. The business-as-usual approach to the summit, with its Nairobi-based staff (of AGRA) organizing virtual “dialogues” and vetting “game-changing solutions” to food systems failures, seemed deaf to the loud alarms from the FAO.

The worst hunger remains in rural areas in developing countries.

**Africa’s failing Green Revolution**

For the last 15 years, the Green Revolution has been the dominant approach in Africa. AGRA has led the charge from its Nairobi headquarters, with overwhelming $1 billion funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, but also with support from the Rockefeller Foundation and a small number of bilateral donors. African governments have chipped in with waves of subsidies to farmers – as much as $1 billion per year altogether – to purchase the Green Revolution’s products: commercial seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs.

The Green Revolution’s “theory of change” is as simplistic as it is flawed: put seeds and fertilizers in the hands of small-scale farmers. They will see their yields double, so too their incomes from the sales of surplus crops. And they will become food-secure from the food they grow and can now afford to buy. The evidence suggests that none of that has come to pass. Adoption rates for the expensive new seeds and fertilizers remain low, even with governments subsidizing farmers’ purchases. Many of those who adopt have not achieved large yield increases, even in favoured crops such as maize.

Only a few have seen rising incomes from sales of growing surpluses; some have ended up in debt after a bad harvest. And food insecurity has grown from its already alarming levels.

This is less a theory of change than a proven route to continued hunger.

**Fiddling in Nairobi**

AGRA is set to unveil what it will no doubt present as a bold new strategy. But it will likely do little more than fiddle with its current strategy, just as it has done before. The failing premise that commercial seeds and fertilizers can dramatically reduce hunger and poverty in rural Africa through a productivity revolution remains unchanged.

Emperor Nero infamously fiddled while Rome burned. AGRA should stop fiddling in Nairobi while more Africans are going hungry. And donors should listen to African civil society leaders and say no when AGRA claims to speak for Africans, which they use to ask for millions of more dollars for its failing strategy.

**Timothy Wise** is a senior advisor at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy and author of Eating Tomorrow: Agribusiness, Family Farmers, and the Battle for the Future of Food. This article was first published by IPS News in August 2021. http://www.ipsnews.net/2021/08/fiddling-nairobi-africa-goes-hungry/
The formal colonization of Africa is said to have ended between 1950 and 1975. This wasn’t an all-pleasing move to some in the Global North, as there has since been a careful and deliberate attempt to re-colonize, control and exploit Africa and the African people. There have been strategic moves by big corporations towards land grabs and market/food system take-over in Africa – as seen in corporate concentration and control attempts in the African food systems.

The entrance of multinationals and the big corporations into the African market space has been to plunder and profit while leaving the people impoverished and enslaved with a devastated environment – a very clear example is seen with what the oil multinationals have done to environments and the people in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Civil society organizations, individuals, groups, and academia have attempted to raise concerns over the modus operandi of these corporations, because of which these groups are often being tagged as anti-development. The most recent of such being an article in The Conversation written by some authors from Cornell, Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the African Development Bank, which connects vaccine conspiracy behaviour with anti-GMO movements, which they claim are depriving Africans of life-saving biotech.

This article attributes the vaccine hesitation to safety concerns and the call by concerned individuals and groups for liability/redress and misinformation. To suggest that the decades-long debates all over the world about the impacts of GMOs, corporate take-over of agriculture, and democratic deliberation about who controls our food systems is the same thing as anti-COVID vaccination is a cynical attempt to avoid an honest attempt to address the real needs of Africans and African farmers: our seeds and soil. This is a callous and dishonest attempt at manipulation.

Africans deserve the same right to engage in democratic deliberation as other countries - including the dozens of countries that have fully banned GMOs. The peddlers of corporate GMO agenda are dishonestly avoiding any discussion of the impacts of GMOs on the autonomy of farmers, the right to seeds, and the use of GMOs to further control who can grow what, where, when and how.

The pertinent question to ask the pro-GMO groups would be: why is democratic debate about GMOs okay in Europe, the US, Canada, and so many other countries but not for African countries? With dozens of nations banning GMOs and even more regulating them to protect farmers, Africans deserve the same right to democratic debate and not the dishonest dismissals and false equivalencies currently being peddled.
COMPARING A TWO-DECADES LONG DEBATE OVER

THE SAFETY OF GMOS WITH ANTI-COVID-19 VACCINATION:

A CYNICAL AND CALLOUS MANIPULATION

Mfoniso Antia and Zahra Moloo – For Africa Technology Assessment Platform
It is important to state here that falsely claiming that anti-GMO activists are conspiracy theorists actually adds to the misinformation and thus feeds the vicious circle of conspiracy theory-making that the authors of the said article claim to oppose.

The article rightly stated that 99% of the GM crops are insect-resistant and pesticide-tolerant. Shouldn't this call for concerns, knowing that the crops have been engineered to become pesticides themselves? Shouldn't Africans be concerned about consuming crops that are engineered to be pesticides?

The question in the minds of the people about GM crops is whether it is possible to eat something that can kill pests and still be safe and healthy. It is important to reiterate that Africans do not need pesticide-engineered crops, nor do their farmers. African farmers have over the years used local methods of pest control without poisoning consumers.

There are farming methods that work hand in hand with nature and produces crops that are safe for consumption. Agroecology is one of such and should be encouraged. African farmers, especially those in Nigeria, need extension workers, ways of preserving farm produce and transportation to the cities where there are huge consumer markets. Genetically modified crops and mono-cropping with the aim of market/food system take-over and control is what they do not need.

The article rightly mentioned that the anti-GM movement originated from the US and Europe. If individuals or countries in these regions reject the failed technology, why should Africans accept it? If the technology was as safe as claimed, its proponents should spend more time convincing the countries of its origin rather than strategically planning to dump the technology in Africa.

Africa is not a petri-dish for tests/trials and should not be made a dumping ground for failed and rejected technologies. Africans do not need Cornell or AGRA squad to lecture them on GMOs. Farmers have learned first-hand about the spectacular failure of GM cotton in Burkina Faso. The permitting system in Nigeria doesn't engender any confidence in the technology either. Uganda has insisted on strict liability requirements, and the GMO proponents bristle over that as anti-science. Is science averse to responsibility?

To the pro-GM groups, it is wrong to use the COVID crisis to cynically push your pro-GMO agenda. It is anti-scientific to avoid or dismiss scrutiny. Comparing our critiques to anti-vax critiques is a way of avoiding addressing the real critiques we have raised. These two things are not the same thing, and criticism for both shouldn't be compared.

The concerns of the people regarding the vaccines have been about the way the vaccines were developed and rolled out - including the total lack of international coordination to ensure equitable access, for example; and the lack of transparency on how they managed to take a 4-year process down to less than 18 months. Shouldn't the safety of the vaccines be questioned especially seeing that the likes of Gates Foundation are championing the cause of its deployment to Africa?

Africans deserve better!
The need to protect the environment, sustain livelihoods and ensure energy access cannot be over-emphasized because of our high gains from the environment and all it carries.

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), in a two-day School of Ecology, looked at critical ways of protecting the environment, building power from the grassroots, and ensuring a shift from fossil fuel-based energy to renewable alternatives. As the world shifts from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, Africa should not be left behind.

The Executive Director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, in his address, noted that the idea of shifting the power line is a project that looks at who decides what energy options should be adopted and who has access to the energy options.

Using the mangrove ecosystems as the jumping-off point for the conversation, he stressed the fact that they provide breeding grounds for fishes, are excellent for shoreline protection and support livelihoods as well as cultural expressions.

