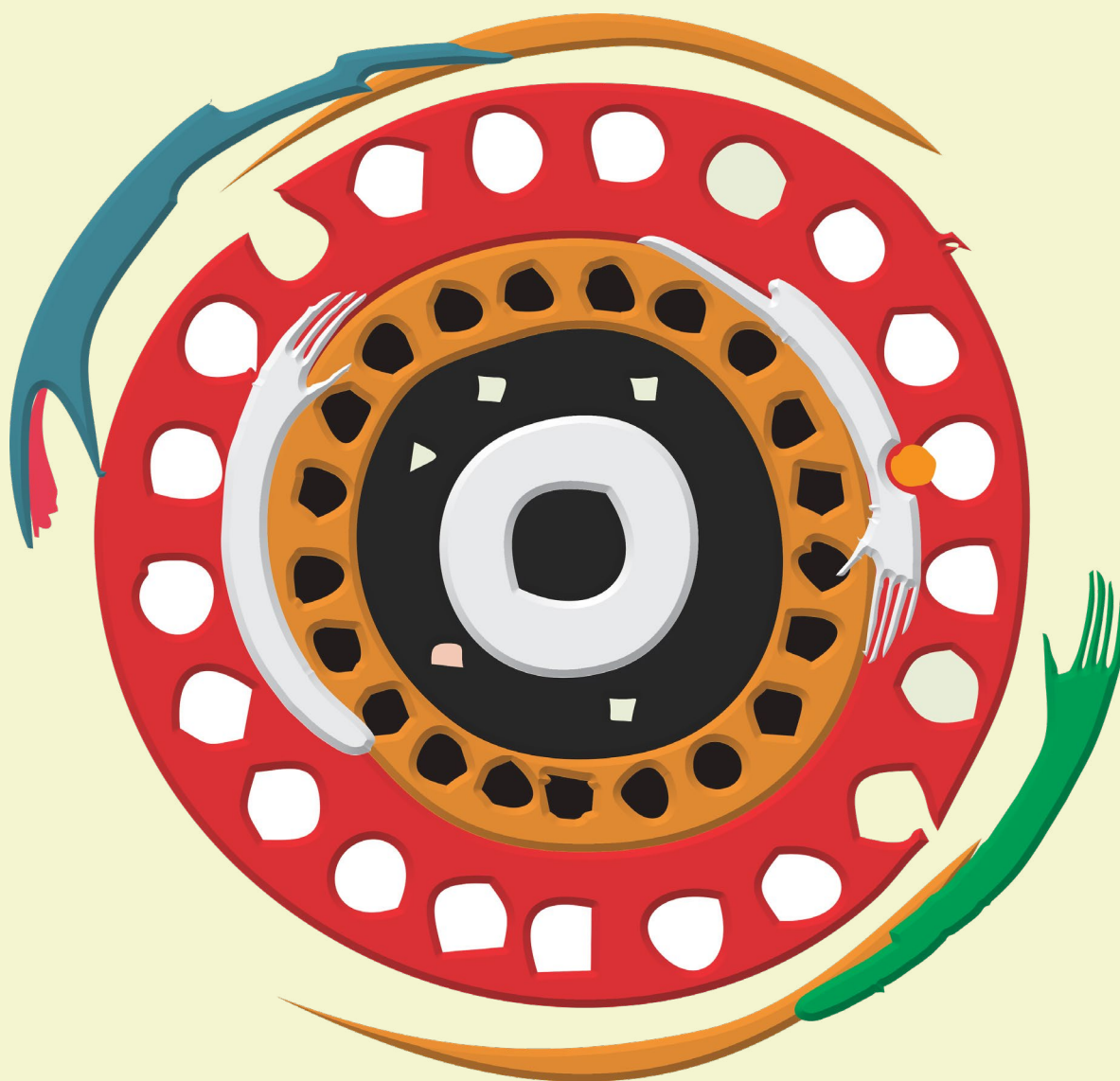


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ISSUE #39 - MARCH 2023

# INSTIGATOR

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION



**OUR ENVIRONMENT  
AND THE WEBS OF LIFE**

**THE AFRICAN WORLD'S  
DEBT TO W.E.B. DU BOIS**

**HEALING  
TERRITORIES**

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**Nnimmo Bassey**  
Director, Helath of  
Mother Earth  
Foundation

