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The Ikarama
Paradox

Conversations with
Walter Rodney

Meeting the
Last Militant

The Curse of
The Blessing

Editorial Team

Nnimmo Bassey
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Cadmus Atake-Enade
Joyce Brown
Stephen Oduware
Mfoniso Antia
Magdalene Idiang
Kome Odhomor
Jasper Koikoibo

Guest Copyeditor

Kingsley Ugwuanyi

Administration

Dotun Davids Olatundun
Elvis Omorogbe
Kelechi Okoede
Mabel Obaseki
Cletus Ita-Chot

Layout

Babawale Obayanju (Owales)

Cover Design/ Photo

Babawale Obayanju (Owales)

Circulation

Shehu Akowe

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Health of Mother Earth Foundation,

30 19th Street, off Ugbowo-Lagos
Road, Benin City 300212, Nigeria
P.O. Box 1057 Ugbowo, Benin City,
Nigeria

Tel: +2348173706095

www.homef.org

CONTACT INFO

All mails, inquiries and articles should be sent to **editor@homef.org** or **home@homef.org**

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Home Run

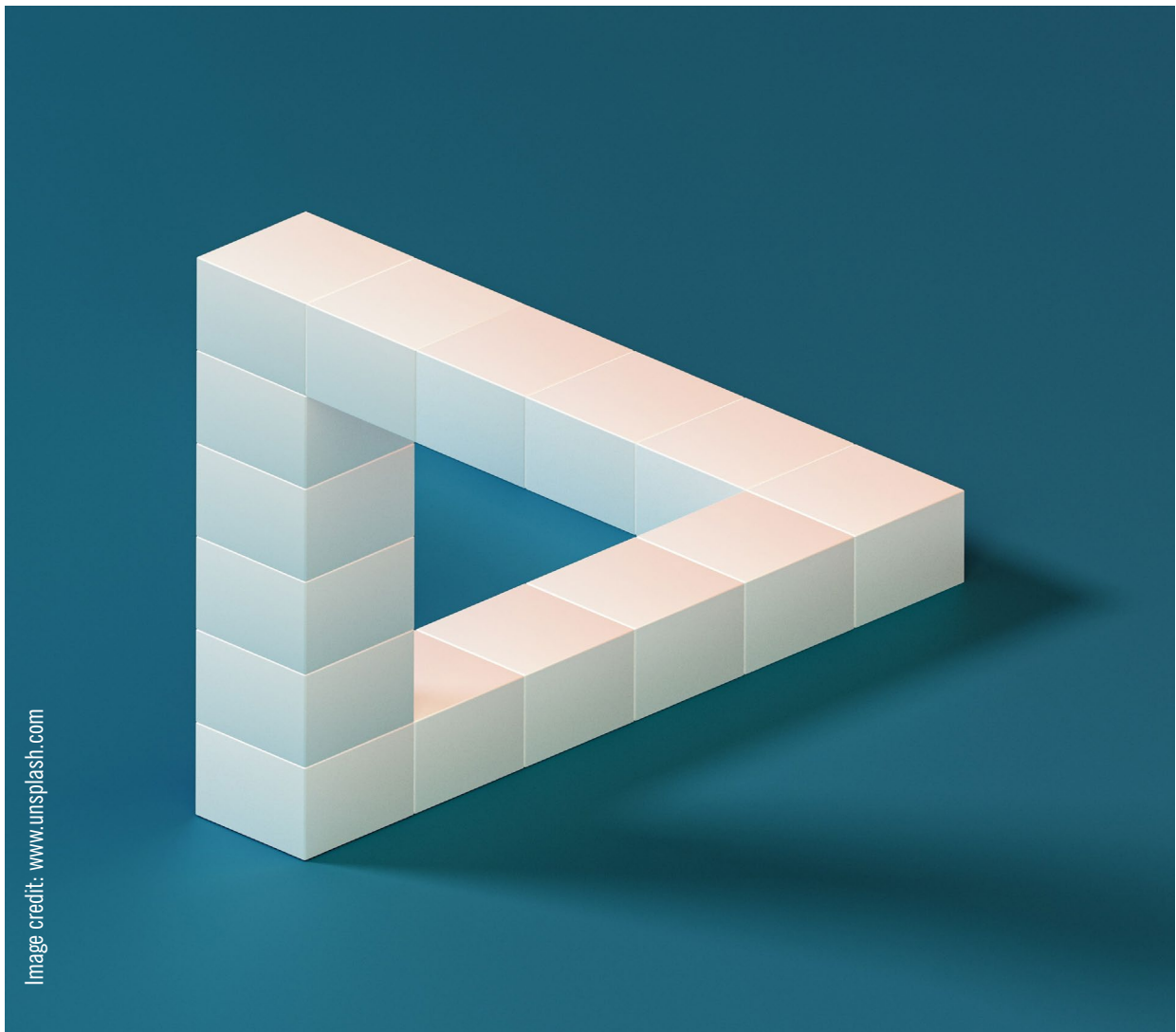
Welcome to the 2022 September edition of our quarterly magazine, eco-Instigator. This is the 37th in the series and, as usual, promises to be informative, educative and instigative. The eco-Instigator is one fundamental vehicle for the attainment of the change HOMEf clamours for; it spotlights the core issues of the environmental and climate debates – bringing in the cultural, social, livelihood and justice dynamics, and proffering real, pragmatic and people-centred solutions to the environmental challenges plaguing our world.

This edition covers a wide array of current hot topics in the environment justice space. The issue of fish washing ashore, for instance, is increasingly becoming rampant in extractive fields along the coast of Africa. There was a massive fish die-off in Nigeria's Niger Delta in 2020 that affected over 4 littoral states. The true cause, to date, has remained elusive. After 2 years, a similar incidence happened in the Isipingo lagoon, South Africa. Even though the actual cause has yet to be determined, the South African authorities believe that it may have been caused by contaminations from spills from one of three pumps in the area. We serve you reflective reports from our research and activities from community engagements to fluid sessions of discussions on contemporary environmental and climate issues caused by the commodification and auctioning of nature. We also serve you reports from our engagement with students in a bid to promote environmental clubs in schools and bring climate change discourse into the school curricula.

As usual, we bring you instigative and resonating poems and suggestions of good reads – the books you should read. And as you read this edition, remember to drop us a line or share feedback, stories, articles, poem or photos at home@homef.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

Until Victory!
Nnimmo Bassey





THE IKARAMA PARADOX

Nnimmo Bassey

Some Niger Delta communities would compete in the notorious race of being the oil spills capital of the world due to the regularity and scale of oil spill incidents they experience. Ikarama community in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State is one of such communities. A major community in the Okordia clan, it is also well known for its location on a road that forks off the East-West Highway at Zarama where the highway crosses Taylor Creek. Travellers on this highway regularly must squeeze their way through the colourful, massive and boisterous Zarama market that emerges at this intersection on Fridays.

It is a day when traders and farmers in communities within the region bring their wares and produce for sale to buyers who come from far and near to buy yams, plantains and bananas, cassava products, vegetables, meat, seafood and an assortment of other goods. The market is so massive that it literally takes up one wing of the bridge that straddles Taylor Creek at this point. The colourful umbrellas under which business is transacted here are a sight to behold. But the market doesn't give any hint of the oil pollution that swirls in the swamps and creeks beyond.

Before the advent of oil exploitation activities at Ikarama, it was a community that was fertile both for fishing and farming. Its location in the Bayelsa National Forest marked it out as a custodian of rich biodiversity. This benevolence of nature has been brutally threatened by oil over the past decades.

When oil spill is mentioned within the Okordia clan in Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Ikarama and neighbouring communities including Joinkarama readily come to the mind of anyone familiar with the history of oil spill incidents in that axis of the Niger Delta. Ikarama community is host to Shell's Okordia manifold, oil wells and pipelines owned and operated by the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC).

Reports of oil spill incidents are as numerous as they are disturbing. At a visit to an area impacted by oil spills in the community way back in 2014, it was amazing to see that those who pretended to have cleaned up the spill had merely turned the soil over to cover up, not clean up, the pollution. The grass over the area shone from the stubborn oily sheen that refused to be hidden and the fumes in the air were so thick that residents whose houses were close by had to relocate for safety reasons.

I was accompanied on that visit by Alagoa Morris, the ace monitor of the despoliation of the Niger Delta environment and Jay Naidoo, an African elder, activist and politician, who was the founding Secretary-General of the

Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and later on a minister in the government of President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Naidoo went on to reference the ecocide in Ikarama in his excellent book, ***Change: Organising Tomorrow Today***.

Naidoo was shocked by what he saw at Ikarama, Rumuekpe and Ogoni. He wrote in his book that rather than paralyzing him, what he saw made him more determined to do something to help *restore* the land to the rightful owners, the people who work with their bare hands and only take from nature what she yields to them. He continues in that struggle to this day by organizing and mentoring young people as key knowledge holders on our continent.

My last visit here may have been in 2014, but I have studiously followed the pollution trajectory here from way back to 2007 up until now. And that is why I recently returned to Ikarama today, 8 years after.

A major incident occurred in February 2018 when a resident was hit by the pungent smell of crude oil, and the sound of spraying liquid, on his way to the farm. That spill was traced by the Joint Inspection Visit (JIV) to have resulted from what is termed "third-party interference." The response to this incident was brutal as officials of the Civil Defence Corps descended on the community in the wee hours of one morning, shot a youth in the hand and on both legs, and arrested and took away a lady in lieu of her husband, a logger, who was away in the forest at that time.

Mr Udoki Orukori, the arrested woman's husband told reporters then that he did not know where his wife had been taken to. "I was informed it was Civil Defence [that arrested her]. For now, I don't have money, so there is no access for me to go after her." Mr Orukori's extreme exposure and helplessness illustrate the state of affairs of community people all over the Niger Delta who have to confront multiple security forces in the murky waters of the region and in the murkier task of securing oil and gas facilities.

Before the February 2018 incident, the last observed spill in the community was recorded two years earlier, which was attributed to Shell's equipment failure. Since then, the incidents of spills have become regular.

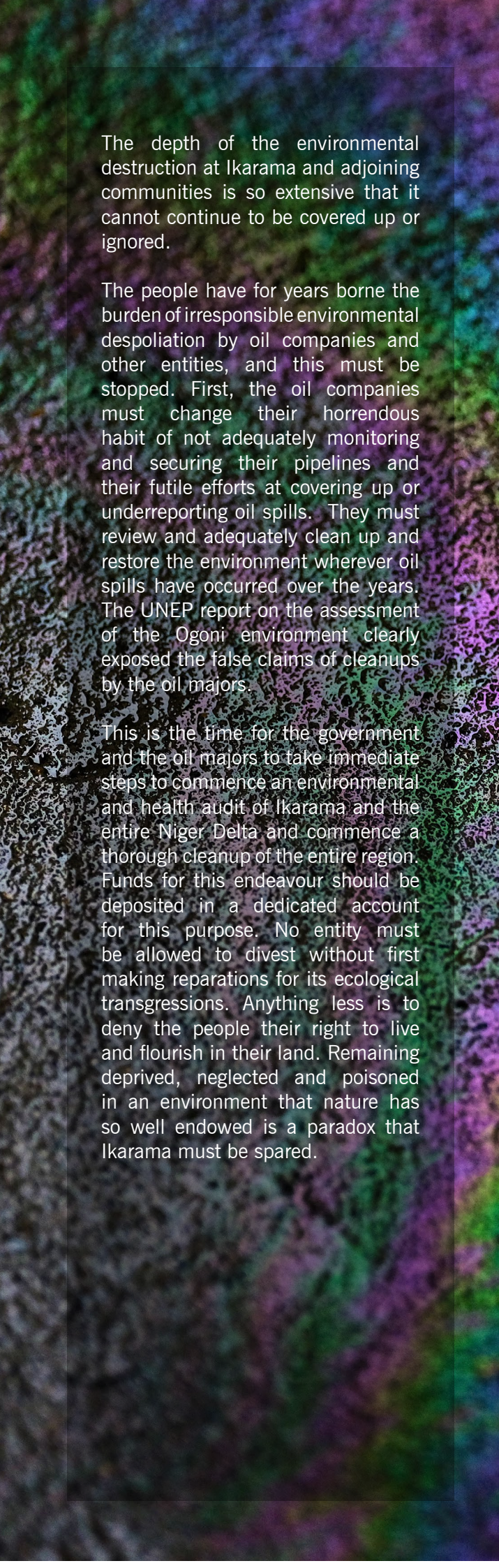
There was another major oil spill here on the evening of 11th June 2018 at Shell's Okordia Manifold, which spread to the neighbouring Kalaba community. The cleanup of the spill was slow and ineffective, and, as a result, over subsequent months the swamps remained heavily impacted with ensuing floods further compounding its impact and spread.

Although both Shell and ENI have a fair share of the blame for the spills here, most of the pollution incidents have occurred from the facilities of SPDC, notably from the Adibawa/Okodia delivery line, Okodia/Rumuekpe pipeline and Okordia Manifold. And most of the oil spills have occurred close to residential buildings, farms and farmlands, raising serious concerns about locating oil extraction facilities and activities within or close to communities. Expectedly, community people have been experiencing diminishing returns from their fishing and farming endeavours, besides the life-threatening health impacts of living in a highly toxic environment.