At the start of the project: Shifting the Power Lines. HOMEF, in partnership with the Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD), carried out participatory research in Kono and Bundu, two fishing communities in Rivers State. The contrast between the two communities is that while Kono people have preserved their mangrove forests, the mangroves at Bundu have been largely destroyed by oil pollution, plastic wastes and over-harvesting of the wood. The communities illustrated the urgent need for the meeting of energy needs of our coastal communities.

“Looking at the fast-disappearing mangroves in various parts of the Niger Delta and other parts of the world, we see a trend that deprives people of access to energy, access to ecosystems that support local livelihoods and help to mitigate the impacts of climate change.”

All the speakers from Nigeria, Ghana, Bolivia, Brazil, South Africa, Swaziland, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom made broad recommendations, such as the need for bottom-up policy-making pathways.
They all decried the unjust power relations and the entrenching of domination, inequality, oppression, racism, and neo-colonialism.

Nnimmo Bassey noted that “there is a need for sustainable change from the people. When an issue is identified, it should be escalated to the national and global levels because what affects the grassroots in Nigeria also affects others in other parts of the world. There is also a need to share solutions and build a movement to ensure that the best things get adopted and put in place.” He also noted that we should “analyse and get to the root of the problems because a lot of the problems in the environment space are due to faulty power relations.”

A leading earth jurisprudence expert and attorney from South Africa, Cormac Cullinan, in his presentation, noted that our responses to ecological challenges are moderated by our world views. He noted that the current economic models promote the degradation of nature and that we should build a healthy relationship with nature and the other species.

The need to campaign for a better environment is for everybody in the environment space to continue to support the livelihoods and cultures and to live in dignity. We all have a space to contribute and be part of the movement to contribute to a greener environment.

Asad Rehman, executive director of the United Kingdom-based War on Want, insisted that for there to be a just energy transition, there must be a readiness of nations to act, and to agree to fight for a temperature rise of not more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to actively work to undo embedded systems of oppression in the world.

Thuli Makama of Oil Change International (Africa) spoke on the need to uproot the false power and development narratives that have been used to open Africa for exploitation. She decried the fact that while the world is shifting away from fossil fuel extraction, international oil companies are aggressively seeking new oil fields in Africa. She added that while the extraction of resources in Africa is mostly geared for export, our people merely end up with low-paying hazardous jobs.

There were also reports on the Stilt Roots stories and on the Shifting Power Lines project from Latin America and Asia. The report from Latin America was presented by Marcelo Calazans of Oilwatch Latin America. He spoke alongside fishers and activists from Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina.

They all spoke on the destruction of mangrove ecosystems and the challenges posed by fossil fuel extraction. They reported on the resistance of the people to these negative actions and demanded a new way of looking at energy and how to meet such needs.
Coastline communities depend on aquatic ecosystem resources to secure their livelihoods and maintain their cultures. A distortion of this environment brings about both subtle and direct impacts on the social, cultural, and economic lives of the people. Canalisation and sea-level rise, for instance, bring in salt water from the sea, thus contaminating freshwater sources.

This situation brings about the stressful contradiction of living on water and yet having none to drink. Besides the pressure on potable water, the intrusion of salt water also alters the diversity of aquatic and terrestrial species in the territories.

Health of Mother Earth foundation HOMEF engaged fishers in coastal ecosystems monitoring and training sessions at Uta Ewua in Ikot Abasi LGA of Akwa Ibom State. The session exposed the diverse challenges facing fishers around the country. The executive director of HOMEF, Dr Nnimmo Bassey, urged fishers and the community people, in general, to protect the coast line from degradation.

“The Niger Delta coast line is specifically impacted by oil spills, pollution, and the waste being dumped into the river, which affects the livelihoods of the fisherfolk and the quality water, as well as the species in the water. Fisherfolk will lose their livelihoods, which in turn affects the availability of food for Nigeria.”

“The essence of the meeting with fishers in Uta Ewa is to equip them with tools to be the first-line monitors of what is happening in their environment. We have engaged different coastal communities such as Makoko in Lagos, Gbarain in Bayelsa, Ogoni in Rivers, Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State, and we are now here in Uta Ewua in Akwa Ibom. The objective is to have our fisherfolk defend their ecosystems, defend their livelihoods, advocate change and live in dignity. We are doing this by equipping them to monitor their environment and report incidents that they see, including oil pollution in their water. We also noticed the mangrove ecosystems have been invaded by the nipa palm. The mangrove forests help to protect the shoreline and also provide breeding grounds for fishes. The coastal ecosystem is of great value to not only the fishers but also to everyone.”

The fishers, in their resolution after the meeting, outlined what they intend to achieve with the environmental training that was received during the session.

The resolutions include:

1. They will share experiences on how oil spills and environmental pollution affect their community.
2. They will share knowledge received with other community members.
3. They will use the knowledge in advocacy, dialogue with the operating companies on safe fishing methods under the FishNet Alliance.
4. They will use the knowledge gained in engaging the government to provide facilities for the storage and processing of their catches.
5. They will engage in the replanting of mangrove tree species and other forest tree species.
6. They will adopt community conservation methods to ensure sustainable reforestation.
7. They will also dialogue with the ministry of agriculture and natural development to ensure adequate support for fisheries in the community and the state in general.
8. They demanded that oil companies and the government should clean up their rivers and estuaries and pay adequate compensation for losses due to oil pollution.
9. They called on the Nigerian Inland Waterways Authority to clear up wrecks and abandoned equipment from their stations for safe navigation and fishing activities.
10. They also called for security agencies to save them from the ravages of sea pirates, who are a serious threat to lives and property in the area. The members of the community council, members of various fishers associations, NGOs and the media were present at the meeting. A chapter of the FishNet Alliance was duly set up in the community at the close of the training session.
Nigerian Civil Society's Position on the Petroleum Industry Bill

The current version of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) failed to address community, economic and environmental concerns. We have convened this briefing and dialogue to review the state of our environment, including the contentious PIB. Recall that only a few days ago, Nigeria's Federal House of Representatives passed the PIB into law. Their passage of the Bill was immediately followed by the passage of the same law by the Senate, howbeit with some amendments. This position was made known during a press briefing in Abuja.

Before proceeding, please permit us to remind you that the PIB is one of the oldest and perhaps most contentious bills in the history of Nigeria's legislature. The Bill, introduced to the legislature in 2008, was envisaged to bring together about 16 existing legislations on Nigeria's petroleum industry into a single cohesive legislation to govern the industry from the upstream to downstream sectors. Overall, it aims to ensure improved benefits to Nigerians from the oil and gas sector.

Since its first transmission to the legislature in 2008 as an Executive Bill, the PIB has passed through key adjustments, setbacks and controversies. In 2011, there were different versions of the Bill in circulation, each including or eliminating one contentious provision or the other. By 2012, a new version of the Bill was developed and re-presented to the legislature for consideration. The Bill was withdrawn from the National Assembly and replaced with a revised version in 2014. In 2015, the House of Representatives passed a version of the PIB amidst controversy that the version was heavily doctored to suit vested interests. Later in 2015, the administration of President Buhari split the PIB into four components – the Petroleum Industry Governance Bill (PIGB) dealing with reforms in the governance of the oil and gas sector, the Petroleum Industry Administration Bill (PIAB), the Petroleum Industry Fiscal Bill (PIFB) and Petroleum Host and Impacted Communities Bill (PHICB). In May 2017, the Senate passed the PIGB, with the House of Representatives following in January 2018. A harmonized version was passed by both houses of the National Assembly on the 28th of March 2018 and forwarded to the President for approval. That effort came to nought as President Buhari denied his endorsement, citing 'constitutional and legal reasons.'
The current efforts around the PIB began in September 2020, when the Presidency transmitted a comprehensive Petroleum Industry Bill titled A Bill for an Act to Provide Legal, Governance, Regulatory and Fiscal Framework for the Nigerian Petroleum Industry, the Development of Host Communities and for Related Matters to the National Assembly for consideration.