## Home Run

Thank you for reading the Eco-Instigator. This is the first edition for the year 2023 which we have themed *Healing Territories*. Our focus for the year is, healing, wellness, wellbeing, solidarity, love, peace and selflessness. These are all embodied in the *Eti Uwem* philosophy which speaks of the good life. Living the good life entails being in a state of wellness—free from disruptions, exploitation, and ecological corruption.

The achievement of a good life is highly linked to the wellbeing of the environment. It so happened that they year of *Healing Territories*, is Nigeria's general elections' year. Seeing how less attention was devoted to environmental issues in the manifestos and campaigns of the presidential aspirants, it became cardinal to seek out what the contestants' ideas for a greener Nigeria could be.

This edition brings you an article that allows for deep reflection on the interconnections between our wellbeing and the environment. And the presidential aspirants also revealed what their plans for a greener nation would look like.

Makoko, a fishing community, in Yaba Local Government Area, Lagos State is under threat as the government dredges its lagoon and waterfronts. The impacts of the 2022 flood remains daunting even as new flood threats reach Nigerians. One would want to ask how Nigerians are coping in all of these—the articles, 'In the Wake of the Flood' and 'Coping with Floods' provide some insight. The HOMEf team presents insights on healing territories in this edition. Once again, a warning alarm is sent out concerning the unsustainability of extractivism and thoughts are shared on how ecological cases can take a down turn.

Also in this edition, we are reminded to carry on the works of great Pan-Africanists and African intellectuals. The advocacy for safer, healthier food and agroecological farming system continues to grow stronger, in here, the opportunities and challenges that come with the much desired transition are presented.

Like previous editions, we stroke your sense of imagination with poetry and short story. Enjoy the edition and remember to drop us a line or share feedback, stories, articles, poems or photos at [editor@homef.org](mailto:editor@homef.org). We look forward to hearing from you.

Until Victory!



# OUR ENVIRONMENT AND THE WEBS OF LIFE

by Nnimmo Bassey

*"Without a safe environment the enjoyment of human rights is highly improbable. The present Nigerian Constitution at Section 20 provides for environmental protection as one of the Fundamental Objectives and directive principles of state policy. It states that states shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air, forest and wild life of Nigeria."*



The 2023 general elections provide Nigerians an opportunity to learn about the critical perception of the presidential candidates to the polycrisis that can be traced to changes in our environment, and especially the climate. The subject of this town hall is fundamental for our survival and to living in dignity.

Without a safe environment the enjoyment of human rights is highly improbable. The present Nigerian Constitution at Section 20 provides for environmental protection as one of the Fundamental Objectives and directive principles of state policy.

*It states that states shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air, forest and wild life of Nigeria.*

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights expressly states at Article 24 that:

*All peoples shall have the right to a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development.*

The Charter has been domesticated by Nigeria, thus, provides a basis for the justiciability of our right to a safe environment.

The reality is that the focus of political leaders on the environment has been largely tokenish. The indicator that they care at all about the environment is often only when they move to destroy under-served and largely autonomous communities termed slums. It is this mindset that led to the destruction of Maroko (which was inhabited by over 300,000 people) in July 1990 and is now threatening Makoko communities in Lagos. And sometimes a cosmetic sanitation exercise in which trash gets pulled out of drains and piled by the roadside until they get washed back into the drains. Although there is a designated ecological fund, its use has been characterized as mostly being for political ends.

### **The Environment Unites**

We believe that serious focus on tackling the environmental problems in Nigeria could be a unifying factor in a nation faced with many divisive factors. Every region has significant ecological problems and investment in solving them would reduce the troubling reality of unemployment by providing needed supports to our largely informal economy. Our propensity to invest in mega projects serve more as means of financial extraction rather than meeting real social-economic needs of our people. We celebrate the construction of deep seaports, but do we have any fish port for the millions of our artisanal fishers?