Chief (Mrs) Ayibakuro Warder, a community woman in Ikarama, told environmental monitors in August 2021, "Our crops don't do well again, particularly cassava and plantains. They die off after planting and we must replant repeatedly. Tuber plants like cassava and yams no longer yield like in the past. The yams rot away before harvest. We feel this could be as a result of crude oil in the environment as oil spill-impacted sites are not properly cleaned up and remediated. We have not been experiencing this before now. Sometimes, in some areas of our farmlands, as we till the soil we see crude oil. That is what we are contending with and, as fisher folks and farmers, this is a threat to our means of livelihood and health."

The story has not changed. When Benjamin Warder tried to construct fishponds in March 2021 and again in April 2022, he was greeted by crude oil oozing from the swamp. According to Mr Warder:

In March last year, I brought an excavator to prepare a fishpond for me. What I saw was quite unfortunate. I saw crude oil coming out from the ground. I raised alarm by informing the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria's Alagoa Morris. Thereafter National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), Shell and Environmental Rights Action (ERA) came and dug some spots in this area. And it was very glaring that crude oil was coming out from the ground. As a community person, I felt that since even the multinational oil company had come here to witness crude oil coming out from the ground they would come back to carry out soil tests on the entire environment and carry out proper remediation of the environment. But unfortunately, from August last year till now, nothing has been seen or heard about it from SPDC [Shell Petroleum Development Company]. That notwithstanding, I decided to try and invest again this year and brought an excavator on 26th April 2022. And you know the heavy cost of bringing a Swamp buggy down here from Yenagoa; it is expensive. And when we excavated this time, what we saw was worse than the one of 2021.



The depth of the environmental destruction at Ikarama and adjoining communities is so extensive that it cannot continue to be covered up or ignored.

The people have for years borne the burden of irresponsible environmental despoliation by oil companies and other entities, and this must be stopped. First, the oil companies must change their horrendous habit of not adequately monitoring and securing their pipelines and their futile efforts at covering up or underreporting oil spills. They must review and adequately clean up and restore the environment wherever oil spills have occurred over the years. The UNEP report on the assessment of the Ogoni environment clearly exposed the false claims of cleanups by the oil majors.

This is the time for the government and the oil majors to take immediate steps to commence an environmental and health audit of Ikarama and the entire Niger Delta and commence a thorough cleanup of the entire region. Funds for this endeavour should be deposited in a dedicated account for this purpose. No entity must be allowed to divest without first making reparations for its ecological transgressions. Anything less is to deny the people their right to live and flourish in their land. Remaining deprived, neglected and poisoned in an environment that nature has so well endowed is a paradox that Ikarama must be spared.

WE ARE ALL STEWARDS ON EARTH

As the world marks this year's World Environment Day, we reflect on the fact that we have a stewardship duty towards the earth and other beings on the planet. Unfortunately, our actions have been largely predatory and with a general tendency to ignore our own well-being.

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) dedicates this year's World Environment Day to the grassroots and the peoples whose lives and livelihoods have been gravely impacted by neo-colonial and extractive forces that mindlessly exploit and harm nature. These are communities who tackle the impacts of the multidimensional climate crises and who are facing disaster in their unsupported vulnerable state.

The theme of 2022 World Environment Day 'Only One Earth' highlights the need to create transformative changes in our policies and choices to live sustainably in harmony with nature with the full understanding that the planet is our only home and that its resources are finite.

Speaking about this theme, the Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), Nnimmo Bassey, stated that "humans must wake up from the futile dream that the earth can be recklessly exploited without dire consequences. This year's World Environment Day theme reminds us of the need to understand that the generous gifts of Nature must be handled with gratitude and care." He regrets that at a time when we should check the



Image credit: nasa on www.unsplash.com

exploitation of natural ecosystems and wasteful consumption, the world is rather investing in militarization, warfare and destruction. "It is a good time to adopt ecocide as an international crime as a means of ensuring accountability for heinous ecological crimes, including those that have intergenerational implications. We are living witnesses to the crimes committed in mining and oil fields as well as those committed in conflict zones. We must protect our biodiversity, reject species eroding, as well as reject genetic modifications of all sorts and support harmonious relationships with Nature."

As we celebrate another World Environment Day, we urge everyone to be eco-defenders, secure the environment and by this secure our well-being and that of future generations. Let us care for the Earth as it is our Mother, not our enemy.

THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA'S OIL

Magdalene Idiang

The vicious cycle of oil and gas pipeline construction and expansions in Africa dates back to the mid-1980s when the levels of investment in the exploration, exploitation and construction of pipeline projects spiked. Some of the new projects include the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP), the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline and, recently, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP).

Africa abounds with a rich bounty of natural resources. The continent holds around 30% of the world's known mineral reserves. These include cobalt, uranium, diamonds and gold, as well as significant oil and gas reserves. Given this natural wealth, it comes as no surprise that Africa is a hotspot for the high demand for basic minerals for industrial use, especially in Brazil, Russia, China, and Norway,

amongst others. These countries contest with the predominant Western oil majors in competition for acreage and increased financing of oil and gas projects in Africa. But the environmental ruins caused by the existing gas and oil pipelines in Africa are frightening. In most parts of Africa, especially Nigeria, it is an incidence of rusty pipeline breaks today, and devastating fires caused by gas leaks tomorrow. Ogoniland is a perfect example of what oil extraction can do as revealed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in its assessment report on Ogoniland in 2011, which showed hydrocarbon pollution in the water and soil that will take 30 years to clean up and rake up billions of dollars in funds for it to happen. Shell is responsible for the Ogoni pollution. But there are other multinationals from the Global North still extracting without responsibility.

Canada is developing oil resources in Okavango; oil extraction in Ecuador is expanding; China is building more coal-fired power stations. At stake is not just the risk of losing our wonderful coastline's natural beauty and ecology but also losing millions of local economic wealth and the livelihoods of Africans.

In the aftermath of the Russian threat to cut off gas to most European countries in response to sanctions imposed on them for the 24 February 2022 attack on Ukraine, an energy crisis has ensued. Europe which is reliant on Russian gas and had hitherto championed transitioning from fossil fuels is now seeking to exploit vast quantities of natural gas in Africa to replace Russian gas which accounted for 55% of their consumption.

European oil merchants are now crawling all over Africa and the Middle East for new investments to replace Russian gas that will soon stop flowing into Europe. An upsurge



in the number of oil, gas and pipeline projects signed by transnational corporations in Africa portends grave dangers for the continent.

The likely increase in new oil exploration projects in Africa will lead to disruptions in the beautiful ecosystems and the communities that have depended on them for centuries. Communities of oil and gas extraction across Nigeria and other parts of Africa have lost access to their patrimony which was transmitted from generation to generation, spanning hundreds of years. This poisoned earth is not the earth that the people of Africa knew in the past. It is not the earth people still know in places such as Uganda, Namibia, Botswana, and Kenya where people are defending their land from fossil fuels projects by International Oil Companies (IOCs).

So, which way forward?

Right now, the momentum is clearly on the side of Africans as the renewed scramble for oil and gas on the continent has exposed

the hypocrisy of the Global North on the just energy transition targets that they themselves set. More than ever before, Africans must, in unison, rise and demand that countries of the Global North stick to the same goals they set before the Russia-Ukraine war began. There is a positive side to the Russian threat to shut the gas taps to their European partners if forecast by experts in the oil and gas business is anything to go by. It will serve as a basis for Europe to leapfrog to a low carbon economy which climate experts believe will significantly cut down greenhouse gas emissions. Perhaps this is just the trigger that the world needs to achieve real zero. Turning to Africa to fill the void that Russia filled will only ignite more flares, and cause more pollution and human rights violations. Africans should not allow this.

Africans, be wise!



ACTIONS FOR THE OCEANS AND OUR WELLBEING

“ ..we cannot talk about collective actions without first defining what the problems are, their causes and who are responsible for the problems.

”

The marking of international days has come to stay! It has become indelible in the global space. World Ocean Day was first proposed by Canada at the Earth Summit that took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 originally with the aim of celebrating the planet's oceans, establishing and highlighting our personal connection to the sea, as well as raising awareness of the essential role it plays in our lives and the overall health of the environment.

8th June became celebrated every year after the United Nations recognized the Day in 2008 and since then has become a ritual for drawing attention to the oceans. As the world marks the Day, it is important to ask real questions as to who is destroying our oceans, seas, rivers and creeks. What are the drivers of the destruction?

As the world marks the year 2022 World Ocean Day with the theme *Revitalization: Collective Action for the Ocean*, it is instructive to have a sober reflection on the state of our oceans, seas, rivers and creeks; it is also important that locals who have lived in harmony with these water bodies be recognized and supported.

As we sit by the river bank in Ogulagha community, Delta State, Nigeria to dialogue with fishers and community people whose connection with the ocean, rivers and creeks around them goes beyond livelihoods (depending on the aquatic ecosystems goods and services; this connection is also both spiritual and cultural), we are taken aback to reflect on how the community had flourished before the advent of oil exploration and exploitation. Like many other communities of the Niger Delta suffering from the impacts of extractive activities, Ogulagha community is now being impacted by incessant spills that threaten not only the aquatic ecosystem but also the survival of the people.

The Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) lends his voice and calls for real collective actions to protect the oceans and other water bodies. According to him, "we cannot talk about collective actions without first defining what the problems are, their causes and who are responsible for the problems. It is crystal clear that industrial fishing,

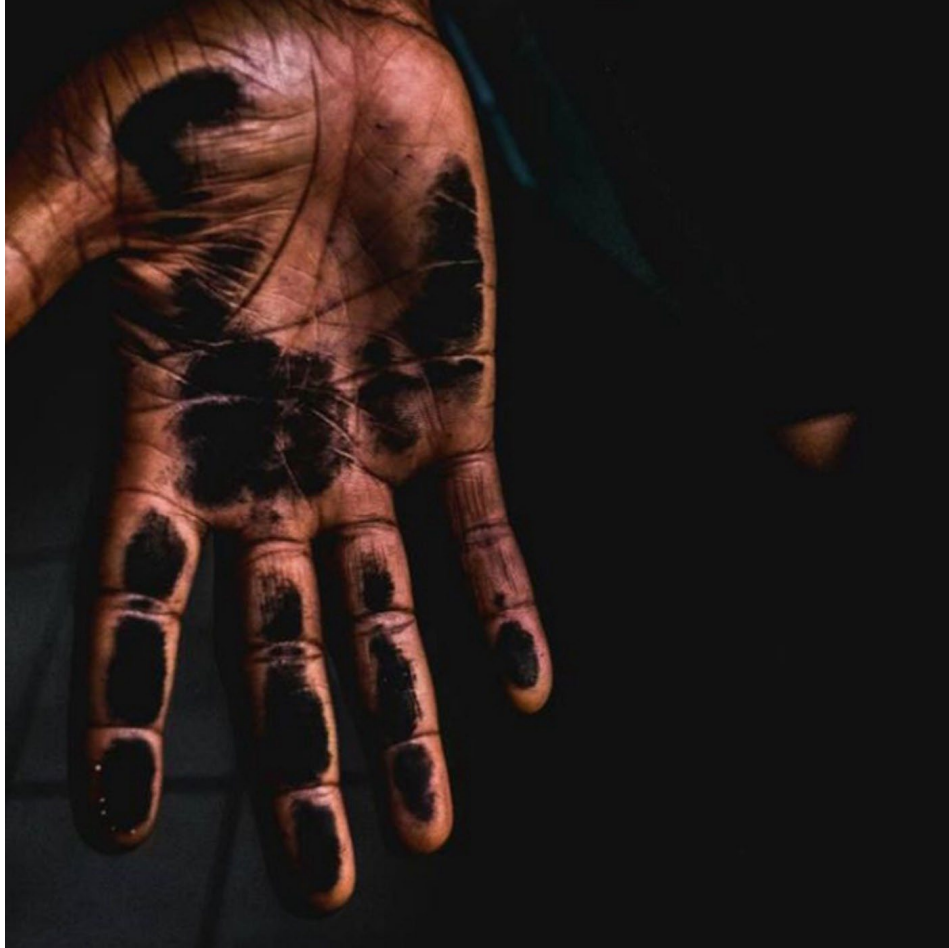
offshore exploration and exploitation, dumping of waste offshore, seabed mining ... are the major drivers of pollutions and aquatic ecosystems destruction; and yet, nobody is talking about the actual perpetrators. It is time to rethink and come to our senses that this mindless exploitation and abuse - leading to all forms of pollution and destruction - must stop."

Speaking on behalf of the FishNet Alliance - a network of fishers in Africa - Stephen Oduware said that "fishers are facing a lot of problems ranging from pollution to low catch of fish, climate change impacts and then to insecurity at the high sea. It seems there is a deliberate attempt to erase fishers out of the equation and value chain. The recent plan by the Nigerian government to deploy Genetically Improved Tilapia Fish (GIFT) buttresses this at the national level; while the current WTO chair's negotiation test on fisheries subsidies evidences it at the global level."

The Alliance, therefore, calls on national, regional and continental governments to think in the interest of the peoples, especially those on the frontline of the impacts; to consult fishers on policies that govern aquatic ecosystems; and to support artisanal fishers because they support the economy and provide employment.

What is needed now is a deliberate and honest effort to redeem the world's oceans from the firm grip and stranglehold of corporate capture. It is time to name names of historic polluters, waste disposers, deep-sea and seabed destructive agents, and collectively hold them to account to clean up their mess. The time to act is now!