Exactly 9 months after the National Assembly began deliberation on the Bill, both Chambers have passed it and are currently working towards the harmonization of the versions from both legislative chambers.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is important to note that civil society organizations in the country, including those here today, have historically engaged the PIB process in efforts to ensure that the final outcome reflects the popular thinking of Nigerians, not just on the economy of oil and gas, but also on the outlook of the country beyond oil. National Assembly, presented memos for consideration and produced detailed reports recommending adjustments to the different drafts that have been considered. It is pertinent to note that we did the same in this recent effort. Unfortunately, it is regretful that our suggestions which emanate from a long history of work in the sector, engagements with stakeholders including oil-producing communities, and established international best practices, have not been taken seriously in the Bill as passed by both chambers of the National Assembly. Ladies and gentlemen, we shall proceed to itemize the contentious key issues below.

On the Host Communities Trust
The PIB makes elaborate provisions for the establishment and management of a petroleum host community development trust as a framework for the transfer of development benefits to petroleum host communities. However, the Bill specifically makes the incorporation of this trust the exclusive responsibility of the oil companies operating in the area and gives oil companies overriding powers to decide who become members of the trust and other governance structures.
Without doubt, the provisions for the establishment and governance of the Host Communities Trust (HCT) downgrades the participation of communities while overtly promoting the role of oil companies. The PIB gives the companies power to nominate all members of the Board of Trustees of the HCTs with only an obligation to 'consult' host communities.

Besides the paltry 3 of 5 per cent earmarked for host communities, we consider this provision in the Bill a clear indication that the PIB intends to continue the historical treatment of host communities as oil colonies and sacrifice zones under the control of profiteering companies. It also indicates that the government still holds the erroneous and unfortunate view that communities, where crude oil is extracted from, do not have the capacity to direct their affairs. This is not only untrue; it is also insulting.

It is our recommendation that in the harmonization of the PIB, the Host Communities Trust be incorporated and governed by members of each host community. We also recommend that contrary to what is in the PIB currently, the oil companies should not be the ones to determine who is a host community.

On Oil Community’s Responsibility for the Protection of Oil Facilities

A key source of contention raised by civil society organizations and host communities, which has unfortunately been retained in the Bill passed, is the placing of responsibility for the protection of pipeline and other oil infrastructures on host communities. According to the Bill, “where in any year, an act of vandalism, sabotage or other civil unrest occurs that causes damage to petroleum and designated facilities or disrupts production activities within the host community, the community shall forfeit its entitlement to the extent of the costs of repairs of the damage that resulted from the activity with respect to the provisions of this Act within that financial year. Provided the interruption is not caused by technical or natural cause.”

As you are probably aware, oil theft is the major reason for puncturing oil pipelines. This illicit activity is carried out mainly by armed cartels (and not poor community people), suspected to be working in close collaboration with oil company officials and the military stationed in those communities to protect oil installations. Placing the responsibility of protecting oil installations from armed gangs on unarmed communities is simply an unrealistic expectation. Again, this proposal stems directly from the erroneous view which has been peddled by oil companies that communities are responsible for the sabotage on pipelines and oil theft.

However, these are views that have been debunked by the NNPC and even the United Nations Environment Programme. Attempting to criminalize oil-producing communities in this regard is an unfortunate and cunning ploy. If this provision is upheld, it could result in a consistent denial of benefits which could, in turn, engender regular conflicts. We, therefore, recommend a total deleting of this clause.

“Without doubt, the provisions for the establishment and governance of the Host Communities Trust (HCT) downgrades the participation of communities while overtly promoting the role of oil companies”.

34 / ECO ~ INSTIGATOR #33
On Gas Flaring

The PIB makes the flaring of gas illegal. However, it creates a series of exemptions that basically ensure that the same gas flare regime continues literally unchecked. The Bill identifies instances where gas flaring may be permitted.

These include
(a) in the case of an emergency;
(b) pursuant to an exemption granted by the Commission; or
(c) as an acceptable safety practice under established regulations.

The Bill goes further to clarify that the Authority or Commission may grant a permit to a Licensee or Lessee to allow the flaring or venting of natural gas for a specific period – (a) where it is required for facility start-up; or (b) for strategic operational reasons, including testing.

The section, however, does not provide an explanation of what 'strategic operational reasons' are beyond testing. It also does not state the time frame allowed for flaring in the case of facility start up or for strategic operational reasons. These provisions could be easily abused and turned into a license for unchecked environmental and health damage to communities. Additionally, the Bill proposes that 'moneys received from gas flaring penalties by the Commission pursuant to this subsection shall be transferred to the Midstream Gas Infrastructure fund for investment in Midstream Gas Infrastructure within the Host Communities of the Settler on which the penalties are levied.'

Clearly, the Bill proposes the utilization of gas flare fines in more income-yielding investments without any special consideration for the communities who suffer the impact of gas flaring. Evidently, the PIB considers gas flaring a waste of economic resources which should be paid for and not as abuse that is impacting the climate, the health and livelihoods of communities.

Ladies and gentlemen, for emphasis, it is also important to note that gas flaring has been illegal in Nigeria since 1984. In 2005, a Federal High Court in Nigeria reaffirmed the illegality of the practice and held that gas flaring amounted to a violation of the constitutional right to life and dignity of the people. Since the 1970s, the Nigerian government has put in place several deadlines to end gas flaring.

The deadline to stop gas flare out was 2020, which was again shifted in favour of a 2030 deadline. As a routine practice, deadlines to end gas flaring are shifted as the targets approach. The PIB does not place any definite flare-out date, presenting the impression that the practice will continue indefinitely to the detriment of the host communities who continue to bear the dangerous consequences. The PIB does not appear to consider Nigeria's climate change pledges as contained in the nation's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

We strongly recommend the introduction of a clause that affirms the outlawing of gas flaring and requires that offenders pay the full economic cost of the flared gas as well as the related health and environmental costs. The clause should ensure that gas flare fines are invested in the host communities funds and an Environmental Remediation Fund. It is recommended that the discretionary powers given to the Commission to determine how much is paid as a penalty for gas flaring be removed. The regulations should clearly peg the fines for violation as stated above.
It is also recommended that the PIB places a definite date to end gas flaring and provide a framework to review each company milestone towards achieving the flare-out target, as well as establish definite 'non-fines' sanctions for violations of milestones. It is equally recommended that the grounds for exemption on gas flaring should be made more explicit, including for such reasons as 'strategic operational reasons.' Timeframes for such exemptions should also be expressly stated.

Frontier Basins
Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps the most contentious issue in the PIB is the proposal for the utilization of 30% of NNPC profits for oil exploration in so-called frontier basins mostly located outside the Niger Delta. While the PIB expects the NNPC to become a profit-making enterprise, it already dedicates a hefty chunk of its expected profit into the search for additional crude oil. It is interesting to note that Nigeria has for decades invested heavily and futilely in the search for crude oil in the same basins. Indeed, it is reported that as much as $3billion may have been spent in this effort.