Nigeria suffers from huge biodiversity losses. At a time when our farmers should be supported to build a farming system that works with nature, to preserve indigenous seeds and varieties, we are opening to all sorts of genetically engineered seeds and products in a very lax biosafety regulation regime that threatens our biosecurity and food security and ignores the *precautionary principle*. While the law requires labelling of



*A teenage girl swimming to her submerged family house in Anegbette, Edo State during the 2022 floods in Nigeria - Photo credit: Stanley Egholo*

GMOs as a cardinal requirement for their being permitted into our environment and to our dining tables, our social-cultural context and informal trading systems make labelling an impossibility. Since we cannot label, we should not permit. That is simple logic.

Should we sacrifice our health and environmental sustainability, promote monoculture, and disrupt our agricultural systems for seed monopolies and promoters of pesticides, and other harmful inputs?

Environmental sustainability has lost much of its meaning since it is hung mostly on the economic plank which sees the environment as a thing to be exploited or transformed for the extraction of rents often termed foreign exchange earnings. This drive for foreign exchange has allowed rapacious exploitation

that has scarred our environment and our peoples, leading to a catastrophic and shameful fall in life expectancy.

Concepts such as the green economy, blue economy and the like, have been aped without any serious interrogation. These have built the scaffolds for the commodification of nature, exploitation of our people and entrenchment of colonial approaches that deepen poverty and lock in corruption and a lack of accountability. Some of these approaches have led to massive land and sea grabs and raised the potential of sky grabbing and ultimate loss of independence.

### **Existential Threats**

The climate crisis is an existential threat to humanity, Nigerians, more so. The floods of 2022 took the lives of up to 630 Nigerians and destroyed infrastructure and over one million homes. Now we have heard warnings about impending floods. This town hall should help us know how the candidates would address this perennial issue that is bound to get worse. Amid floods, Nigerians are battling with water stress and the blockage of water ways by invasive species across the nation.

The trend in political circles has been that Africa must persist in using fossil fuels to drive economic development because Africa has not contributed significantly to the harmful carbon stock in the atmosphere. A supporting argument to this is that renewable energy cannot drive industrialization. Before the conversation begins, let us place on the table that this argument is contestable.

The entire nation of Greece was powered with renewable energy for 5 solid hours in October 2022. Overall, the European Union produced 22 percent of its electricity in 2022 from wind and solar power. If we wish to ignore that as a signal that change is coming, let us not ignore the fact that overall, although Europe is investing in fossil fuels infrastructure in Africa, they are taking

steps to wean themselves of this same energy source. And, there has been a drop in energy demand as the people become more conscious of the climate crisis.

Will we continue to pollute our environment, extend the situation in the Niger Delta to Gombe, Bauchi, Lagos and elsewhere? Do we consider the fact that without a shift in the clean direction, we stand a chance of becoming the cemetery for internal combustion engines in the coming decade? What will the presidential candidates do to ensure that we don't end up with stranded assets as the international oil companies divest and skip off with inordinate profits, even as our communities are already stranded?

We are here to hear from our esteemed presidential candidates. The moderators will likely cover issues of droughts, desertification, deforestation, floods, coastal and gully erosion, oil, and other forms of pollutions. We would also like to know what they would do about the oil/gas well fire that has been raging since April 2020 at Ororo-1 field off the coast of Ondo State. Hopefully, we have a leader that will not keep a blind eye on such blatant ecocide.

Uncontrolled artisanal mining, including of lithium right here in the Federal Capital, and the disturbing blasting of hills in the outskirts of Abuja for construction materials, pose serious environmental and social-cultural problems.

This town hall is as much a platform for the candidates to inform us of their plans for the environmental sector and a platform to sound a wakeup call to every Nigerian to hold office holders accountable for environmental actions or inaction. We cannot play politics with our environment because it holds the webs of life.