THE CURSE OF THE BLESSING: THE STORY OF THE PORT HARCOURT SOOT AND ITS HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

The discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Otuabagi community, Oloibiri District of Bayelsa State, in June of 1956 was greeted by Nigerians and particularly the Niger Deltans with so much joy, high hopes and expectations that this “blessing” will herald massive human and infrastructural development to all Nigerians.

After about six decades, the people of the Niger Delta have come to the reality that what was thought to be a blessing was actually a curse, one which has brought the pollution of rivers, farmlands, underground water, and diseases of diverse kinds. The people of the Niger Delta are predominantly fishermen and women and farmers, so with the pollution of their farmlands and rivers by incessant oil spills from poorly maintained oil pipelines and sabotage from oil thieves and illegal oil bunkerers came the loss of sources of livelihood, poverty and extreme hunger.

Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, is a cosmopolitan city and the commercial nerve centre of oil and gas exploration and exploitation, playing host to almost all the international oil companies in Nigeria. Since the discovery of oil,

the oil companies have continued to this day to flare gases, releasing toxic, carcinogenic hydrocarbons into the atmosphere. The activities of artisanal crude oil refining, abattoirs using condemned tyres to roast their meat, industries using large plants that spew hydrocarbon fumes, burning of dumpsites, carbon monoxide emission from cars and generating sets all contribute to the appearance of the black substance in Port Harcourt. Sometime in 2017, residents of Port Harcourt metropolis suddenly began to notice black substances on the floors of their homes, in their nostrils, on their cars and clothes.

They wake up in the morning and this thick black fog covers the atmosphere making it impossible for the rays of the sun to pass through. The atmosphere appears as though it is about to rain, 8 am looks like 4 am, and even drivers would have to put on their head lamps to be able to drive around within the city. Soon residents began to share their observations on social media, it became a concern to almost all residents and has been a topical conversation.

Environmental experts later identified this black substance as soot, which they said is a particulate matter from the incomplete combustion of fossil fuel. Residents of Port Harcourt

popularly call it *black soot*. This soot is composed of a group of hydrocarbons collectively called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). Despite the outcry by the residents of Port Harcourt, there was no response from the federal and state governments, which made concerned citizens launch a social media campaign **#stopthesoot** which trended nationally and globally within months, gaining local and international media attention. Concerned citizens under the **#stopthesoot** campaign in collaboration with civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, media organizations and prominent individuals carried out a series of street protests which later forced the Rivers State government to set up a technical committee to ascertain the sources of the soot and its composition.

After months of investigation, the technical committee submitted a preliminary report stating that the concentration of the soot was high in certain parts of the city and that the concentration spikes at night. The committee also reported that the soot is composed of carbon, nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, benzopyrene, benzofluoranthene, dibenzocarbazole, phenanthridine, benzoacridine, and fluoranthene amongst

others. Prof. Blessing Didia, a medical doctor, professor of histopathology and a member of the technical committee while being interviewed by a radio station in Port Harcourt, admitted that the constituents of the soot were exponentially carcinogenic to humans. More than four years after the technical committee submitted its report, it is yet to be published.

plants in the particulate phase through the dry/wet deposition processes. Similarly, Rajpara et al. (2017) and Tong et al. (2018) have observed that the mode of exposure, exposure duration and exposure dose are important parameters for the severity of PAHs toxic effects.

Anatomically, hairs line the nostrils which serve to trap

deoxygenated blood releases carbon dioxide and picks up oxygen which is taken to the heart for transmission to all parts of the body; during expiration, carbon dioxide is expelled to complete the respiratory cycle.

The chief constituent of the soot is carbon. During respiration, the soot goes into the lungs to reach the alveolar spaces. Red blood cells have a higher affinity for carbon than for oxygen; therefore, in the alveolar spaces, the red blood cells pick up carbon at the expense of oxygen and transport the same to tissues in the body. The carbon and other PAHs get incorporated into the nuclei of the cells where they alter their genetic sequence leading to almost all the health complications of the soot in a very complex process. Oxygen is very vital for biochemical reactions to take place in the body, by picking up more carbon, the concentration of oxygen in the blood becomes too low (hypoxaemia) and so is tissue oxygen concentration (hypoxia).



The Health Implications of the Soot

All hydrocarbons get into the human system via three routes: inhalation (as in the soot), ingestion and dermal contact. The soot gets into the human body through all the routes but mainly through the respiratory system. Abdelshafy and Mansour (2016) posited that atmospheric polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are deposited in water, soil and

large particulate matter from entering the lungs, beyond the nostrils, the respiratory epithelium is lined by ciliary processes which serve to trap small, finer particles from going into the lungs.

The soot is so tiny that it measures <2.5micrometers, making it impossible to be trapped by the natural defence mechanism of the respiratory system. Physiologically, during inspiration, oxygen is taken up through the nostrils into the lungs, at the alveolar spaces

According to Lee and Vu (2010), benzopyrene is considered as one of the most carcinogenic PAHs and is generally used as an exposure marker for risk assessments. Recall that benzopyrene is one of the constituents of the soot in Port Harcourt as reported by the technical committee. Skupinska et al. (2004) observed that for smoking people, one cigarette causes an intake of 20-40ng of benzopyrene. Imagine the amount of this compound

that has been smoked by residents since 2017 till date. Port Harcourt residents have been made smokers of soot in the past five years and counting. Yu (2002) and Rajpara et al. (2017) noticed that several organs are susceptible to cancer formation due to long-term exposure to PAHs, including the lungs, skin, oesophagus, colon, pancreas, bladder and women's breasts. Bolden et al. (2017) noted that many non-cancer reproductive system-related health effects occur in both males and females due to exposure to PAH, such as sperm quality, testicular function, egg viability as well as DNA damage to the oocyte, ovarian damage and other reproductive diseases.

Smith et al. (2017) explained that benzopyrene induced infertility in the male reproductive system. These studies corroborate the study carried out in Port Harcourt by Laura et al. (2017) which revealed that the majority of male residents in Port Harcourt have different structural anomalies of their spermatozoa, meaning they can no longer impregnate their wives. Rengarajan et al. (2015) noted that the Centre for Children's Environmental Health reports demonstrated that exposure to PAHs during pregnancy is responsible for adverse birth outcomes, such as low birth weight, premature delivery, and congenital malformations. Again, this is corroborated by another study conducted in Port Harcourt by Abbey et

al. (2017) which revealed a birth defect prevalence of 20.73/1000 live births. This is very high when compared to other regions of Nigeria: South East 4.15/1000, South West 15.84/1000 and North East 5.51/1000 live births respectively. Similarly, Fienemika et al. (2018) revealed an increase in the prevalence of upper respiratory tract infections among children under five in Port Harcourt. Further, according to Perera et al. (2014) and Rengarajan et al. (2015), high prenatal PAH exposure is connected with a low IQ, asthma and increased behavioural problems in children.

Recommendations to Stop The Soot

The Rotary Club of Port Harcourt Eco in collaboration with other non-governmental organizations, civil societies, media organizations, community leaders, youth groups and good-spirited individuals organized a multi-stakeholder soot conference on the 9th of December, 2021. The aim was to come up with a win-win approach in tackling the soot menace in Port Harcourt such that the government wins, oil companies win, the operators of the artisanal crude refinery win, residents of Port Harcourt win and the environment wins at the end of the day. The recommendations herein were extracted from the presentations from resource persons and participants of

the conference.

- The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) should as a matter of urgency grant licenses to operators of artisanal refineries in the Niger Delta to establish and operate cellular and modular refineries. If this is done, their operations will be legalized and regulated, taxes will be collected, employment will be generated for the teeming unemployed youths, and the environment will be better protected.
- The FGN should renovate existing refineries in the country, and build new ones to increase the nation's crude oil refining capacity. This will ensure the availability of petroleum products across the country. The business of artisanal crude oil refining is booming due to the unavailability of petroleum products or their short supply.
- The FGN should stop oil companies from flaring gases and ensure that oil companies do their business in line with extant environmental laws, rules and regulations.
- Oil-bearing communities should be incorporated into the business of oil

and gas; they should be made to directly benefit from the proceeds of oil and gas domiciled in the areas.

- Nigerian security agencies should stop setting recovered stolen crude ablaze; instead, such crude should be taken back to the refinery or tank farms just as recovered loots are returned back to the Central Bank of Nigeria.
- Air quality monitoring devices should be placed in specific areas of the city, and daily air quality readings taken and publicized.
- A health audit should be conducted by the FGN and Rivers State government in Port Harcourt metropolis to ascertain the impact of the soot on residents of the city.

As an outcome of the conference and in reflection of the outcry by residents, the Governor of the State in his New Year's Day broadcast declared a state of emergency on the artisanal refinery in the State and declared alleged kingpins of artisanal refining wanted. He also ordered that all artisanal refining sites be destroyed in all the local government areas of the State. The actions of the Governor yielded momentary results as the concentration of the soot reduced significantly for about three months; however,

in recent months the soot has returned as though it never left. For a more sustainable fight against the soot, the win-win approach remains the most practicable way of winning the fight in the long term. The government should liaise with the artisanal refiners, study their refining technology, and see how it can be improved upon with a view to ensuring it doesn't pollute the environment and ensure they get licenses for their operations.

Conclusion

Soot comes from the incomplete combustion of fossil fuel, with the discovery of crude oil which was thought to be a blessing came the curse of environmental pollution such as soot with its dire consequences on our health. We are all dying slowly but surely; no one no matter how wealthy can buy the air they breathe to shield themselves from the consequences of the soot. It has been reported already that the majority of male residents in Port Harcourt have abnormal sperm cells, and neonates are born with varying types of birth defects, low birth weight, prematurity, acute respiratory distress syndrome, and sudden infant death syndrome. In addition, cancer is on the increase, cardiovascular diseases and kidney diseases are rising and the age of onset is reducing, and people are dying of unexplainable causes. We all have roles to play to #stopthesoot by

lending our voices and using our influence to compel those in authority to do the needful. The environment is ours to protect, conserve and preserve; if we fail to perform this civic duty, not only have we failed ourselves but our children and the generations to come after them.

Bieye Renner Briggs

(MBBS, MPH, PhD-in-view)Public Health Physician/Environmental AdvocateExecutive Director, Centre for Environment and Public Health (CEPH)
bieyebriggsmbbs@gmail.com

CLIMATE OF FEAR

By Niyi Osundare

The rains come
too late these days
and leave before their time
witheringly fields foretell
the coming of furious famines

Spring swallow summer
summer stumbles into a sweltering fall
while winter joins the frail with snowy
deluge and blinding ice

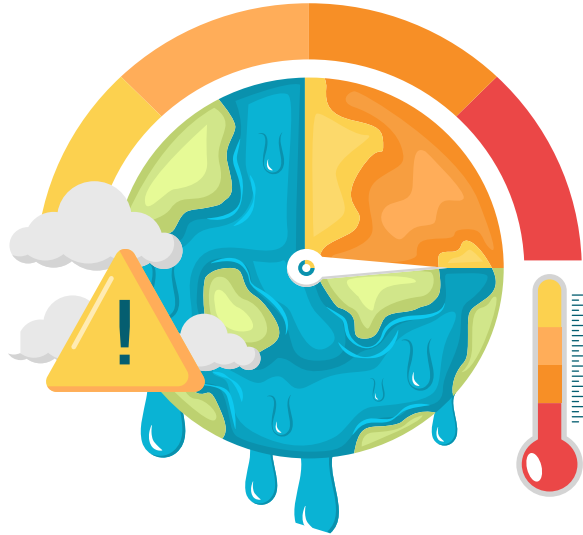
Unstoppable fires consume the skies
from Kangaroo Island to Paradise

Pause

A melting Artic chokes the oceans
which claim the coasts and bury the cities
just one whittling whistle from the
catacombs
of coral reefs bleached and buffered
by a plaque of acid and plastic debris

Once-in-a-century hurricanes
proliferate into ten-in-a-year
while countless typhoons pummel the
peace of once Pacific regions

Birds are falling from the sky
lizards roasting on their rocky perch



Out of balance, out of breath
our planet gasps and groans
as murky moons wobble their way
across the wilderness of a broken sky
...

Pause

The earth we used to know
is once-upon-a-time

This poem is culled from Prof
Osundare's latest poetry collection,
Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet
(2021)



Propelling the Energy Transition

The building and sharing of capacities towards the advocacy of policies that function to cause a just transition from polluted pathways and over-consumption of resources are one of the main aims of the School of Ecology hosted by Health of Mother Earth Foundation.

The School is designed to bring together experts, intellectuals and participants from a wide range of sectors in one knowledge space to argue and deconstruct certain narratives, concepts and policies in order to find healthier and safer pathways that work for the wellbeing and progress of the ecosystem, peoples, and the planet.

What is energy transition and what does it mean to “Propel the Transition”?

On 13-14 of July 2022, scholars, scientists, activists, students, and experts in the fields of environmental science, ecology, law, and other relevant disciplines gathered in a School of Ecology (SoE) session at Ikike Resource Centre in Benin City, Edo State, to critically examine energy, its alternatives and its intersection with climate, politics, economy, and power under the theme: ***“Propel the Energy Transition”***?

The two-day session both highlighted the ineffectiveness of Nationally Determined Contributions, the voluntary emissions reduction mechanism set in the Paris Agreement, the implications of divestment driven by the oil industries, Nigeria’s climate law as a tool for energy transition, and false solutions which include Nature Based Solution (NBS), Net zero pledges, Geoengineering and the newly promoted Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM4C) proposed mainly by the USA government at COP26 and explored alternatives in the form of renewable energy and decision-making across Africa and beyond.