The fact that public resources have to be spent in this effort is indicative of the fact that oil companies around the world do not consider this a worthwhile investment. Rather than spend so much of the expected profits of NNPC on exploring for oil in unlikely places, we propose that the government consider investing the same percentage of NNPC profits in generating clean and affordable energy for Nigerians, or even supporting an environmental remediation fund aimed at remediating years of pollution, livelihood loses and health impacts of oil extraction. We strongly hold the view that this will be a far more worthwhile investment. We note here that even the remotest factor, profit, is nebulous in a situation where the exact quantity of crude oil extracted is unknown.

Climate Change and Changing Times
Sadly, it is noteworthy that the entire PIB expresses no intention for moving Nigerians away from dependence on fossils. At a time when the world is moving away from crude oil, the PIB is planning to make more investments in that regard. This indicates that the government is not keeping in tandem with global trends. The provisions and proposals in the PIB are also indicative of the fact that the Nigerian government is unperturbed by concerns of global warming and climate change. Ironically, Nigeria is emerging as one of the most impacted countries globally by the effects of climate change. The shrunken Lake Chad, increased desertification, and the regular floods around the Atlantic coast are ready evidence. That the PIB pays no heed to issues of climate change, despite Nigeria’s NDCs, and aims to plunge the country further into fossil extraction is a major source of concern.

Ladies and gentlemen, the PIB presents a rare opportunity to reform the management of the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. But it also presents an opportunity to transform the footprints of oil extraction in host communities, to invest in clean energy, ween the country from fossil dependence and combat years of pollution and neglect. The PIB also ignores the extreme harm inflicted on the Niger Delta and says nothing about a region-wide environmental remediation effort that ought to have started before now. The Bill, as passed by both chambers of the National Assembly, has done none of the above.

This position and statement are endorsed by the following organizations:
1. Health of Mother Earth Foundation
2. We the People
3. Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa
4. Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth
5. Policy Alert
6. Ogoni Solidarity Forum
7. Kebetkatche Women Development and Resource Centre
8. Africa Network for Environment & Economic Justice
9. Indigenous Centre for Energy and Sustainable Development
10. Coalition Against Gas Flaring
11. Host Communities Network
12. Green Alliance Nigeria
13. Centre for Transparency Advocacy
14. Oilwatch Nigeria
A Chat with Medical Practitioners on GMOs and Biosafety in Nigeria

As concerns about the introduction and use of genetically modified organisms/food products are increasing, more steps are being taken in terms of policy reviews and propaganda to encourage their use. The plethora of concerns—health, environmental, economic and political—hold intergenerational implications if not carefully and urgently addressed.

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) organized a dialogue with medical practitioners on 19 June 2021 to deepen the understanding of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), examine their implications on biosafety in Nigeria.
and make recommendations on the way forward for promoting biosafety and justice in our food systems while preserving the health of the people and the environment.

The dialogue, which was held in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, had medical doctors, laboratory scientists, researchers, nutritionists, CSOs and the media in attendance.

At the opening of the event, HOMEF Director, Nnimmo Bassey, stated that the quality of the food we eat affects the quality of our health, and we cannot have quality food if we do not cultivate good products—such that are not dependent on toxic inputs.

He stressed that the bedrock of biosafety is precaution—which requires that caution should be applied when the safety of a product is uncertain. Mr Bassey added that the key to food safety, food security and food sovereignty is diversity—this he said will ensure that we have a mix of foods that are nutritious and which support our health.

Speaking on the topic of GMOs and their implications on human and environmental health, Dr Ifeanyi Casmir, a molecular biologist and public health consultant, described GMOs as a tale of controversies, adding that a person is basically what s/he eats. He pointed out that pesticides and GMOs cannot be separated because these pesticides are, in his words, “the perfume that GMOs wear.”

Dr Casmir hinged his presentation on a quote by Rachael Carson, who's considered to be the mother of environmental toxicology: ‘What Science believed and Technology made possible must first be judged for its safety and benefit to the whole stream of life.’

It was explained that scientists who transfer genes from one organism to the other are oblivious of the totality of the impacts of the introduction of such genes in the receiving organism. ‘The introduction of a gene into different cells can result in different outcomes, and the overall pattern of gene expression can be altered by the introduction of a single gene....’

Although modern biotechnology, including genetic engineering (GE), has made a profound contribution to the health sector, towing the path of GE in agriculture is not for our benefit. This is because it will aid the erosion of our local varieties. Crops engineered to be herbicide-tolerant have over time increased the use of toxic herbicides on farmlands which destroy beneficial organisms (including microorganisms) in these farmlands, besides the herbs they were targeted at.

Although there are conflicting findings from studies on GMOs, there is a growing body of evidence connecting GMOs with health issues (such as cancers, liver and kidney disorders, birth defects, immune system malfunction) and environmental degradation.

“the quality of the food we eat affects the quality of our health, and we cannot have quality food if we do not cultivate good products—such that are not dependent on toxic inputs”.

GMOs are promoted based on these falsehoods: no overt consequences, no known effect on human health, they are not likely to produce any effect, and they are not riskier than other crops. To refute these statements, Dr Casmir quoted a scientist, Tsatsakis, who said that the consensus over the safety of GMOs is a falsely perpetuated construct, adding that there is more than a causal association between GM foods and health issues.
Studies have shown that DNA molecules injected into food affect the animals that eat them. Many GM crops are engineered to express novel miRNA sequences, either to impose control on host plant genes or to act as insecticides.

Dr Ifeanyi Casmir backed up his presentation with some scientific evidence from other researchers whose findings have been published in reputable journals.

He concluded by saying that ‘The multifunctionality of agriculture requires policy approaches that also address poverty and livelihoods. This reaffirms the conclusion by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science & Technology for Development (IAASTD) that an integrated agroecological approach is the most promising for climate change mitigation and improving sustainability.’

Further, there was a discussion on the cultural, socio-economic and political perspectives on GMOs, which was led by Nnimmo Bassey. This session started with the question: who is nourishing the world? It was emphasized that it is the small-scale farmers that are indeed nourishing the world and not the industrial farmers or corporations.

One of the myths about GMOs is that they are substantially equivalent to other crops, and they can co-exist with non-genetically modified crops. To refute this, a question was asked: why then do GM seeds have patents? Also, the claim of their independent co-existence is simply not true as crops interdepend on each other for survival. There have been cases of horizontal gene transfer from GM crops to native varieties in farmlands where the owners of these farmlands were taken to court by the GM crop patent owner for infringing on his patent rights over the GM construct.

The socio-economic implications of GMOs were listed to include the replacement of natural products by synthetic products, loss of markets, biodiversity erosion by monoculture or plantation agriculture, farmers losing their livelihoods instead of being turned to sharecroppers. With GMOs, farmers lose their right to preserve and reuse seeds. Likewise, we lose the right to choose what we eat.

Labelling GMOs to mark them out from other products can’t and won’t work in our socio-cultural context because food is generally sold in cups and measures and in other forms where labelling is not possible. To secure our socio-economic rights, we have to protect our indigenous varieties, support our farmers and free ourselves from seed colonialism. The varieties of crops we once knew are now narrowed; some have been lost over time, and the few remaining are being targeted by genetic modifications.

The conversation also touched on issues related to the Act and regulation of biosafety as well as the associated challenges. It was highlighted that the challenge with the state of biosafety in our nation isn’t a lack of laws but a lack of implementation/enforcement. Nigeria is a signatory to a number of international laws which aim to promote biodiversity, such as The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Cartagena Protocol to the Convention on Biodiversity, the African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights etc.