PHOTO CREDIT: BABAWALE OBAYANJU



## 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRANTS REVEAL PLANS FOR A GREENER NIGERIA

**A**s the 2023 general election approaches in Nigeria, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPA), and We the People (WTP) organised a presidential townhall for aspirants to share their plans for a greener Nigeria.

It was a platform for presidential aspirants to discuss their action plans for addressing critical environmental and climate change issues facing the country.

The townhall was held at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Abuja, Abuja on 7 February 2023. It had, in attendance, environmentalists, academics, politicians, journalists, over one thousand students and people from environmentally impacted communities.

The following presidential candidates were present: **Omoyele Sowore** of African Action Congress (AAC), **Dumebi Kachikwu** of African Democratic Congress (ADC), **Adewole Adebayo** of Social Democratic Party (SDP), and **Rabiu Kwakwanso** of New Nigerian People's Party (NNPP) represented by his party's national chairman, **Rufai Ahmed Alkali**.

Issues addressed included- what the challenges and opportunities of Nigeria's transition to a green economy and low-carbon development would be; how Nigeria can lead global efforts toward addressing climate change; and plans to address unresolved environmental challenges, resource exploitation, and land degradation in historically marginalized communities in the country.

Tackling the issues, Mr. Omoyele Sowore of the AAC stressed the need for Nigeria to embrace cleaner sources of energy, stating that he had no congratulatory remarks for those who had newly discovered crude oil on their land. "In no time your land will become a

wasteland and you will end up drinking your oil because the world is moving away from oil as an energy source," he stated.

Responding to a question on oil pollution in the Niger Delta, Mr. Sowore avowed that Nigeria needed a pan-African knowledge base across all sectors, including in environmental and climate law/policy spaces. Pointing to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP), he questioned how Africans can expect anything good to come out of a COP that is attended by polluters in private jets. According to him, "the polluters are the ones sitting on the high tables, there can never be green results from such conferences." He further said that, in relation to environmental degradation, conversations at the COP should begin with compensation for and cleanup of the degraded environment.

Speaking on the same issues, SDP's Mr. Adewole Adebayo noted that it is erroneous to address the environment in the second person.

According to him, "we are part of the environment. But the government we have had over the years is a threat to the environment." He spoke on the supposed dichotomy between the natural and social environment, stating that the latter which had to

***" We are part of the environment. But the government we have had over the years is a threat to the environment."***

do with human interactions within the socio-political institutions built is as important as the former (natural environment). Mr. Adebayo also talked about poverty as the only thing that caused people to fall back on the destructive habits for survival. He, thus, emphasized the need to deploy technological innovations to help Nigerians live more sustainably as well as the need to make polluters pay through compensations and investment in reforestation.

"Overall, we must be a community of serious-minded people. When we do not have a leader that is a proper chief executive by ensuring the environmental regulatory agencies are up and doing, the result is what we have currently. And the good thing is, I do not need to attend an international conference to learn how to regulate Nigerian environment,"



Mr. Adebayo said. Regarding the call to transit from oil, the SDP's presidential candidate said, Nigeria has little to lose because she has more gas than crude but the problem is, the resources are majorly being exported.

The ADC candidate, Dumebi Kachikwu aligned with the views that it was wrong to adopt foreign models all round. He noted that many scientific research resulting from foreign countries had commercial motives. Hence, Nigeria must ensure that the foreign models fit well into local circumstances before adopting them.

He stressed the need for homegrown research.

Mr Kachikwu emphasized the need for multinational corporations in Nigeria to

be made to operate strictly within the confines of the law.

Mr. Kachikwu saw conflict as emanating from the tussle for scarce resources and plans to curb the challenge of insecurity by securing the national borders. "If you must enter Nigeria, it must be done legally; and if you must reside here, you must reside peaceably," he stated. He plans to promote ranching over open-grazing and promised to establish a system where all meat would be sold in licensed shops with tracking mechanism to ensure all meat are traceable to the ranch that produced them.