The School explored several topics which included but were not limited to, Okavango Basin: implications for Namibia/Botswana and the rest of Africa; dismantling energy colonialism (towards a just transition in North Africa); nationally determined catastrophe; what the NDCs mean to Africa; where will Africa be in COP27; a view from the socio-economic and climate justice dimension on the needed transition; building resilience; deconstructing the transition; and mobilizing people’s action, amongst others.

The programme which started at 10:00 am was facilitated by Mfoniso Antia, IKIKE project lead, who welcomed participants and introduced what the School of Ecology

is about. She mentioned that the School of Ecology is under HOMEF’s knowledge space IKIKE, created for learning, contestation of ideas, interrogation of concepts, policies, and actions on various issues, ranging from environmental/climate justice to agriculture, re-source democracy, and an overall social-ecological transformation of peoples and planet.

Followed shortly after the introductions was a welcome address by Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation. According to Nnimmo, *“Propelling the Energy Transition,”* as the name implies, means to force change from bad or dirty energy to good or renewable energy. It is the duty of everyone, especially the young generation, to propel this needed transition because when policymakers say they want to achieve certain carbon emission cuts by 2050 or 2070, they are not talking about themselves knowing they will not be on the scenes in 20 years and so the young generation should question these false solutions proposed by world leaders and instead make bold demands for real action.

The indications from multilateral actions prompted by the Paris Agreement of the UNFCCC are tilting more towards the perpetuation of polluting activities and then embarking on carbon removal from the atmosphere, or at pollution sources to buy time by delaying climate action while offloading the impacts on the youths and generations to come. Going on, Bassey said this school denounces the intergenerational crimes connected to the insistence on energy firms that harm humanity and the Planet; however, it proposes alternatives that would bring access to clean energy to communities in sacrificial or marginalized zones. This is why we are here today, together, to scan the horizon, map dirty energy hotspots and challenged communities, and finally to promote the use of indigenous as well as empirical knowledge to influence policy and action.

The first lecture was delivered by Nnimmo Bassey on **Nationally Determined Catastrophe: what the NDCs mean to Africa and low-lying regions**. In the lecture, Bassey argued that the policy of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which constitutes the core of the Paris Agreement, birthed in 2009 during the Conference of Parties in Copenhagen and signed by almost all countries of the world cannot and will never solve the world climate crisis. According to him, before the NDCs, the world was so concerned with using the Kyoto protocol, which required that those who have done the most to create the climate problem should do the most to solve it.

This was mostly about halting emissions in a measurable binding agreement where emissions cut ratios were assigned to certain countries and groups of countries. Why? Because there is a justice principle underneath the United Nations Framework on Climate Change, called Common but differentiated responsibilities. Climate Justice is simply saying to the whole world, that those who created the problem do their fair share in solving the problem.

However, the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) policy says that each nation should do whatever they want to do as it is convenient for them and not what is needed globally. It provides that each country produces a document that is reviewed every five years to show what they have done in cutting down on their carbon emissions. In spite of the pledges by countries on carbon emission cuts, Africa as a continent still suffers twice the global heating.

Going forward, he said that we need to have a further understanding of what climate change is; climate change is closely tied to market environmentalism, and that is what voluntary emission reduction is all about. It does not really mean reducing emissions but marketing ideas by countries to show that they are doing something when in reality all is bad fiction, and one of such ideas is the concept of Net Zero. Nnimmo explained that

the environmental problems we face in the world today have political roots, which is what allows the kinds of action we see. Politics has everything to do with environmental decisions and only political actions can upturn the ecological problems we face today.

Analyzing human-induced climate change, we see that what we are experiencing now has gone beyond global warming but global heating and countries/continents such as the USA, Australia, and Europe have higher levels of GHGs, while Africa has less than 3% of carbon emissions but we suffer the most, which makes the policy not Nationally Determined Contributions but Nationally Determined Catastrophe. Hence, the Conference of Parties that is held every year should be seen as an opportunity to negotiate for a better outcome for Africa (not just a few million-dollar projects) to stop the crisis that is unfolding on the continent and get the COP to sign agreements that legally bind these countries/continents to their respective climate actions/responsibilities that would benefit and favour the continent of Africa.

He concluded his lecture with five key actions that the young generation should undertake: understand our narratives and analyse our stories, know our history and context, reject neocolonialism and false solutions, promote keeping the oil in the ground, and insist that the continent must not be cooked.

“Climate Justice is simply saying to the whole world, that those who created the problem do their fair share in solving the problem.”



Thuli Makama, an attorney, frontline climate activist, and a member of the steering committee for Oil Watch Africa was the second speaker for Day 1. She spoke on the issue of exploring the Okavango Basin, its implications for Namibia/Botswana, and the rest of Africa. She mentioned to the participants that the SAN people of the communities around the Okavango have been marginalized over the years, and seeing the damage done to the Niger Delta in Nigeria, serves as a constant reminder of the need to keep fighting to protect the Okavango delta from the oil projects that are threatening their biodiversity and livelihoods.

The Okavango oil project is one that in no time will destroy their biodiversity; meanwhile, the oil is taken through exit points up north for their development. In the 24 years of oil exploration and extractive activities in Namibia, no tangible investments have been made, because the oil companies strive and

survive from the subsidies provided by the government. Certain myths have been told to us - the oil drilled from the delta would be used for development but in reality, the cost of operations is externalized, while the profit is internalized by the oil companies. Another myth is that oil exploration would bring jobs to the communities, but what we have realized from the already existing projects in all other areas is that the jobs they provide for the community are not of good quality, making up only about 1% of the workforce.

With the existing corruption in the industry, it is extremely important that we dismantle the colonial contracts that have held our governments hostage in agreements that are driving the levels of poverty and weakening our energy force on the continent. Ghana is an example of a country that has been held at the wrists with energy contracts that are of no value to the people.

Africa is being pushed to open up its space for more fossil projects when the oil industry is on the brink of shutting down; this only means that Africa would be stranded with investments in the industry when the energy move takes place. With the available rich resources in Africa, the continent can independently power its economies and the energy transition to renewable energy and increase peoples' access to energy.

Asume Osuoka, an activist and a lecturer with York University in his lecture on "Propelling the transition: ideas, resources and necessities," said certain questions that require deep thoughts need to be asked: what is energy transition? who determines the transition agenda? and is decarbonization enough to tackle the issues of climate change?

According to him, energy transition is not a movement that demands or introduces a particular discourse to the public sphere that shapes the nature or character of the discourse but the way they are prioritized by existing powers, which reflects the powers themselves. The petroleum industry has contributed to the character of the state we have presently, and it has shaped the kind of industrial society and

patterns of consumption that exist; hence energy transitioning alone will not be adequate if we do not dismantle the political structures created by the industry.

He argued that the ownership of energy determines who holds power. The energy transition is necessary but most importantly we need a political power transition because to have a real energy transition, we need to have conversations on the relationship between the state and oil production and revenue, the sovereignty of energy, and energy as a human right must be recognized. He emphatically stated that ‘energy is power, energy is politics and energy needs to be available to all; it will only happen if the character of the state is changed and nobody is marginalized.

Hamza Hamouchene, a researcher-activist on dismantling energy colonialism towards a just transition in North Africa, spoke on the climate crisis in the region, how human-made climate change is undermining the ecological and socio-economic basics of life in the region, and how the extractivist model of development imposed on the region is a major crime.

Though a transition to a more sustainable system has become inevitable, justice for the crimes committed against man and nature is not guaranteed. There is an existing deceptive narrative that regards the Sahara as a desert — it is sparsely populated, empty and vast, yet it provides Europe with cheap energy so it can continue its over-reaching consumerist lifestyle and intensive energy consumption. This narrative overlooks certain questions such as ownership, and sovereignty which in turn facilitates the plunder of resources and the privatisation of commons. Some countries in the North Africa region such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco are examples of energy colonialism that is reproduced in energy transition with certain concepts like ‘green grabbing.’ The continuous push of more fossil fuel projects into the African continent has led us to believe that what we see is not energy transition but energy

expansion because as much as renewable energy is worked on, more fossil projects are executed.

Feedback from community people in Latin America, Africa and South East Asia on how communities have lived in harmony with their environment revealed how much the petroleum industry has distorted the equilibrium that existed between peoples and their co-existence with the environment. The industry disrespected, neglected and politically misrepresented their lands and culture. They urged participants to collectively rise up, defend and fight for their lands, and protect their livelihoods, insisting that anything contrary to this is a sacrilege.

In the concluding lecture for the first day, Barr Chima Williams argued that a transition from fossil to another energy source that is expensive and only affordable to a few cannot be regarded as a good transition; there needs to exist a balance; energy transition needs to be accompanied by energy democracy – ‘energy access for all’. He explained that the only climate law existing in Nigeria just passed in 2021 is the Nigeria Climate Act, which does not support an energy transition to renewable energy but provides for false solutions such as REDD+.

“ To have a real energy transition, we need to have conversations on the relationship between the state and oil production and revenue, the sovereignty of energy, and energy as a human right must be recognized.”



Day 2 of the School of Ecology had speakers **Nnimmo Bassey, Prof. Sofiri Peterside, Ken Henshaw, Babawale Obayanju, Angelei Ikal, Leon Dulce, and Marcelo Calazan** make very insightful arguments. Nnimmo emphasized the drivers and impacts of climate change, the role of the COPs and how it is organized to restrict conversations at varying levels, and the underwhelming amount of money spent on climate finance compared to the funds allocated for the acquisition of weapons. He stated that Africa needs to focus on decolonizing development, denouncing non-contributions of climate finance, actively rejecting false solutions, restoring biodiversity using indigenous species and technologies, and essentially building resilience with other marginalized continents to build solidarity among people. Ken Henshaw stated that poverty is a relation of production, and the needed energy transition must deconstruct those relations because the market system is what drove the world to the current climate crisis.

Questions from participants further emphasized the need for energy democracy in this energy transition, which would integrate the peoples and governments of nations. The transition occurs not just in energy sources but also in energy sovereignty, distribution, investments, and production.

At the end of the 2-day school, it was resolved that:

- There is an urgent need to break out of the capitalist system of extractive industries operations in Africa by changing the narratives from the capitalist system of leadership to an all-inclusive people-led system, ensuring that leaders make the right decisions relating to energy.
- There is an urgent need for energy transition and power transition – a politics that prioritizes the interest of the people not the corporations across Africa
- Energy transition in Africa must be decolonized and energy must be recognized as a fundamental human right in its totality.
- There is an urgent need to recognize ecological debts across Africa.



HALVES OF THE BIVALVE

***(Culled from “Double
Barrel”, a WIP)***

Dieworimene Koikoibo

Glossary of Izon words:

Kaikai — local dry gin.

Nua — greetings (thank you, in context).

udan pulo — kernel oil.

Woyin — Our Mother (God).

Ala and Bibo walked arm in arm, straight to the general jetty—a concrete edifice that stretched riverwards—and sat on the first step of its grand staircase which descended into the chocolate river water. It was usual to wait for a long time before the boat arrived. During the waits, Ala’s eyes wandered, as they did presently, exploring the curves and smooths of the village—Akuama. The village cuddled the river like a lover on a rainy morning and, together, blanketed by waning forests, they formed a jagged giant bow without a string. From behind the trees on the other side of the river, as if seeking refuge from the anger of the villagers, the gas flare installation delivered its ear-splitting, fiery noise.

Canoes and boats, tied to either wooden jetties or pinned stick-anchors, clustered the entire stretch of the waterside. And household wastes and faeces of different sizes littered the water close to the bank where it barely flowed and stank. Unlike the gas fire, the pollution in the water close to the bank didn’t even attempt to hide its face; it rudely stared at the face of anyone who dared conduct his business at the waterside and intruded in nostrils. Or were the nostrils the ones intruding?

Well, the stench forced Ala and Bibo to flap their fingers in front of their noses in a futile bid to purify the air for intake. There was one more thing: the oil residue which lingered and mixed with the other rubbish entrancingly glamourised the pollution. But Ala’s eyes soon escaped its enchantment and

looked away to the middle of the river.

Out on the middle of the river where it sprinted as if it was late for the meeting with the Atlantic, little boys and girls floated on canoes to fetch the chocolate water with empty paint-buckets. They would, when they got home, put alum in the buckets of water to cure its oily chocolateness. It would then serve their households, in cooking and drinking, for the next couple of days. Their mothers, when they returned after a tiring day at the farms and fishing sites, would thank *Woyin* for blessing their wombs with thoughtful children.

Far away on yet another side of the river, several bare-bodied boys dived for *watersnails*—bivalves (clams). Their little canoes afloat, they would go underwater for so long that one would easily believe they went there, sat down, cracked jokes over a bottle of *kaikai* and negotiated with mermaids for the watersnails.

The peace left behind on the surface of the water by the divers' time underwater was such that one could've walked on the water. Only the waves from the passing boats, or the boys when their heads popped up again—eyes red and scorching and fists filled with the watersnails—on the surface to catch some breath, ruffled the water. And one dive at a time, the watersnails filled their small canoes.

Recently, however, the divers complained bitterly about the sizes of the watersnails they found on the riverbed after spending long minutes underwater. Up to seven watersnails could enter a diver's fist now after groping the riverbed for longer than usual, unlike before when two or three watersnails would fill a diver's fist within a short time. The divers believed the decrease in the sizes of the watersnails was due to the incessant oil spills on the river. But the boys didn't relent; only dead fish follow the tide, they believed.