Barr. Ifeanyi Nwankwere, who anchored this session, stated that the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) Act of 2015 embodies the principle of precautionary measure, but this has been woefully ignored by the Agency. The Act was amended in 2019 to include emerging aspects of modern biotechnology, including gene editing and synthetic biotechnology, which poses greater risks to biodiversity and affects the rights of farmers.

Speaking on the challenges with biosafety regulation, it was stated that the NBMA Act has gaps that prevent it from protecting the interest of our people. These flaws include wide discretionary powers given to the agency, defective provisions on public participation, access to information, and liability and redress.
Moreover, there is a stark conflict of interest – with a major promoter of GMOs, the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), on the board of the regulatory agency.

This gives room for regulatory capture and positions the agency to serve the commercial interest of the promoters of GMOs.

In the concluding session, HOMEF’s project lead on Hunger Politics, Joyce Brown, led a discussion on agroecology as a viable solution to food and climate challenges.

Agroecology was explained as a science, a set of practices and a social movement. As a science, it studies the interrelationships between the various components of ecosystems. As a set of practices, it comprises sustainable and diverse farming practices (including crop rotation, mixed cropping, biological pest control, composting, agroforestry, livestock integration) that optimize and stabilize yields. As a social movement, it respects and promotes the right of farmers and communities to decide what they grow and how.

Agroecology works.

A study that reviewed 40 initiatives using agroecological methods showed an average crop yield increase of 113%. Although the yield of individual crops may not necessarily be higher in agroecology than in chemical-intensive farming, the total agricultural output is larger because agroecological farmers rely on a diversified pool of crops and livestock.

While modern agriculture portends overlapping ecological, environmental and economic crises, agroecology nurtures ecosystems, ensures economic stability, and is structurally just. Soils farmed using agroecological methods trap in carbon and so contribute to the mitigation of climate change. Agroecology reduces pesticide use and brings about soil restoration.

After the intensive discussions, a number of recommendations were made by the participants, which include that the deployment and use of GMOs in Nigeria should be halted while we conduct rigorous and independent research on their implications for the Nigerian people. It was also stressed that there should be deeper and wider awareness creation to ensure that other professionals, farmers, and indeed the general public get to understand the current challenges, the state of biosafety in Nigeria and the risks of consuming genetically modified food products.
The fact that Africa can be completely circumnavigated has advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is that the continent can be accessed by sea from any direction. This means that the seas can be a ready tool for wrapping up the continent and promoting regional integration and cooperation.

We would be stating the obvious when we say that this spatial disposition has also made the continent prone to exploitation and assault. This position made it easy for Africans to be uprooted and relocated through slavery. This central location of the continent equally made it open to adventurers and colonizers. It is also noteworthy that key terrestrial infrastructure on the continent either begin or end at the shorelines.

The sea means a lot to Africa and her littoral states. The mineral resources and aquatic diversity have attracted entities with both legal and illegal intentions. With the world literally scraping the bottom of the natural resource pot, there is a scramble for the sea, and one way to sell the idea of limitless resources and opportunities has been to dream up the Blue Economy concept.
In the publication Blue Economy Blues, HOMEF stated:

To understand the Blue Economy, one needs to look at the concept that inspired its creation. That concept is that of the Green Economy. The Green Economy is another top-down concept that jars the organic relationship of humans with their physical environment as it essentially deconstructs that relationship and builds upon a philosophy that distances humans and other species from the environment and presents that environment as a thing to be manipulated, transformed, and exploited in a way that delivers gains along subsisting unequal power alignments.

African political leaders, including those at the African Union, are enamoured by the Blue Economy concept, particularly when considering what can be done in the areas of fisheries, aqua-culture, tourism, transport, shipbuilding, energy, bio-prospecting, and underwater mining and related activities. The oceans and lakes simply appear to be spatially limitless and endowed with limitless resources. The truth is that these notions aren’t true. African waters are among some of the most overfished waters, and this is often not for consumption in the continent. Our fisheries provide nutrition to about 200 million Africans and employment for over 35 million coastal fishers. Nevertheless, about 25 per cent of fish catches in African waters are by non-African countries, according to an FAO report.

West African waters that have been among the most fecund have been characterised by shrunken fish populations due to overfishing, illegal fishing and climate change. These illegal fishing activities are often carried out by large foreign industrial trawlers that travel over long distances with the help of harmful subsidies. It is said that about 65% of all reported illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing takes place in the waters of the Gulf of Guinea.

The rush to exploit our oceans has manifested in criminal activities, including sea piracy, waste dumping (oil spills) and stealing of fishes. Shockingly, 95% of all kidnappings at sea is said to happen in the Gulf of Guinea. Their catches are said to end up being used to feed livestock in Europe and the USA. According to reports, these trawlers come from China, Russia and countries in the European Union. They catch more fish in one day than what an artisanal fisher would catch in a year. These unregulated and illegal activities largely go unreported.

**IPCC—Oceans warming faster than expected**

Warming oceans lead to reduced fish populations and catches as fish migrate to cooler waters and away from equatorial latitudes. Ocean warming has been fingered as triggering more violent cyclones such as cyclone Idai, Kenneth, and Loise on the southeastern seaboard of Africa. The warming has also led to the destruction of coral reefs off the coast of East Africa, with clear impacts on fish stocks.

The sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) affirmed that a 1.5C temperature rise above preindustrial levels may be reached by 2050 due to the continued dumping of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. If drastic emissions cuts are not embarked on, the world is on track to overshoot the Paris Agreement targets, thereby literally frying Africa and cooking our oceans. This will make nonsense of any notion of the Blue Economy, except that the oceans could become arenas for geoengineering experimentations aimed at sucking carbon out of the atmosphere or for some form of solar radiation management by pumping seawater into the clouds.

With temperatures rising and polar icecaps melting, the IPCC report assures that sea-level rise stays on a steady course. The floods are coming. The submergence of coastal communities and cities will go from being a threat to becoming a stark reality. We are already seeing deadly floods on virtually every continent. With sea-level rise comes the loss of coastal land and infrastructure, as well as the loss of freshwater systems through salinization. For a continent that often suffers water stress and has the spectre of water conflicts hanging like the sword of Damocles, real action must be taken to counter climate change.
One key action that must be taken is the outlawing of new oil or gas fields in our oceans and other aquatic ecosystems. The oil rigs and FSPOs (Floating Productions Storage & Offloading) cut off fishing grounds and engender human rights abuses by security forces who expose fishers to extreme danger just to ensure an expansive off-limits cordon ostensibly positioned to protect oil company installations. It is equally the time to halt the building of petrochemical refineries and other polluting industries (such as the one at Lekki Free Zone at Lagos) on seashores as they are sure to pollute the waters, poison the biodiversity and negatively impact the food chain. A phosphate factory at Kpeme, Togo, for example, pumps its wastes into the Atlantic Ocean, literally fertilizing the continental shelf to death. Nutrient pollution can have devastating impacts on public health, aquatic ecosystems, and the overall economy.