Rufai Ahmed Alkali who represented Rabiu Kwakwanso of NNPP laid emphasis on the production of fertilizers, chemicals, and

pesticides to "revive the agricultural sector".

The NNPP chairman stressed that a revolution was ongoing in the environmental sphere and the intellectual community must continue to interrogate the issues around this revolution.

The respective candidates expressed their dispositions in relation to the role scarce environmental resources play in the insecurity in Nigeria, making particular reference to the depletion of water in Lake Chad and the consequent farmers-herdsmen conflict in some parts of the country.

They also shared their respective views on how the activities of multinational companies in Nigeria can be well regulated to protect the





environment from being despoiled and denigrated. At the commencement of the townhall, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Abuja, Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah, represented by the Deputy Vice Chancellor Admin, Prof Abubakar Abba, highlighted the importance of the environment. He pointed out the fact that "ordinary Nigerians depend on environmental resources for survival, food, medicine, and housing". He urged the candidates to understand how each region of the country share in the environmental and climate crises.

The Director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, in his opening statements, noted that environmental and climate change concerns in Nigeria are unequivocal. He stated categorically that the environment is life which cannot be enjoyed under degradation. He sent out a warning signal on the likelihood of the Niger Delta situation repeating itself elsewhere in Nigeria, specifically in Gombe, Bauchi and Lagos States.

On the issue of adoption of foreign models to solve Nigeria's environmental and climate woes, he stated that concepts such as green economy and blue economy are being imported into our policies without interrogation and with disregard to the precautionary principle. He further stated that the focus of political leaders on the environment was

nothing to write home about. "The indicators that they care at all about the environment are often only when they move to destroy undeserved and largely autonomous communities termed slums; and sometimes a cosmetic sanitation exercise. Thus, we express hope that the 2023 presidential candidates would act differently if they emerge as new presidents". Giving a cue to the aspirants, Nnimmo Bassey stated, "We are experiencing a loss of biodiversity due to the introduction of toxic genetically modified organisms into the environment, every region is facing its own peculiar ecological problems and this could be a unifying factor in a nation faced with many divisive factors". The moderators of the townhall, Edmund Obilo of Splash FM, Nkoli Omohudu of AIT and Sheriff Ghali, a lecturer at the University of Abuja, also lent their voices to the quest for a greener Nigeria.

The townhall was an opportunity for students, lecturers, the media and environmentally impacted communities to hear from and interact with each prospective president on salient issues concerning the environment.