A veritable source of Vitamin B12, the watersnails proved to be a treasure for all the sweet secrets they had locked up in their cavities. The young divers, those of them who attended school, would afford notebooks and sandals when they sold off

their treasures to households and food sellers. They barely have enough to sell after settling their households' pots.

Usually, in *Akuama*, when the secrets of the bivalves must have been devoured by those who cherished them, the empty shells were returned to and spread on the riverbanks—perhaps a '*Nua*' to the 'mermaids', but certainly as a preventive measure against erosion and to help old women with the otherwise slippery banks.

The diver-boys made the expedition look like a child's play. But they clawed and dug the riverbed with their toes and fingers for the treasures. Most times, it took the boys an entire day or more before they had a canoe-full harvest. Unlike the fish, this was how the watersnail made it to the cooking pot, not because it opened its mouth to take the bait, or caught up in the net.

Ala always wondered how one could hold his breath for so long a time, diving for watersnails underwater. The day he joined the boys and tried it, his ears tingled for weeks as if someone was playing the drum close to them. His first attempt became his last. It was a different kind of fishing; not everyone knew its ropes.

As he sat with his sister watching the boys dip and pop, he wondered if the watersnail sellers and eaters in cities like Yenagoa, Port Harcourt, or Lagos where the treasures got processed into varieties and served in restaurants, or sold on the roadsides, were ever curious about the process of getting the bivalves. Did they know the bodies of the diver-boys who clawed the bivalves up remained pale and ghostly long after the bivalves might have passed from pot to plate to teeth to bowels and then back to nature through their anuses—and that only great amounts of *udan pulo* could re-colour the boys' skins to their blackness? His one wish was that the eaters were at least grateful enough to return and spread the empty halves of the bivalve on the riverbank.

Meeting the Last Militant

by Ucheawaji Perfect Johndick

I was only seventeen years old, looking for an entry-role certificate job in the health sector. During my search, one of the interviewers asked me a question that went down my spine.

“Are you Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa or Niger Delta?”

“I am Niger Deltan!” I replied, confidently.

“That means you are a militant!” he said while filing the sheet logs before him.

For a few seconds, I found myself biting my fingers as I began to ponder, muttering silently within me, “Why was this man referring to me as a militant? Is it because I come from the South-South? Because I hail from Rivers State...?”

Breaking my train of thoughts was his effusive voice pattering, “Small girl, answer me!”

‘Militant’ for all I knew was a very offensive way of addressing a person, nonetheless a teenage girl you’re meeting for the first

time. Everything I knew about the name was derogatory as it was a term that embodies many known societal vices, such as kidnapping, theft, sea piracy, killings, violence and more. I left that office feeling offended, debased and contemptuous of my Niger Delta identity.

A few years down the line, my concept of militancy was still the same, not until Thursday, 25 February 2022 when I met with The Last Militant - Comrade Cheta Ibama Ibegwura popularly called “Che” at his hometown Erema in Onelga Local Government Area of Rivers State in a meeting initiated by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF).

My interaction with Comrade Cheta Ibama Ibegwura was intriguing as it was enlightening and redemptive. It enlightened me on the original use of the concept of militancy before it was bastardised and degenerated to the later notion it now holds publicly. Militant, in its original form, wasn’t associated with terrorism and violence, he said, but a powerful force that challenges unjust and anti-people government policies. At this point, I felt a chill, a justification for my moral pride as far as I’m Niger Deltan. Continuing, he stressed the notion that justice and equity are rather what is needed to make everyone happy, and solidarity on such ethos (of “justice & equity”) was the framework with which the labelled militant group operated.

While communicating his thoughts, he juxtaposed historic realities as they were in his youthful years with today’s contemporary realities and lamented the wide disparity from what used to be the norm in societies. It was at this point he traced the order of imperialism to capitalism.

Money, he said, was only a means of exchange but is now a commodity prioritized by many to the extent that people now exploit fellow humans and the environment in order to acquire more money. The adverse exploitation of the environment in the quest for money short-changes the life expectancy/life span of man, as tampering with the environment translates to tampering with human lives.

Comrade Cheta recommended that there is a need to go back to learn about imperialism. Returning to what took place before we came (history) provides us with a comprehensive understanding of our environment. He added that another key reason for visiting the archives of history was to understand the power of language: a coded system of sounds and letters within which understanding, relationship, partnership and manufacturing etc take place.

Comrade Che is a Nigerian freelance revolutionist and advocate, who campaign for workers’ rights, community rights, and human & environmental justice. He dispensed militancy through political actions, inspiring trade union consciousness. He is best described as a man of utmost integrity and uncompromising status.



His very formidable moral character and unyielding disposition exposed him to false imprisonments, detentions, and attempted assassinations. Here is a militant that had an opportunity to amass tremendous wealth by simply conceding to the dictates of the then imperialists, exploiting the environment and people, and leaving a trace of wealth for posterity to see and adjudge him as a wealthy man. He refuted the maligning tendencies that would have corrupted his moral fabric and tainted the true concept of militancy, as I now know of it, which would have consequently left him not innocent. His indefatigable position is celebrated today as we have a living legend militant.

On arrival to his compound in Erema, I wondered why we travelled afar to meet a man who barely had an embellished roof over his head, and a few damaged parked cars; but in the course of his speech, he mentioned that he was ripped off everything he had when he was detained by the government for speaking out.

Indeed, the wealth of every nation is from the social labour of the working class, but poverty lies in the path of a corrupt society, resulting in oppression and depression. He explained that corruption is the abuse of justice structured in the administrative structure of the civil service; such corrupt practices are perpetrated by low, medium and high-rank public servants who dupe the public. The effacing realities we have in public service today are the problem of modern Nigeria and not just the President of the country. It amazes me to think that in a society where bribery and corruption thrive, an individual had the moral uprightness to damn the subjugating principalities as it were, refuted the accumulation of wealth by corruption, but instead promoted the excellence of moral character and the sanctification of the heart and conscience.

This individual and his actions are the primary reason for this interview and the justification of the term militant. He lightly added, with no little sense of regrets, that not taking bribes

from the government and oil companies who had flared gas in his town for over thirty years is some reason he doesn't have any lavishing properties/assets.

The comrade could be described as a conservationist, conserving nature and promoting serenity and the order of things. His strong affinity towards nature was obvious as his house was everything green, an embodiment of nature. He had organic trees of different fruits and seeds surrounding his house, which depicts a man who does not only advocate human rights and workers' rights but fights for the environment. We shared *Udara* while we listened to him.

After listening to the comrade cite examples of how Nigerian leaders steal money in different ways, I hastily concluded that corruption was a spirit from the evil realm. He continued that bribe is not easy to resist, but if we should arm ourselves with the fundamental understanding that what we ultimately seek is not primitive wealth but justice and equity which shall outlive us far after our perished body and carnality are gone, then we can summon the audacity of hope and resist bribery in all its forms of deceitful appearance.

With a huge storm of enthusiasm and assurance, he enshrined this notion of his in our minds, as would now form a principle to "right living"; he said, "I have observed from my experience *when one is straightforward and doesn't soil his hands because of money, nature has a way of feeding such a person.*"

This current functional system of capitalism which was an effect of imperialism and the bedrock of land grabbing heightened poverty, global warming, *possessive individualism*, etc. took the colonial masters years to establish. Our effort in overturning it would meet consistent upheavals and, as such, it would take us



years to attain the heights attained by most developed societies.

He admonished that whilst we are fighting for revolution and change, we must conquer

these trio elements of true change: fear, poverty, and death, adding that though death is a negative end, we must understand that life is metaphysical, as nothing dies. For Comrade Che, a dead body today becomes manure for plants to grow, and so also animals die to become food. He calls it the discontinuity of the continuity.

Another takeaway I got from Comrade Cheta Ibama Ibegwura's wisdom was the truth that all officers of the armed forces are civilians in uniforms, and all civilians are soldiers without uniforms. While fighting for the revolution we crave, we must engage with the solidarity of mind and resource, defying the tendencies of fear and oppression from all forces against our clarion call for progress, justice, and equity. The Last Militant is indeed a title well deserving of Comrade Cheta Ibama Ibegwura. He is not just a wise man who embodies political, social, and economic knowledge but also a man who knew God and quoted some scriptures in the course of his speech, little wonder Comrade Nnimmo Bassey described him as "Apostolic Comrade Che."

Learning from him was a wonderful experience and I am working on sensitizing my students, friends, and acquaintances on money as a subject of abuse in times like this.



Image credit: www.unsplash.com



Creativity and Change

**Honouring Comrade
Ihonde at 80**

By Nnimmo Bassey

Today we have the rare privilege of sitting at the feet of Comrade Jonathan Ihonde to salute him on his 80th birthday and to learn from his revolutionary wisdom. This is the third edition of what we call ***Learning from the Wise*** - a deliberate platform for forging a just and sustainable future through intergenerational dialogue with elders and knowledge holders. We have so far had sessions with the 90-year-old labour and environmental justice activist, Comrade Che Ibegura at Erema in Rivers State, and at Ekpetiama with King Bubaraye Dakolo, writer, environmental and human rights activist, who is the current chair of Bayelsa State Traditional Rulers Council.

Comrade Ihonde is a man of many parts. He is a playwright, unionist, progressive political organizer and teacher. He was trained in the Soviet Union and was a frontline leader in the Radio Television Theatre and Art Workers Union of Nigeria (RATTAWU). Today, he continues to mentor many as a visionary leader with a clear understanding of tactics and strategies for effective movement building.

Comrade Ihonde's ***Hotel De Jordan*** (1973-2000) stands out as an example of how the creative arts can be used to propel change. Hotel De Jordan arguably remains the most loved and memorable soap opera ever produced and aired by Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Benin in the then Midwest and later Bendel State. As a veteran labour activist with a deep understanding of politics and politicians, Ihonde built the soap opera on his knowledge of "Nigerian politicians, their dress code, attitudes and endless pranks in sucking the blood of the Nigerian masses." The drama bluntly told a story of highly political socio-cultural dimensions, exposing inequalities and showing the struggle by the masses to liberate themselves from the oppression of the ruling elite.

The sit-com had a memorable cast of Chief Ajas, Chief Igbo, Chief Ugiagbe, Kokori, Idemudia, Lord Mayor, Madam Brefa, Gbewan (the sarcastic village beauty), Gberegbedegbeun, Casino Manager, Bob Allan and the bombastic Prof. Milo Monroe.

The drama and its use of songs to convey clear emancipatory stories highlighted the avowed conviction of its creator that the downtrodden can liberate themselves from the clutches of poverty and despair through struggle. The theme song, ***Poor man dey suffer, monkey dey work, baboon dey chop***, said it all.

Comrade Jonathan Ihonde was one of those that did the initial groundwork that led to the coming into being of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), a pro-democracy and anti-military coalition in response to the upturning of the 1993 electoral victory of MKO Abiola. He worked closely with Chief Anthony Enahoro in that endeavour. His capacity to organize



contributed greatly to the building blocks of such major influential bodies, including the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

Learning from the Wise

Comrade Ihonde is a keen and ardent student of life, a living encyclopaedia of Nigeria, its peoples, foibles, and potentials. He is a bridge builder, and his life is a master class in the construction of solidarity and movement building. His creativity remains highly inspirational.

With the world gripped in a deep polycrisis, we believe that solutions to the complexities can be forged by listening to multidimensional thinkers such as Comrade Ihonde. The keys to this learning include his acute sense of history and his knowledge of the complex terrain that makes up Nigeria. His spirit of sacrifice and readiness to be immersed in the struggles without seeking accolades or public acclaim should speak volumes to young activists learning the ropes in an increasingly egocentric and individualistic society with severely deteriorated ethics and morality. As a labour activist and unionist, Comrade Ihonde models the pathways needed in a world hurtling to the edge of (a) socio-ecological precipice. Wisdom from the Wise demands a new awakening and a shift from the celebration of dispossession, accumulation, and destructive relationships with the Planet.

We remind ourselves that our relationship with each other defines our relationship with Nature. The health of the Planet is a major determinant of our overall wellbeing. Solidarity, cooperation, and respect for the rights of Nature to maintain her cycles and nourish humans and other beings with her gifts are necessary for the survival of the human race. Destructive and exploitative relationships between humans inevitably promote extractivist, colonial and capitalistic modes that are yielding the polycrisis of climate change, extreme inequalities, pandemics and xenophobic nationalism, among others.

It is a privilege to sit, listen and learn from Comrade Ihonde.



CONVERSATIONS WITH **WALTER RODNEY** AND THE STRUGGLES FOR LIBERATION

Walter Rodney, born in Georgetown, USA, was a renowned internationally acclaimed author of scholarly books and academic articles that documented the devastating effects of slavery and colonial imperialism in Africa and the Caribbeans. He was an activist who was very critical of capitalism as it promoted individualism instead of cooperative communal efforts.

Walter Rodney was a scholar of high repute operating not just in Africa but in Europe as well. The philosophy, work ideas and thinking of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) is greatly influenced by the works of Walter Rodney and others.

One of the problems we face in the world today is that we tend to easily forget history. But when we arm ourselves with history, we would ask some hard questions. "The question as to who and what is responsible for African underdevelopment can be answered at two levels; firstly, the answer is that the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for African economic retardation by draining African wealth and by making it impossible to develop more rapidly the resources of the continent; secondly, one has to deal with those who manipulate the system and those who are either agents or unwitting accomplices of the said system." This quote was given by Walter Rodney on the production of poverty.