Blue economy sails on the highway of pervasive market fundamentalism that seeks to shrink public involvement in productive endeavours and yield the space for private enterprises. Market fundamentalism blinds policymakers to the fact that the so-called efficient and profitable private sectors depend on subsidies and securities provided by the public sector. One only needs to think of the bailouts of financial institutions during economic meltdowns and the elimination of risks and ethics by pharmaceutical companies in the race for COVID-19 vaccines. These are, of course, justified by overriding public interests. The drive to support industries such as those producing plastics, and our love for disposable products, permit highly polluting materials such as plastics to be unleashed into our environment, thereby causing great harm to our oceans and aquatic creatures. It has been said that there will be more plastics than fish (by weight) in the oceans by 2050. Reports indicate that the production of plastics has increased twentyfold since 1964, reaching 311 million tonnes in 2014. This quantity is expected to double again over the next 20 years and almost quadruple by 2050. It should be noted that the volume of petroleum resources needed to make plastics has been increasing steadily, and despite the highly visible pollution impacts, the demands keep rising, with only about 5% of plastics being effectively recycled and 40% ending up in a landfill, while about 30% of the plastics end up in sensitive ecosystems such as the world’s oceans. Already there is a plastic flotilla or a Great Plastic Patch in the Pacific Ocean that is euphemistically called the 8th continent.

The politics of economic development and market fundamentalism allow what would ordinarily be unthinkable to happen. A drop of crude oil contaminates 25 litres of water, making it unsuitable for drinking. Imagine how much water was polluted by Shell's 40,000 barrels Bonga Oil spill of December 2011 or Exxon's Idoho platform spill of similar volume in 1998. Shell's Forcados terminal spill of 1979 dumped 570,000 barrels of crude oil into the estuary and creeks, while

---

The sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) affirmed that a 1.5°C temperature rise above preindustrial levels may be reached by 2050 due to the continued dumping of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
Chevron (then known as Texaco) released 400,000 barrels of crude oil in the Funiwa incident of 1980. Add to these the Ozoro-1 oil well blowout off the coast of Ondo State in April 2020, which has remained a crime scene more than a year after.

**A little help from Nature**

Once upon a time, our turbulent seas were embraced by verdant mangroves on our coastlines. Today the mangrove forests have been deforested for energy or to make way for infrastructure or urbanisation. These forests are key components of a viable Gulf of Guinea. Without them, the region has no answer to rampaging waves and sea-level rise. The spawning ground for fish species and nurseries for the juveniles gets eroded and lost as mangroves get depleted. Oil pollution turns the mangrove forests into dead zones. Their deforestation opens up space for invasive nipa palms introduced to the Niger Delta in 1906 by a horticultural adventurer. The call for the restoration of mangrove forests must be supported and acted upon.

This can be done in cooperation with community groups that are raising nurseries and demonstrating their efficacy through pilot efforts. Support by the government can bring these efforts to scale and impact. Alternative energy sources also need to be provided for communities that depend on mangroves for fuelwood.

Protecting selected freshwater and marine ecosystems could be one way of securing thriving biodiversity in our oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers. However, such areas must be delineated with close attention to indigenous knowledge and the cultural protection norms of communities that depend on them for their livelihoods. Top-down approaches to establishing protected areas end up dislocating communities, harming their economies, and eroding their cultures, spirituality, and dignity. Some of such areas are simply demarcated for officially sanctioned land and sea grabbing. They can, and have been, used as tools of oppression and exploitation.

In an article titled “Protected areas must promote and respect rights of small-scale fishers, not dispossess them,” Sibongiseni Gwebani stated, “The concept of protecting an identified fishing area, designating marine spatial territory and linking this to specific regulations has a long history in South Africa. These have been influenced by the apartheid spatial planning legislation introduced in the 1960s. Large proportions of coastal land were forcibly cleared for either forestry or marine conservation by using racial segregation laws. The histories of all of the major marine protected areas in South Africa are shaped by racially based removals through land and seascape during the 1970s and 1980s.”

**No Politics with our Seas**

The statistics rolled out during the School of Ecology on the Politics of the Sea organised by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) show a very disturbing situation in the Gulf of Guinea. The gulf has become one of the most dangerous maritime areas in the world. One of the presenters informed the audience that 90% of sea-based environmental pollution footprint in the Gulf of Guinea takes place in Nigerian waters. The region is very poorly policed and is a zone of plunder with hundreds of thousands of stolen crude oil moving unhindered. When we gaze at the ocean, creek, or river, let us think about life below the surface, not as an SDG goal, but as creatures that have the right to live and thrive as children of Mother Earth. Let us see our water bodies as arenas of life and remind ourselves that we are just a tiny fraction of the biomass of living beings on earth. The seas offer us a canvass for learning the positive politics of life rather than scrambling to grab and trash whatever we can lay our hands on.

‘Top-down approaches to establishing protected areas end up dislocating communities, harming their economies, & eroding their cultures, spirituality, and dignity.’

44 / ECO ~ INSTIGATOR #33
UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

What After Oil — a Public Forum in collaboration with Shehu Musa Yar’Adua Foundation

Coastal Environmental Monitoring and Reporting Training

Conversation with Frantz Fanon

Oilwatch Global Gathering/FishNet Alliance General Assembly

School of Ecology

Always visit www.homef.org for upcoming events and how to participate.
Africa Can Feed Herself

By Fidelis Allen

The 7th Public Lecture of the Right Livelihood College Campus at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, co-hosted by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), was held on 25 June 2021 with Professor Hans Harren speaking on the topic, Africa Can Nourish Itself.

The lecture, which was held virtually for the second time since it started in 2015, was attended by students, civil society actors, community folks, management and staff members of the University of Port Harcourt, and friends of the College in different locations of the world. These lectures are part of the Port Harcourt College Campus’ efforts at realizing the vision of linking those who have been at the forefront of change-making concerning key global problems with the academic community for the sharing of experiences and knowledge for the common good. This informed the initiative at the Right Livelihood Award Foundation in Sweden several years ago. All previous and future speakers in the annual public lectures on the campus were/will be laureates of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation awarded for their change-making role in society. The story of these lectures and the rich profile of the speaker for this year was highlighted in the preliminaries by Fidelis Allen and Nnimmo Bassey.
Nnimmo himself and the late Ogoni environmental rights activist, Kenule Saro Wiwa, have been the only recipients of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation from Nigeria to date. Professor Prince C. Mmom, who represented the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt, had expressed the university’s pleasure regarding the collaboration with the Health of Mother Earth Foundation and the Rights Livelihood Award Foundation.

The overriding theme of food security under which the topic of this year’s lecture was presented is of great concern to many today. Policymakers, civil society, multilateral organisations, including the World Food Programme, are worried about the state of food security. Africa is expected to double its current population by 2050. With 1,340,598,147 in 2020, Africa already accounts for 18.2% of the global population. Nigeria, in particular, is expected to reach the same population level as China by 2050. Worse, rising insecurity due to the activities of kidnappers, killers, bandits, and terrorists in the country, is threatening the ability of households in urban and rural communities to access adequate nutritional food. Africa as a whole is facing a grave crisis in its agricultural systems and socio-economic and political conditions, with enormous implications for the availability of peace and affordable and nutritious food. These contexts were mainly the motivation for the choice of subject for this year’s public lecture. Hans began the lecture with a context that includes his vast experience of almost thirty years working in Africa, as well as the time he spent in Nigeria. His extensive knowledge of agriculture and food systems during these years has benefited students, teachers and policymakers in Africa, including Nigeria, Kenya and Togo, to name a few.
Hans had received the Right Livelihood Award in 2013 for his contribution to change in society through his exploits in the use of knowledge for the transformation and empowerment of students and practitioners, although he expressed misgivings about the sustainability of those efforts since his leaving Africa. He founded several organisations and directed research centres that have contributed greatly to practice and scholarship, including the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture of Nigeria in Jos.