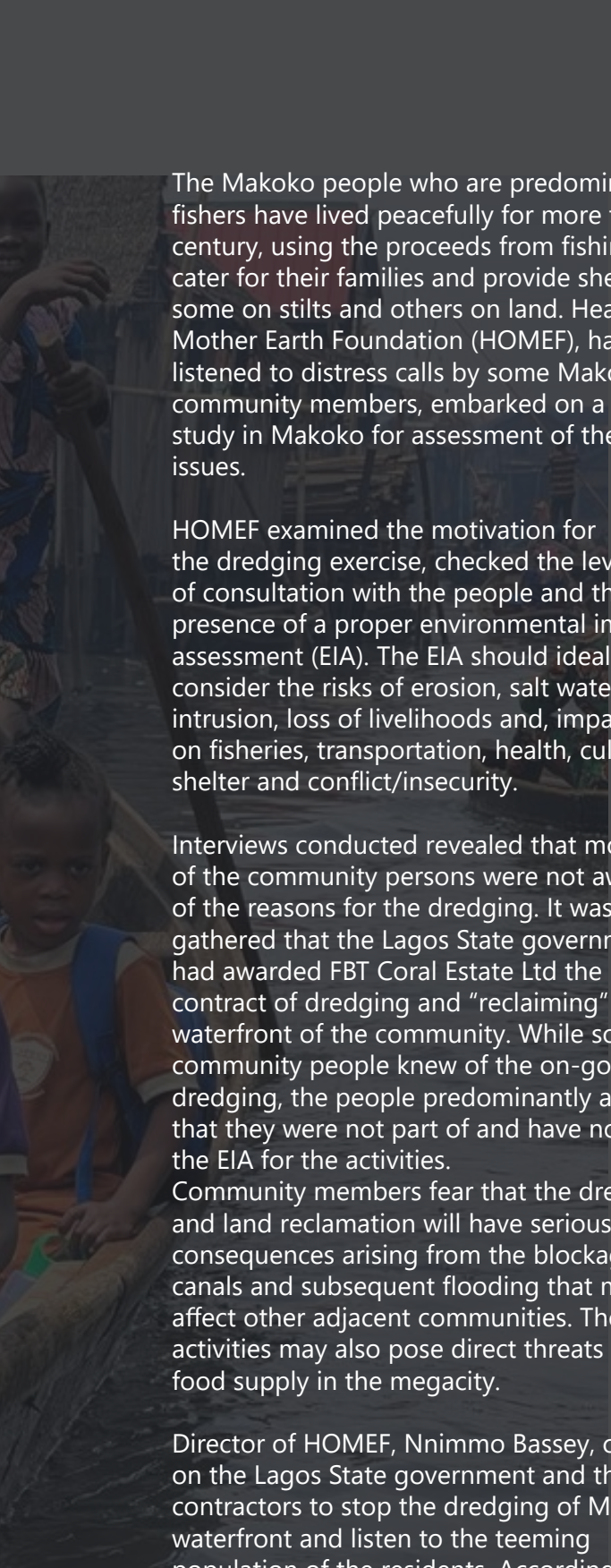
A photograph of a group of children, likely from the Makoko community, sitting in a wooden boat. Several children are wearing orange and purple school uniforms. The background shows a corrugated metal wall. A semi-transparent black box with white text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

# RECLAMATION, DISPLACEMENT AND POVERTY IN MAKOKO

Photo Credit: Nimmo Bassey // HOMIF

**M**akoko is an important fishing community located in Yaba Local Government Area of Lagos State, overlooking the Third Mainland Bridge. The community faces imminent displacement threats from the government of Lagos State, without due consultations or plans for resettlement. The threat is triggered by on-going dredging of the lagoon and waterfronts in the community. This has destabilized the natural equilibrium of the lagoon ecosystems, and is impacting the people's livelihoods and raising the spectre of flooding which could ultimately lead to permanent displacement of the inhabitants of Makoko.





The Makoko people who are predominantly fishers have lived peacefully for more than a century, using the proceeds from fishing to cater for their families and provide shelters, some on stilts and others on land. Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), having listened to distress calls by some Makoko community members, embarked on a field study in Makoko for assessment of the issues.

HOMEF examined the motivation for the dredging exercise, checked the level of consultation with the people and the presence of a proper environmental impacts assessment (EIA). The EIA should ideally consider the risks of erosion, salt water intrusion, loss of livelihoods and, impacts on fisheries, transportation, health, culture, shelter and conflict/insecurity.

Interviews conducted revealed that most of the community persons were not aware of the reasons for the dredging. It was gathered that the Lagos State government had awarded FBT Coral Estate Ltd the contract of dredging and "reclaiming" the waterfront of the community. While some community people knew of the on-going dredging, the people predominantly agreed that they were not part of and have not seen the EIA for the activities.

Community members fear that the dredging and land reclamation will have serious consequences arising from the blockage of canals and subsequent flooding that may affect other adjacent communities. The activities may also pose direct threats to food supply in the megacity.

Director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, calls on the Lagos State government and the contractors to stop the dredging of Makoko waterfront and listen to the teeming population of the residents. According to him: "There is need for government to have open conversations with the people who have deep knowledge of the environment and have made massive economic contributions to the State. The idea of using *development* as a foil for grabbing waterfronts, displacing and destroying the lives and cultures of the people must be

halted." Bassey added that "Makoko and other underserved communities in Lagos and elsewhere in Nigeria, deserved to be upgraded with adequate supply of social services and not displaced for the benefit of land speculators and other forces of accumulation by dispossession."