The lead Discussant in this conversation is Prof. Horace Campbell, the Director of African Initiative and Professor of African American studies and political science at Syracuse University, New York, and facilitated by Ken Henshaw, the Director of We the People Organisation.

Ken Henshaw:
We appreciate Prof. Campbell for joining us and having this conversation with us on the works of Walter Rodney as it relates to Africa's liberation struggles.
Looking at Walter Rodney's works and ideologies, what did he mean when he used the concepts of development, and underdevelopment with regard to Africa, especially in his book How Europe underdeveloped Africa?

Prof Campbell: Walter Rodney though he may be dead and not be with us, his spirit is with us; that spirit is one of African redemption. Walter Rodney understood that the capacity for a human to live and produce life on planet earth and to develop a quality of life that gives health and wellbeing are central to humanity's capacity to interact with nature.

The book was an intervention at a historical moment when Africa was being introduced to modern industrialization in the guise of independence. When Walter was asked to recommend a book that talks about African history in Cuba, he realized there was none, and put it upon himself as a task to be able to produce an important text that captures the relationship between Africa and the planet earth, and that is the genesis of the book *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*.

Two inspirations for the book are:

1. A book that can enrich the liberation process in Africa
2. A book that can enrich socialist transformations in Cuba

What I think Walter Rodney wanted to do by using the word 'development' was to make a fundamental break with the ideas of white supremacy, genocide, and destruction which have been legitimized as bringing progress, civilization, or in the colonial diction - Christianity, civilization, and commerce – so we move in the colonial era, from all these to modernization, liberalization and to the building of modern industries, modern political systems, modern

chieftaincies. He wanted to break down the nature of capitalism. He said that capitalism stood in the path of further human development. So, he was one of the clearest theoreticians of what is now understood as **Racial Capitalism** and the basis for capitalist transformation was the transatlantic slave trade and the accumulated capital. To Walter, he saw the regression of Africa as under-development, because the population, health and well-being of Africans were undermined.

There are 7 genealogies of racial capitalism:

1. Transatlantic slave trade
2. The genocide of the first nation peoples in all of the Americas
3. Turning the land and resources of the first nation people into private property
4. The enslavement of the African peoples in the Americas
5. The consolidation of industrial capital
6. The partitioning and destruction of Asia by the Europeans, British, French, Dutch and the imperialist partitioning of Africa, and the coming of colonialism
7. The consolidation of American imperialism through cultural domination and the spreading of whiteness throughout the world

The only way for humans to go forward is to end capitalism.

Ken Henshaw:

There is an argument that the poverty in Africa is a product of the inefficiency of Africans and it has been used to justify colonialism, neo-colonialism and a continued effort to subjugate Africa, a need to civilize Africa. But the question should be: Why is Africa underdeveloped and what is the role of the West in perpetuating the underdevelopment paradigms in Africa?

Prof. Campbell: The interactions between the material realities of imperialism and destruction in Africa and the cultural realities need to be established because at the material level the destruction of Africa, the genocide of millions of African people in transatlantic trade to the disease, health pandemic and the depopulation of Africa have all been presented as saving Africa, especially in religious terms, modernization terms and cultural terms. If there is famine as a result of changes in farming techniques, the famine is blamed on Africa and the same people who generated the famine are the ones who come up with a solution to the famine.

The salvation narrative in every area - health, education, environment, and food has been internalized by a class of Africans who have a stake in the system. The system in Nigeria, for instance, is organized to train Nigerians to steal wealth from fellow Nigerians and peasants and to ship overseas to the destruction of the natural environment, roads, health and educational systems in Nigeria.

In Chapter Six of the book, colonial education brought regression at the level of knowledge production, most children in Africa do not know the foundation of mathematics or physics and why it is a basis for modern science and technology. So, the aim of the book *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* was how to inspire a generation of African scholars, activists, and freedom fighters who will in turn inspire the youths to take back Africa from the ones who exploit Africa, not just through fighting imperialism but also the white supremacists and racists and their allies who imperilled—and continue to imperil—all of Africa.

Ken Henshaw:

In the book, Walter Rodney talked about the consequences of the transatlantic slave trade on the development of Africa; he elaborated on the fact that the Western societies and their economies grew while Africa was destroyed on the lines of the slave trade, so if 400 years ago, we suffered man-power drain where over 10 million Africans were shipped over to the Americas and Europe, how would Walter Rodney have addressed the prevailing massive brain drain happening in Africa today?

Prof. Campbell: First we need to detach the brain drain discussion from the nature of enslavement because they are qualitatively different. In Chapter 2, the nature of enslavement was extensively discussed; we may need to go back and read it to understand it more.

He explained the different forms of the slave trade from the transatlantic to trans-Saharan and other forms of slavery to show the relationship between slavery and capitalism, and he talked about how the transatlantic slave trade fertilized the development of capitalism in six areas: banking, shipping, insurance, textile industry, sugar refinery, and meteorology.

He extensively explained the role of the enslavement of Africans and the accumulation of capital which laid the foundation for the industrial revolution. The knowledge and skill taken to develop the agricultural economy of the Americas by Africans were acquired through coercion. However, the current brain drain in Africa has to do with the structure of the world

economy and the disarticulation of the African economies. This means that a trained person is not rewarded at a level that they can survive with their families in Africa, and as such seek to go to other parts of the world.

Brain drain is part of the global phenomenon of capitalism and the absorption of knowledge from the global south into the global north, but it is not particular to just Africa; the Asian communities experience it as well. The Africans who leave Africa face a kind of racism in the Europe and United States, and brain drain is a part of the challenge we have: to transform the African economies so that we can train African people in Africa and retain them for the transformation of the African societies.

According to Walter Rodney, "in a way, under development is a paradox, many parts of the world that are naturally rich are actually poor, and parts that are not so well off in wealth of soil and sub-soil are enjoying the highest standard of living." How will you relate this statement to natural resource extraction in Africa and the role it has played in the underdevelopment of Africa and the development of the West?

The role it has played has to do with the nature of capitalism and the destruction of nature. The ultimate result of capitalism is death and not just of humans but the death of the planet earth. Look around, the wealth of Africa is not being used for the transformation of the people.

“ Transatlantic slave trade fertilized the development of capitalism in six areas: banking, shipping, insurance, textile industry, sugar refinery, and meteorology ... The knowledge and skill taken to develop the agricultural economy of the Americas by Africans were acquired through coercion ”

The two most important wealth of Nigeria is the Nigerian population, water and the soil. This wealth is not being harnessed for the development of Nigeria; instead, all the sources are taken and used to destroy the environment, so ***Nigeria is one of the worst scenes of crimes against nature and people*** which is called the development of the West and what you see is reproduced in all parts of Africa.

The production of oil and gas in Norway is different from the production of oil in Nigeria, and the production of copper in Canada is different from that of Zambia and Congo. The basis of all aspects of relations with Africa is exploitation. Capitalism is a complete process of the exploitation of African workers and the super-exploitation of African women.

Let's take for example the workers in Zambia and Congo working in the copper and cobalt mines. The price the Americas pay for their cell phones is a direct subsidy from the exploitation of the workers, and until we go back to what Walter Rodney said that the underdevelopment of Africa is an expression of exploitation, the problem remains.

We can measure the amount of labour time the African worker puts into the production of goods, which directly affects the African woman who gives subsidized capital because care is taken off in terms of health, food, household services, and water.

Our scholars and activists have to move in the direction of mobilizing the youth and the women to create a new social system. With the need to reverse the destruction done to planet earth without making the same industrialization mistakes the West made. Our task requires a greater understanding of how to harness the knowledge and language skills of Africa to convert artificial intelligence into tools for the liberation of Africa.

From Rodney's perceptions and views on the roles we have to play in the liberation of Africa, what would Walter say, in 2022, to young people about liberating themselves from the global capitalist framework that has kept Africa subjugated?

Nigeria is one of the states in Africa that is

pregnant with revolutionary change. The Nigerian elite has discredited itself, whether Nigeria succumbs to more violence, destruction and ecocide is dependent on holding the line in Africa against absolute barbarism which is what capitalism has done.

Walter Rodney wanted us to humanise the earth and to do that we must recover our humanity through the development of the ideas, skills, organization, and leadership that could lay the foundation for a transition to a new mode of economic organization.

The system of education in Africa today is destroying the confidence of African youths so that they do not know the history of African liberation. African revolution is a revolution that starts with empowering Africans with a sense of understanding of their revolutionary capabilities and it begins with them understanding their past victories. It can only come about when you fertilize the ideas of revolution by explaining to the young people the confidence of their ancestors in fighting the great odds that they are fighting today; it is not only based on ideas but on the spirit of Pan-Africanism.

The Nigerian has been robbed of his spiritual essence and has been turned into factions such as Christians and Muslims, making them forget their spirituality which makes them real human beings.

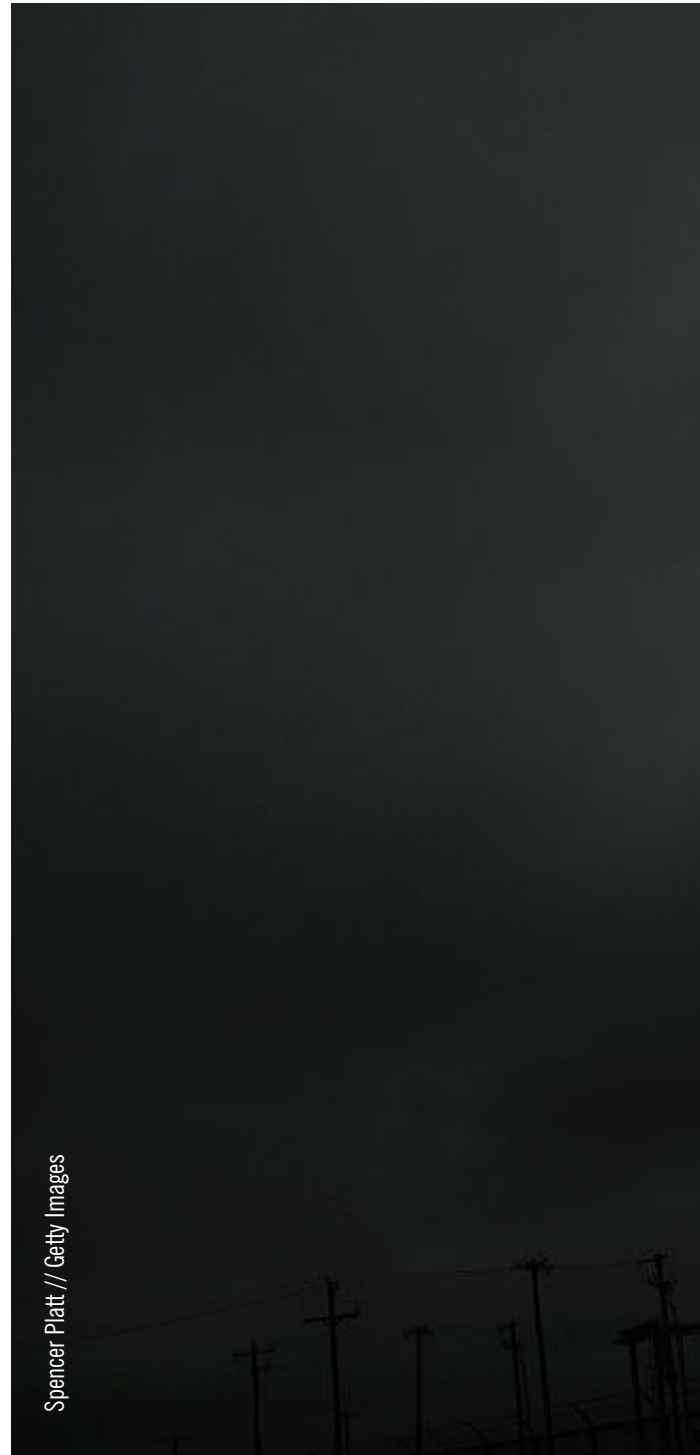
The revolution in Africa is at a delicate moment where imperialism can only rule Africa through the kind of violence that they are currently unleashing in the Nigerian rural areas – kidnapping, Boko haram, extremists, and religious fanatics — this is because Nigeria is so central to the African revolution.

In the West, oil companies cannot carry out the same criminal activities as they do in Nigeria. The people involved in oil production have to live there. But the challenge is that there has to be a halt in oil production because oil has no future.

We can learn from China's experience of the negative impacts of industrialization: they cannot breathe clean air in their cities. But

fortunately for Africa, industrialization has not risen to the point where we don't have clean water or air, so the challenge for those developing plans for the transformation of Africa is how to develop the bioeconomy. The bioeconomy is how to release solar energy, plants, and water for the new economy in the 21st century, and this is the kind of transformation that would be revolutionary in Africa and make other societies to be in awe because Africa has the resources to develop the bioeconomy. So the possibilities of the bioeconomy need to be inspired in the young generation so they are not accomplices to the destruction of nature.

Imperialism seeks to marginalize the past and present young, real leaders in Africa, put them in exile, isolate them and even kill them. Leadership in Africa needs to be reconceptualized. In teachers' colleges and universities, study groups can be held to discuss these issues using such books by Walter Rodney as a guide for the discussions. This conversation is also a great step in the right direction of educating the youths on their history and African liberation.