“I am very pleased to be back in Nigeria, even though virtually, I enjoyed my time in Nigeria with the farmers,” Hans stated as he began the lecture. He immediately explained the correction he made on the topic, from ‘Africa can feed itself’ to ‘Africa can nourish itself.’ The sense here, according to him, is that feeding is associated with animals, whereas nourishment pertains to human beings. This conceptual distinction seems cultural as he explains that in Europe, people are nourished, in contrast to the idea of the feeding of animals or non-human life.

He then took the whole issue of whether Africa can nourish itself in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. He saw these goals as an important framework for the realization of food security in Africa. As he argued, “the SDGs offer the transformative path suggested by the International Assessment on Agriculture, Science, Technology and Development (IAASTD) report signed by 18 African countries.”

The objectives of the IAASTD report and the SDGs are consistent with the capacity to assist countries in making progress on food security and food justice.

His diagnosis of food systems in Africa which has worsened with the outbreak of Covid-19, was insightful. He insisted that agroecology was the way out. Such a model for building food systems addresses the issue of food security that also focuses on nutrition and the question of food sovereignty from the three-dimensional fronts of environment, society, and economy. All three have been missing in the present character of food systems in Africa.

The overproduction of food crops, such as cassava and corn, to the detriment of vegetables and other green crops, was mentioned as inimical to the health of people. The need for a balance between basic foods and vegetables in Africa, he said, will help solve the problem of diabetes and obesity. So far, the food systems in Africa do not promote this balance, something the lecturer believes must change.

Other problems with Africa’s current food systems include insensitivity to climate change which the existing model significantly contributes to. He talked about the need for system change through system-thinking, which allows the connection of food systems to every other aspect of life. This, for him, should be integrated into the training of students in universities, a role he believes universities can play conveniently and for which he would be willing to offer more help. He also highlighted the fact that the dietary choices of consumers tend to shape farmers’ choices. In other words, farmers respond to the food choices made by consumers.
Another problem also resides in the move away from food systems based on ecosystem services to systems that promote the production of cheap food without nutrients to make a profit.

Hans again proposed agroecology as the solution. He argued for the need for subsistence farming to integrate agroecology which he believes is the way to sustainable agriculture and food security.

The model takes into consideration the need to protect the ecology, society, and the economy of the people. This three-dimensional feature of the model agrees with the concept of sustainable development. It will check the over-production of few crops to the detriment of the others. There are over 3,000 crops that can be farmed, but farmers have concentrated on a few, merely six or so in Africa, according to Hans. His critique of the food systems in Africa is based on this.

This has promoted diseases, which he argues governments have continued to spend a lot of money on through their annual budgets. This needs to change through the balance that an agroecological model brings. It can begin with a change in diet from the present mono-food diet to a green diet. This is one way in which agroecological farming, in contrast to conventional farming, supports the environment, society, and the economy. It feeds the soil so that the soil can feed plants.

Africa can nourish itself if its leaders take the steps laid out in the agroecological model, among which is to break away from monocultural farming and from the use of dangerous pesticides, which have long been banned in Europe and several other regions of the world.

Africa should discourage agricultural systems that destroy ecosystem services, biodiversity and promote policies that favour local farmers. In addition, the opportunity for the continent to nourish itself exists with the availability of land.

Thus, leaders should stop selling off the land to foreigners and multinational corporations. Already nearly 50% of the available land has been sold off. It must stop and give farmers more access to the land. Furthermore, the importation of food should be discouraged. This is a political issue with a lot of external political pressure, which has to be tackled.

\[\text{“Africa can nourish itself if its leaders take the steps laid out in the agroecological model, among which is to break away from monocultural farming and from the use of dangerous pesticides"} \]

Fidelis Allen is Professor of Development Studies in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies and Coordinator of the Port Harcourt Campus of the Rights Livelihood College at the University of Port Harcourt. Email: fidelis.allen@uniport.edu.ng
The 4th School of Ecology of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) for 2021 was held at HOMEF’s international office in Benin City on 24 and 25 August, with the theme Politics of the Sea. As efforts are being made towards restoring the ecosystem and saving the world from catastrophic climate change, different concepts and ideologies are springing up. While some are geared towards improving the quality of life and proffering real sustainable solutions, others lean towards the continuous profiting of big corporations at the expense of the wellbeing of local communities.

HOMEF believe that it is pertinent to demystify these new concepts before they gain acceptance and become pivots of new policies.
The two-day School of Ecology was a combination of in-person and virtual participation with over 25 participants joining from Abuja, Akwa Ibom, Calabar, Owerri, Ogun and virtually via Zoom and Facebook livestreaming.

The session was targeted at the civil society, community organisers, groups, organisations, activists, academics, students and the general public with interest in deepening their understanding of the Blue Economy concept and clear political analysis on the issues surrounding aquatic ecosystem pollution and their effects on community livelihoods and wellbeing.

Presentations covered topics on the political cost of the blue economy; extraction, pollution and chaos in South African waters; aquatic ecosystem exploitation in the Gulf of Guinea; the political cost of the cargo cult; the ocean, geoengineering and climate threats; oceanification of Niger Delta; defenders of sea re-source – Strengthening FishNet Alliance; security in the Gulf of Guinea; fossil infrastructure and inland waters; ecosystem rebirth/restoration efforts of Ogoni women; factories and fishers (Phosphate factories of Togo & Morocco); marine and freshwater protected area; and lessons from fishers.

In the welcoming words of Nnimmo Bassey, Director of HOMEF, to understand the Blue Economy, one needs to look at the concept that inspired its creation. That concept is that of the Green Economy. The Green Economy is another top-down concept that jars the organic relationship of humans with their physical environment as it essentially deconstructs that relationship and builds upon a philosophy that distances humans and other species from the environment. It presents the environment as a thing to be manipulated, transformed, and exploited in a way that delivers gains along subsisting unequal power alignments.

Furthermore, the director added that the sea means a lot to Africa and her littoral states. West African waters that have been among the most fecund have been characterised by shrunken fish populations due to overfishing, illegal fishing, and climate change. These illegal fishing activities are often carried out by large foreign industrial trawlers that travel over long distances with the help of harmful subsidies. The rush to exploit our oceans has manifested in criminal activities, including sea piracy, waste dumping (oil spills) and stealing of fishes.

In conclusion, Nnimmo Bassey strongly called for the protection of fishers and coastal communities while putting an end to sea piracy and human rights abuses from security agencies. He also called for a halt to investment in searching for fossil fuels in our water bodies and strongly encouraged the use of maritime resources for the good of citizens and in sustainable ways.

Mr Desmond D’sa, while speaking on the topic of fighting the Waves (extraction, pollution and chaos in South African waters), said that the exploitation of oil and gas resources naturally leads to impoverishment in the lives of those living and working in oil- and gas-rich areas. In 2014, the South African government launched Operation Phakisa as a “fast results delivery programme” designed to boost economic growth and create jobs in the context of the government’s National Development Plan, with the ocean economy as one of its focus areas.
But rather than focus on the stewardship of the ocean and the sustainable use of ocean resources, Operation Phakisa has prioritised the establishment of an offshore oil and gas industry.

He stressed the need to focus on a just transition from the dependence on fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy while ensuring that our marine resources are not only protected but used for the wellbeing of everyone.

From the speakers’ presentations and extensive discussions, the following observations were drawn.