Spencer Platt // Getty Images



Gas Flaring and the Niger Delta Ecosystem

Philip Obi

“ Gas flaring is generally discouraged as it releases toxic components into the atmosphere and contributes to climate change. It also releases a large amount of methane which has a high global warming potential. The methane is accompanied by the other major greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, of which Nigeria was estimated to have emitted more than 34.38 million metric tons in 2002, accounting for about 50 per cent of all industrial emissions in the country and 30 per cent of the total CO₂ emissions.

Gas flaring affects the environment and human health and produces economic loss. “

The activities of the oil companies in the Niger Delta involving gas flaring from various flow stations have characterised the Niger Delta landscape for over 50 years. Most of the oil companies have been burning this natural gas off in which a single flame is as large as a house.

The first decree to discourage gas flaring in Nigeria was attempted in 1979. The decree (Decree No. 99) was aimed at eliminating gas flaring by 1985. The idea was defeated when the Nigeria State modified the decree with a provision that the oil corporations could flare gas but pay a fine, and most of the oil companies rather preferred paying the fine instead of stopping gas flaring.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), in its audit report on the Nigerian Oil and Gas Audit, disclosed that in 2008, the federal government had set a penalty of 3.5 dollars per 1000 SCF of gas flared by the oil companies, adding that the company did not comply with the directive.

There are indications that the international oil companies and their indigenous counterparts continue to flare commercial gas, despite sanctions imposed by the federal government. Available industry data showed that about 4.498 trillion standard cubic feet SCF of gas was flared between 2008 and 2017 in Nigeria. It showed that the government has not been able to eliminate gas flaring, mainly because of many factors, especially limited funding of gas products and the imposition of meagre penalties against defaulters. It also stated that the federal government had, over the years, been unable to collect the 3.5 dollars per 1000 SCF, explaining that it was still collecting the old 10 naira per 1000 SCF penalty which was supposed to run from 1998 to 2008. Billions of cubic meters of natural gas are flared annually at oil production locations, resulting in atmospheric pollution severely affecting host communities.

Gas flaring affects the environment and human health and produces economic loss. The Ministry of Petroleum resources said that

under the gas policy, the government intended to maximize the utilization of associated gas to be treated for supply to power generation or industry. Nigeria flares more natural gas associated with oil extraction than any other country, with estimates suggesting that 3.5 billion cubic feet (SCF) of associated gas is produced annually.

Flaring is done because it is costly to separate commercially viable associated gas from the oil. Companies operating in Nigeria also harvest natural gas for commercial purposes but prefer to extract it from deposits where it is found in isolation as non-associated gas. Thus, associated gas is burned off to decrease costs.

Gas flaring is generally discouraged as it releases toxic components into the atmosphere and contributes to climate change. It also releases a large amount of methane which has a high global warming potential. The methane is accompanied by the other major greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, of which Nigeria was estimated to have emitted more than 34.38 million metric tons in 2002, accounting for about 50 per cent of all industrial emissions in the country and 30 per cent of the total CO₂ emissions.

“ The Nigeria government has not enforced environmental regulations effectively because of the overlapping and conflicting jurisdiction of separate governmental agencies governing the petroleum industry and the environment as well as non-transparent governance mechanisms”.

The international community, the Nigerian government and the oil corporations seem in agreement, at least theoretically, that gas flaring needs to be curtailed. Efforts to do so, however, have been limited. While OPEC and Shell, the biggest culprits of gas flaring in Nigeria, claimed that only 50 per cent of all associated gas is burnt off via flaring, the claim is contested. The World Bank reported in 2004 that “Nigeria currently flares 75 per cent of the gas it produces.”

Gas flares have potentially harmful effects on the livelihoods of nearby communities, as they release poisonous chemicals including nitrogen dioxides, sulphur dioxide, volatile organic compounds like benzene, toluene, xylene and hydrogen sulphide, as well as carcinogens like benzopyrene and dioxides. Humans exposed to such substances can suffer from respiratory problems. These chemicals can aggravate asthma, cause breathing difficulties and pain, as well as chronic bronchitis. Benzene, known to be emitted from gas flares in undocumented quantities, is well recognized as a cause of leukaemia and other blood-related diseases.

Gas flares are often close to communities and regularly lack fencing or protections for villagers who risk working near the heat, sometimes from horizontal stacks. Many communities claim that nearby flares cause acid rain which corrodes their homes and other structures, many of which have zinc-based roofing.

Some people resort to using asbestos-based materials, which are stronger in insulating the roof from acid rain deterioration. Unfortunately, this contributes to their declining health and the health of their environment. Asbestos exposure increases the risk of lung cancer, pleural and peritoneal mesothelioma. The United States Energy Information Administration (EIA) reported that gas flaring is “a major contributor to air pollution and acid rain.”

Other flares are rarely located away from the villages and are known to coat the land and communities with soot and damage adjacent vegetation. Almost no vegetation can grow in

the area directly surrounding the flares due to their heat.

The Nigeria government has not enforced environmental regulations effectively because of the overlapping and conflicting jurisdiction of separate governmental agencies governing the petroleum industry and the environment as well as non-transparent governance mechanisms.

In November 2005, a judgment by a federal high court of Nigeria ordered that gas flaring must stop in Niger Delta communities, as it violates guaranteed constitutional rights to life and dignity. In a case brought against the Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, Justice C.V. Nwokorie ruled in Benin City that “the damaging and wasteful practice of flaring cannot lawfully continue.” As of May 2011, Shell has not ceased gas flaring in Nigeria.

The inability of Process and Industrial Development (P&ID) Limited to execute its controversial gas pipeline project, targeted at harnessing 100 million standard cubic feet of associated gas, offshore Akwa Ibom State for use in the plant, has attracted criticisms on Addax Petroleum Nigeria Limited.

Addax Petroleum had planned to harness the associated gas, which is flared at its oil mining lease, OML 123, in the process of producing crude oil for delivery to the gas plant, thus assisting to end flaring in the area.

Specifically, the reactions of experts were based on the conviction that the flaring has exposed the environment and persons to endless pollution, acid rain, climate change, disease and low life span since 1998, when Addax Petroleum started operations in Nigeria, after signing two production sharing contracts with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Certainly, continuous gas flaring is wasteful, ecocidal and a bad business strategy.

Philip Obi is a freelance journalist based in Nigeria
Email: *Philipobi04@yahoo.com*

MASS DIE-OFF OF FISH IN ISIPINGO LAGOON, SOUTH AFRICA

FishNet Alliance Calls for Thorough Investigation, Cleanup and Compensation for Fishers

The right to a decent livelihood such as artisanal fishing is one that is not only ethically, socially, economically, and culturally sound for coastal communities; it is a right to live, which must be protected. Often, these rights have been denied to fishers with reckless abandon. Fishers are among the most marginalized people in the world. Their fishing grounds are either grabbed for exploitation or installation of offshore facilities or covered by spills from exploration and exploitation activities or from installations off or near shore.

On the night of the 8th of August 2022, local fisherfolks raised alarm about strong bad smell around the Isipingo Lagoon

area and on Tuesday the 9th of August 2022, which was South Africa's National Women's Day (a public holiday), the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) was notified that hundreds of dead fish were washed up on and littered the shores of the Isipingo Lagoon.

It will be recalled that a similar incident happened in 2016 and the devastating impacts are arguably still around. There are growing concerns about the reoccurring contamination of the Lagoon and Estuary that empties into the Ocean.

John Peter Narayanasamy, the Chairperson of the KZN Subsistence Fisherfolks (KZNSFF), noted that with





the contaminated water flowing into the ocean from the estuary, we are going to have other marine species affected and you will find that artisanal fishers will get to their fishing areas and not able to fish.

In an interview, Ednick Mseweli from the Water and Sanitation, eThekweni Municipality acknowledged the level of devastation caused by the contamination by sewage from a faulty pump and also stated that there is the possibility that effluents from chemical plants in the area could also be contributory, and agreed that the Authority is not sure what mix of chemicals have spilt into the lagoon.

Desmond D'Sa, the Coordinator of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) and Leader of FishNet Alliance, South Africa, said that the eThekweni Municipality must do more than just ban public access to the beach as this has done little to stop locals from collecting and eating the fish.

"Some of my colleagues were out there in the past couple of days and many people are picking up the fish, and you can imagine the

kind of impact that fish will have on them if they eat the fish," he said. The municipal officials only arrived on the site the day after (i.e., on the 10th of August 2022), claiming that there was a malfunction at a nearby pump station, hence the lagoon became contaminated with sewerage. The municipality did deploy staff to remove the dead fish and place them into refuse bags for disposal; however, the dead fish in the estuary and lagoon could not be removed due to a lack of access to the necessary equipment to enter the lagoon, he added. The municipality then via social media closed the Isipingo beach but no demarcation or notices were placed in the vicinity of the lagoon.

FishNet Alliance, a network of fishers in Africa uniting against destructive offshore, swamp and nearshore activities, calls for a thorough investigation into the constituents of the sewage and other chemicals discharged into the lagoon and properly examine the fish, water, and sediments to expose the risk factors. The Alliance through her coordinator, Stephen Oduware, stated that a proper cleanup needs to be done while fishers fishing in the lagoon must be provided compensation to ameliorate the burden and destruction of their livelihoods.

Fishers have over time been at the receiving end of offshore pollution. They pay the true costs for the negative impacts of this pollution. Their rights to life and livelihood as fishers must be protected.



FALLING UNIVERSE

By A. S. Afereno

*Crying, wailing, dying
Cough, rough, tough
Broad, blood, flood
Yet pushing further earthly crisis
Mourn groan Boko bomb
Sweeping away soil's naturalty
Digging graves for eternity*

*Man's inhumanity against man
Man's inhumanity against nature
Not concerned about the nearest future
Searching for immediate and everlasting
gains
Billions kept, trillions hidden
Not even for the common good of all
But for man's self-aggrandizement*

*Fallen mahoganies-irokos-ogbeches
Enemies of the motor saw
Drying lakes-creeks-ponds
Enemies of burning earthly furnace
Cruel vessels every minute passed
Enemies of croaker-sardinella-tilapia
Every activity birthing an enemy*

*Endless blasting for the mines
Paving way for the numerous crimes
Stealing of the gold and limestones
Endless digging of the ground for precious
stones
Paving way for the crude and blood*

*Dirty floors flowing with dark blood
Gas pipe blast millions die*

*Trashed canned sorrowful movies
Overflowing before our eyes on the water
bodies
Man still ignorant of his death date
Only thinking, drinking on birth date
Enjoyment is good but not for a fool
Who treats its landlord as a broom
Sweeping with it for selfishness's sake*

*Newton's 3rd law is no joker
Our actions are only but a stone
Let it not be thrown into a glass house
Lest we are self-destroyed
Greed-Selfishness-Pride
These enemies we must avoid
If we must move forward*

*Think of the hotness
Think of the dryness
Think of the pollution
Think of the destruction
For it is not just we who die
In every space lie other lives
Let not your boiling pot burn down their
body
For we all belong to this FALLING
UNIVERSE*



MEET THE 2022 GOLDMAN AWARD WINNER FOR AFRICA

In the aftermath of disastrous oil spills in Nigeria, environmental lawyer Chima Williams worked with two communities to hold Royal Dutch Shell accountable for the resultant widespread environmental damage. On 29 January 2021, the Court of Appeal of the Hague ruled that not only was Royal Dutch Shell's Nigerian subsidiary responsible for the oil spills but that the parent company, Royal Dutch Shell, also had an obligation to prevent the spills.

This is the first time a Dutch transnational corporation has been held accountable for the violations of its subsidiary in another country, opening Shell to legal action from communities across Nigeria devastated by the company's disregard for environmental safety.
Chima Williams, Esq. — A Champion of Environmental Protection

On 25 May 2022, the organizers of the Goldman Environmental Prize, also known as the “Green Nobel Prize,” announced the recipients of the 33rd edition of the prestigious Prize. The Goldman Environmental Prize honours the achievements and leadership of grassroots environmental activists from around the world, inspiring all of us to take action to protect our planet—leaders from around the world ‘who prove that, together, we can reshape the future of our planet.’

One of the recipients of this year's Prize is Chima Williams, the Nigerian lawyer and environmentalist, and executive director of Environmental Rights Action (ERA and Friends of the Earth Nigeria), where he prosecutes transnational corporations on environmental pollution cases in Nigeria. Mr Williams who also doubles as the Legal Adviser to Health of Mother Earth Foundation joined the Nigerian environmental movement in the 1990s as a student volunteer for ERA, an NGO founded in 1993 that advocates environmental rights in Nigeria. Eight years after, Chima founded the first-ever student-run environmental justice group in the country—the Students Environmental Assembly, Nigeria at the University of Benin where he studied law.

For his activism, he was jailed by the military regime of Sani Abacha, forcing him to miss

two school years.

Over the years, as an environmental lawyer, Mr Williams has worked with other lawyers and activists to take on oil majors accused of abuse in the Niger Delta, which is reputed as one of the most polluted places on earth. His first major case involved gas flaring, the harmful practice of burning gas associated with oil production in Iwharekan community, Delta State, Nigeria.

In that case, *Jonah Gbemre v. Shell & Ors.*, working with Millieudefensie, a Dutch environmental organisation, Mr Williams challenged the Nigerian law that allows gas flaring for a small fee. “That case was the first of its kind, the legality of gas flaring in Nigeria, something that nobody would ever have considered that can be litigated upon because for most Nigerians it's not a normal thing,” Mr Williams said in an interview with Premium Times.

In 2005, the Federal High Court, Benin Division, agreed with Chima's argument that the law violated a constitutional provision for the right of citizens to life and dignity. Gas flaring continued nonetheless after the ruling, and in 2008, after Chima led environmentalists and community leaders to a site that showed Shell had not ended the practice, as a result of which a military task force held Chima in a Shell facility and interrogated him.



which meant the company had lied in court. On 29 January 2021, the Court of Appeal of The Hague ruled that Royal Dutch Shell has control over SPDC's operations and has a duty to prevent oil spills, thereby ordering Shell to pay the Goi and Oruma

Undeterred, years later he worked on a case that compelled Eni and its Nigerian subsidiary, Nigeria Agip Oil Company, to pay compensation to a Bayelsa community, Elebiri, affected by oil spills and succeeded in getting the company and government regulators to re-investigate the spill site.

The case that resulted in his nomination for the 33rd Green Nobel Prize came to be in the aftermath of disastrous oil spills in Nigeria caused by Shell which operates more than 6,000 km of pipelines in the Niger Delta between 2004 and 2005. The spills polluted farmland, drinking water and wetlands in and around Goi and Oruma, Rivers State, Nigeria. Chima Williams worked with two communities to hold Royal Dutch Shell accountable for the resultant widespread environmental damage. Mr Williams brought together the communities to take legal action after organising community meetings and surveys of oil spill damage and Shell's pipelines. Although Shell won the case in the first round in 2013, Mr Williams appealed and while waiting for the hearing, his legal team obtained documents revealing that Shell was aware of the poor management of the Goi pipeline and that it needed replacing,

farmers compensation and clean up the areas.

"The biggest challenge in holding oil majors accountable for environmental damage is poor enforcement of the decisions of courts," Mr Williams disclosed in his interview with Premium Times. "Yes, and this is what has led to self-help mechanisms being deployed. This is where the chain is broken," he said.

"In the era of effective litigation that brings justice, communities are getting to know more about that and how to use that," he said. "So, the multinationals realized that given the way they operate, they may be into more problems or trouble in the coming years so they choose to move." Mr Chima further told Premium Times.

Yet, the environmental lawyer does not consider his work as finished. He continues to resist, through the courts, the evil twins of corporate impunity and government irresponsibility.

Promoting Environmental and Climate Change Discussions in Schools



2022 Holiday Programme

The heart-breaking environmental issues that face Nigeria and Africa demand that we think deeply and thoroughly about how to build a future that is healthy, prosperous, equitable and sustainable for all humans and the environment.

With this in mind, the Young Environmentalist

Network (TYEN) under the auspices of Health of Mother Earth Foundation was developed as a sustainable tool to build and strengthen environmental literacy among schoolchildren for a better informed and sustained future in Nigeria and Africa as a continent.

With the objective of bridging the

knowledge gap that exists between young minds and their relationship with Mother Earth, TYEN held a holiday programme at its Resource Centre in Benin City on the 18th and 19th of August 2022. This programme brought together 15 schoolchildren, aged 11-16, from different secondary schools in Benin City, the capital city of Edo State.

Self -Introduction was done by everyone present and the children were made to understand the purpose and reason for the programme by the TYEN team, with the children establishing the ground rules for the meeting.

To kickstart the programme activities, Stephen Oduware, Project Lead for Alliance/ Networking gave a fun lecture on the Fundamentals of Global Warming. In his presentation, he explained the concept of global warming, greenhouse gases/effects and climate change in a way that would be accessible to children. With various illustrations, he explained the changes that occur in the atmosphere as a result of man-made activities in the environment.

According to him, global warming is the gradual increase in temperature of the earth's atmosphere caused by increased levels of CO₂, CFCs and other pollutants. In simple terms, he further explained the greenhouse gases and the impacts of global warming on earth which include rising sea levels, increased precipitation at extreme levels, heat waves, droughts, flooding and others. In the Q&A session, further clarifications were made to the children on how the trees absorb carbon emissions, and how a switch to other safe alternative sources of energy that protect the environment is the next big action.



Following the session on Global Warming, educational videos on global warming were played for the children which gave them a deeper and clearer understanding of the concept. Also, videos of young activists in various parts of the world such as Greta Thunberg and others who work voluntarily in their countries either through campaigns, rallies or in areas that have suffered an extreme climate change impact like hurricanes and flooding were viewed by the children to build their confidence to speak up and take action and to also see the reality of the impact that wrong environmental decisions have on the ecosystem.

In order to excite the environment while learning, the children were grouped into small learning cohorts of 3 to play a puzzle game called the Map of Africa. In this game, while



setting the pieces of the map to fit, they were exposed to countries they never knew existed in Africa, their capitals and locations.

Raising a generation that can document their experiences and thoughts in writing and other creative forms is an innovation that needs to be held with both hands so stories and histories are not lost in time. This was the essential purpose of teaching the children the basics of scriptwriting, which was taught by Kome Odhomor, Media/Communication Lead of HOMEF. In her presentation, Kome highlighted the basic elements every story should have.

To end the activities for the day, each child was assigned a story from the book “A Walk in the Curfew” to read and present during the next meeting alongside their own written stories based on the elements taught in the scriptwriting class.

It was an interesting time the first day with the children, as refreshments were provided and a group photograph taken to end the day. On the second day, arrivals and registration of the young environmentalists started at 9:30 am. The students showed great enthusiasm and excitement to be back in the TYEN learning space. At exactly 10 am, the recap of the previous day’s meeting was given by Mabel Obaseki, with the students giving details and highlights of all activities and lessons learned the previous day.

A replay of the videos on global warming and a documentary of young environmentalists was played for the children and an animation video on soot education which was scripted and acted by the TYEN team in order to enlighten the students on the causes and impacts of soot, which was further explained by Ukpono Bassey, the creator of the animation video. Ukpono explained to the children that, on large scale, soot is caused by the consistent flaring of gas, and on small scale, the burning of local sources of fossil energy such as firewood. Its impacts can be deadly to the human system and cause extreme disruptions to the environment.

Following the video on soot, a discussion on pollution as a tool for environmental disaster was handled by Ese Ojeanelo. In her lecture, she educated the kids on the basic elements that make up the environment - the biotic and abiotic elements, the amount of time certain waste materials take to decompose completely and the responsibilities each of them has in protecting the environment from further pollution and degradation. She encouraged the students to be intentional in their actions of proper waste disposal and to

educate others around them whenever the opportunity arises.

This session was followed up with a question-and-answer session, where the children boldly and confidently answered some basic questions such as “what is global warming?, what is climate change and what are the types of pollution?” Their responses to these questions were evidence of learning, as many of them indicated that they had not as much as heard those terms before the programme.

They also asked questions concerning areas they were not clear about, such as the meaning of deforestation, afforestation, etc.

After the lecture on pollution, the children were given some minutes to replay the puzzle game –Map of Africa, after which they were asked to present the stories assigned to them from the previous day to the audience. It was amazing to see that children enjoyed the stories, could pick out points learnt and some of them could talk about the storylines like it was their personal work and experience. Kome Odhomor, for the original stories written by the children, was amazed by the efforts of every child in the programme. After examining the stories written by the children, she stated that all the stories followed the format of the basic elements she taught them on the first day, which further proves they all had a clear understanding of the topic. She personally gifted her best writers as a form of encouragement for a job well done.

The programme climaxed with the official induction of the children into the Young Environmentalist Network where the students pledged their loyalty to preserving and upholding the beauty of Mother Earth and to be ambassadors of a clean environment.

The two-day TYEN holiday programme was a successful event. The children were groomed to a level of understanding about their immediate environment, and what right actions to take in protecting it. Parents expressed their gratitude to the team and requested that the programme be run for a longer period and more frequently. The participating children appreciated the team for the programme and the new knowledge acquired.

BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ

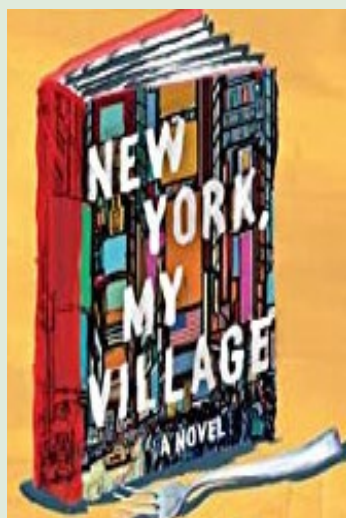


Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet

– Poems by Niyi Osundare

Niyi Osundare's latest book of poems, *Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*, is a critical collection of pastoral poems concerning the environment around the world. A poet of renown who has travelled and given performances in many parts of the world, Osundare has felt and tried to put into words his feelings and thoughts about what he has seen from the Amazon to the deserts of North Africa to his home country of Nigeria. For him, it was nature speaking to him and through him, pleading and imploring. But still beautiful? The lushness of destruction transmuted from a nature endangered....an accessible plea from nature through Osundare's words. This is a relevant book that brings hope for people to stop and reflect on the endangered beauty of all of nature.

In the words of Niyi Osundare: Of all my 20-something books of poetry, none has confronted me with a more challenging combination of urgency of content and complexity of execution than this new one. I dare say the existential imperative of its content has been responsible for the pain that came with its composition and the uneasy relief I now feel upon its completion. There is something deeply spiritual, almost religious, about the mission and the message of the poems, and the many ways they have turned out to be denizens of that vital interface between the ecological and the cosmic.

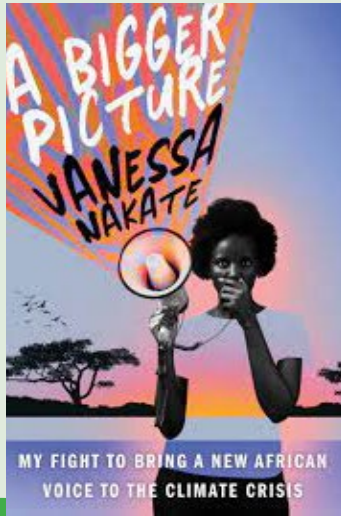


***New York, My Village* By Uwem Akpan**

Exuberant storytelling full of wry comedy, dark history, and devastating satire—by the celebrated and original author of the #1 New York Times bestseller, *Say You're One of Them*.

From a suspiciously cheap Hell's Kitchen walk-up, Nigerian editor and winner of the Toni Morrison Publishing Fellowship, Ekong Udousoro, is about to begin the opportunity of a lifetime: to learn the ins and outs of the publishing industry from its incandescent epicentre. While his sophisticated colleagues meet him with kindness and hospitality, he is soon exposed to colder, ruthlessly commercial underbelly-callous agents, greedy landlords, boorish and hostile neighbours, and, beneath a superficial cosmopolitanism, a bedrock of white cultural superiority and racist assumptions about Africa, its peoples, and worst of all, its foods. Reckoning, at the same time, with the recent history of the devastating and brutal Biafran War, in which Ekong's people were a minority of a minority caught up in the mutual slaughter of majority tribes, Ekong's life in New York becomes a saga of unanticipated strife. The great apartment deal wrangled by his editor turns out to be an illegal sublet crawling with bedbugs. The lights of Times Square slide off the hardened veneer of New Yorkers ploughing past the tourists. A collective antagonism towards the "other" consumes Ekong's daily life. Yet in overcoming misunderstandings with his neighbours, Chinese and Latino and African American, and in bonding with his true allies at work and advocating healing back home, Ekong proves that there is still hope in sharing our stories.

Akpan's prose melds humour with tenderness and pain to explore the myriad ways that tribalisms define life everywhere, from the villages of Nigeria to the villages within New York City. *New York, My Village* is a triumph of storytelling and a testament to the life-sustaining power of community across borders and boroughs.



***A Bigger Picture: My Fight to Bring a New African Voice to the Climate Crisis* By Vanessa Nakate**

Leading climate justice activist Vanessa Nakate brings her fierce, fearless spirit, new perspective, and superstar bona fides to the biggest issue of our time. In *A Bigger Picture*, which is her first book, she shares her story as a young Ugandan woman who sees that her community bears disproportionate consequences of the climate crisis. At the same time, she sees that activists from African nations and the global south more broadly are not being heard in the same way as activists from white nations are heard. Inspired by Sweden's Greta Thunberg, in 2019 Nakate became Uganda's first 'Fridays for Future' protestor, awakening to her personal power and summoning within herself a commanding political voice. Nakate's mere presence has revealed rampant inequalities within the climate justice movement. In January 2020, while attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, as one of five international delegates, including Thunberg, Nakate's image was cropped out of a photo by the Associated Press. The photo featured the four other activists, who were all white. It highlighted the call Nakate has been making all along: for both environmental and social justice on behalf of those who have been omitted from the climate discussion and who are now demanding to be heard.

From a shy little girl in Kampala to a leader on the world stage, Nakate has gifted us *A Bigger Picture* as part rousing manifesto, part poignant memoir, presenting a new vision for the climate movement based on resilience, sustainability, and genuine equity. (*Citation from amazon.com*)

Upcoming Activities

- School of Ecology - Blue Economy, Divestment and the End of Fossil Age

- Agroecology Training for Farmers in Kano

- Conversation on the Rights of Nature
- Capacity-building workshop for fishers and other stakeholders

- Oilfield Dialogues

Stay in touch by visiting our website and social media pages for updates on these programmes.



Volunteers Needed!

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our team of volunteers.
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For More updates on
upcoming events visit www.homef.org