The exploitation of oil and gas resources in the ocean naturally leads to the impoverishment of the lives of those living and working in oil and gas-rich areas. It also results in the extinction of endangered species, the destruction of habitats, oil pollution, climate change and negative socio-economic impacts on fishers, on tourism, as well as on other recreational activities. For example, Operation Phakisa “fast results delivery programme” was launched in South Africa to boost economic growth and create jobs with the ocean economy as one of its focus areas has prioritised the establishment of an offshore oil and gas industry rather than focusing on the stewardship of the ocean and the sustainable use of ocean resources. It was also established that the over-exploitation of aquatic resources, pollution and the introduction of alien species lead to the destruction of biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems. Mangroves and coral reefs, as well as seagrass beds, patch reefs, mudflats, salt marches, estuaries and associated habitats, act as nursery grounds for juveniles of numerous fish species. The contamination and loss of mangroves could decrease fish stock and increase exposure to climate change impacts for coastal communities and tourism. Geoengineering is a large-scale technological intervention in the Earth’s oceans, soils and atmosphere with the aim of weakening some of the symptoms of climate change.

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.

Also worthy of note is the fact that the Blue Economy model seeks to promote the rapacious exploitation of aquatic resources and has the potential to unleash sea grab in Africa. The beneficiaries of the Blue Economy scheme would be pockets of the elite in the developing world who have hoarded the benefits of our shared natural capital and grown gluttonous therefrom.

In summary, to ensure effective safeguards of our oceans for the benefit of peoples and live below water, the following recommendations were made at the end of the two-day School of Ecology session..

The exploitation of oil and gas resources in the ocean naturally leads to the impoverishment of the lives of those living and working in oil and gas-rich areas...the extinction of endangered species
a) There should be a halt to investment in searching for fossil fuels and dangerous exploitation in our water bodies. The Blue Economy is a top-down concept that claims to enhance the living standards and livelihoods of the people but, in reality, portends great danger for Africa and therefore should be rejected. We do not need approaches that further compound the problems but a completely overhauled economic system that is just, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

Similarly, geoengineering and similar experiments should be banned because of their high risk and potential to create unpredictable consequences. The real solutions to climate change are those that address its root causes.

b) Moreover, there should be national laws that build mechanisms for climate mitigation and adaptation actions, including coastal protection.

To avoid irreversible impacts on people and the environment, it is important that the government 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.

c) Finally, it is time for Africa to move away from the racist colonial economy to a people's economy. Against this backdrop, Africa needs to define its own understanding of prosperity and progress while promoting innovative thinking and practices that will enhance human and ecological well-being.

The speakers/instigators included
Nnimmo Bassey (Health of Mother Earth Foundation)
Desmond D’sa (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, Durban SA)
Prof Sofiri-Joab Peterside (University of Port Harcourt)
Neth Dano (Action on Erosion, Technology and Concentration ETC Group)
Chief Negi James (Vice-President of the Ijaw National Council)
Dr Dakuku Peterside (ex-DG/CEO of Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency-NIMASA)
Stephen Oduware (HOMEF’s project lead on Alliances and Networking as well as Coordinator of the FishNet Alliance)
Ako Amadi (a marine ecologist)
Diana Nabiruma (Officer at the Africa Institute for Energy Governance - AFIEGO)
Martha Agbani (Development Practitioner and ED of Lokiaka Community Development Centre)
Kwami Kpondzo (Campaigner with Friends of the Earth International)
My SoE Experience –
Arekpitan Ikhenade

When Nigerians talk of climate change, we reach for foreign examples as if this is a thing we can miraculously say is not our problem. We cite melting of ice caps, floods, hurricanes and heatwaves in places we cannot properly pronounce. But climate change is a Nigerian problem, and climate justice should be a trendy Nigerian topic. We live in a country with some of the most polluted cities in the world. Every year, we experience deadly floods in states across the nation. Then there’s the oceanification of the Niger Delta and the many oil spill clean-ups that may never happen.

What attending the School of Ecology (SoE) did for me was this: it brought the problems much closer to home. Of course, I have always been aware of the problems, but I think somehow, I was unaware of its gravity and what this means for Nigerian lives and our children. During “Politics of the Sea,” (the theme of this year’s School of Ecology), we learned about fossil infrastructure and inland waters, ocean encroachment and the gradual erasure of communities in Bayelsa State. We learned of the dangers of geoengineering and the policy of sea grabs. We learned about maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea and how Nigeria needs to do what giants do; take the first step towards positive change. We also learned of the Fishnet Alliance, a network of fishers engaged in promoting sustainable fishing in line with ecosystem limits.

There is some sort of powerlessness that surrounds most conversations about climate justice. It’s an “us vs them” thing, and mostly, the “us” can do little or nothing to effect the changes they want to see in the world. This is not true for SoE. At the School of Ecology, I listened to experts “ordinarify” the issues. I listened to their show what big and small stakeholders alike can do to change the status quo. I watched them show how power still belongs in the hands of ordinary people like us who will do everything we can to fight for the planet we inhabit; ordinary people who will demand better from themselves and their communities.

Good work is a marathon and not a sprint. HOMEF understands this, and SoE is an attempt to get others to gear up for a marathon too. It was wonderful two days and my first time in Benin City. Many thanks to Health of Mother Earth Foundation for the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge and discover the ancient city at the same time.

Many thanks to Sofiri Peterside, Neth Dano, Chief Nengi James, Dakuku Peterside, Desmond D’Sa, Diana Nabinruma and Kwami Kpondzo, whose talks and presentations made me question my commitment to environmental justice. I can’t wait to add my voice to the climate conversation. I can’t wait to use this gift; I have to curate conversations about how we are treating the earth in this part of the world.
It was 26 August 2021. I picked up my phone to check the time, only to find out that it was still just past 2:00 a.m.! 2:00 a.m.!? As I pondered on what could be responsible for the lack of sleep and seeming long night, I realized, this time, it wasn’t from the subconsciousness of still having a deadline to meet, nor was it from another case of some school kids being kidnapped somewhere in the country, but rather the result of the previous two days’ conversations during Health of Mother Earth Foundation’s School of Ecology session on “Politics of the Sea.”

I recalled the startling revelations from the different facilitators over the two days: From Oduware Stephen revealing in his presentation that Nigeria is the world’s fourth-largest importer of fish despite being home to over 12.5 million hectares of inland waters, to the very alarming statistics by Dr Dakuku Peterside on the state of insecurity on Nigeria’s waterways and the Gulf of Guinea in general, which accounted for 95% of global kidnappings at sea in 2019, etc.

From the findings of Prof. Sofiri Peterside on how Nigeria has degenerated into a rentier state. And how a few gatekeepers and their cronies have kept sabotaging government policies for their inordinate ambitions and personal aggrandizement at the seaports, thereby frustrating the economy - to the commendable efforts of some activists in South Africa, challenging government-backed oil companies in the courts, whose activities are bent on destroying the environment and livelihoods, as revealed by Desmond D’Sa in his presentation.

It dawned on me that amidst the current very worrisome politics of the sea, this quote by Nnimmo Bassey in his presentation on “Politics of Turbulent Waters” captured the essence of the deliberations and should be a code of conduct for every human on planet earth on how we relate with our water bodies and their resources.

“When we gaze at the ocean, creek or river, let us think about life below the surface, not as an SDG, but as creatures that have the right to live and thrive, as children of Mother Earth. Let us see our water bodies as arenas of life and remind ourselves that we are just a fine fraction of the biomass of living things on the earth. The seas offer us a canvas for learning the positive politics of life rather than scrambling to grab and trash whatever we can lay our hands on.”
VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

LOOKING TO HELP?
If you would like to join our team of volunteers, send an email to
volunteers@homef.org