The Executive Director of CEE-HOPE, Betty Abah, in her submission noted that "the current trend all over the world is to upgrade and not demolish informal settlements, causing homelessness and destitution. Urbanization agendas must be executed in ways that are humane and inclusive of all social statuses, for development ideally should be all about people"

In recent years, demolition threats have hung heavily over the community. The people fear that what happened in Maroko in 1990, which had 300,000 persons displaced and many lives lost, may be visited on them. It will be recalled that in 2012, the government of Lagos State demolished parts of [Makoko community](#) after purportedly giving them only 72 hours' notice, a local chief was shot dead by one of the security personnel in the demolition squad. Less serviced communities in Lagos have faced similar fates with human rights abuses and deaths trailing such assaults.

Otodo Gbame suffered same fate on 9 April 2017 when the community woke up to see that it was surrounded by heavily armed policemen as their homes were burnt to the ground and many residents were wounded and two killed in the process. A more recent demolition happened in Monkey Village also in Lagos.

HOMEF believes that flood prone cities such as Lagos should cease the acts of so-called land reclamation as such activities worsen the crisis and reduce the city's climate change resilience. Wetlands must remain wetlands and people who have kept such ecosystem balances should be supported and not criminalized or victimised.

## POETRY



# NIGER DELTA DEVELOPING CRIMINALS

by Perfect Johndick

We came to the party, dressed up and ready  
A party with delicacies made with **Oil**  
And all sorts of cuisine cooked with **Gas**  
Yet the needs of the millions are swallowed  
by rats and snakes  
As they stare at coleslaw and inhale the  
aroma of **afang** and **egusi**.

The people at the elevated table take all the  
meat, crushed the bones  
Stretched out, drunk on wines  
They've stuffed their bellies and loaded their  
**agbada**  
And dumped the crumbs in the toxic muds  
We get nothing. Not the bones. Not the small  
chops  
We stretch our hands in futile hope  
While they develop their stomachs rather  
than the land

"How can this be?" How?  
Farmers stay hungry  
Fishers gaunt and lean like the fish hook  
Children swim in the mire of death  
Who would beat us if ribs counted in place of  
votes?

We till the soil but reap the dust  
We cast the nets but we are stuck in the mud  
We sing and dance and play the drums  
Then retreat to the pangs of hunger

The people at the elevated table took all the  
meat, crushed the bones  
Stretched out, drunk on wine  
They've stuffed their bellies and loaded their  
**agbada**  
And dumped the crumbs in the toxic muds  
We get nothing. Not the bones. Not the small  
chops

Shall we continue in this dreadful dance?  
When will outstretched hands ball into fists?  
And boldly insist that our labour must not be  
in vain

*(Johndick is of WeThePeople, an NGO working  
to identify and project community stake in key  
social, economic and political considerations of  
the government and private companies*

# IN THE WAKE OF THE FLOOD

By Magdalene Idiang

On the 7th of September 2022, Nigerians woke up to the news that 21 out of 36 states had been hit by the swelling 2022 flood. Several communities, especially those situated on Nigeria's shorelines including communities in the Niger Delta where I come from, were either completely or almost wholly submerged. Virtually every news commentary on the flood proclaimed that a "Disaster" had struck the country. Videos of the flood posted by eyewitnesses showed disturbing scenes. Though Nigeria is not new to floods, the 2022 floods have been described by impacted community persons as the worst ever recorded in Nigeria's living memory. This, the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) learned during a flood research carried out in selected impacted communities.

## **Flood impacts**

Several communities in Nigeria lie along the plains and in very close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and other water bodies. Many of the communities experience annual floods that overwhelm large areas with devastating impacts. One of the earliest major floods occurred in 2012, and in that year, whole communities were submerged, lives lost, properties destroyed and an entire farming season was lost. Since then, flooding has become an expected occurrence every year.

The communities flooded in 2022 were, until the disaster, a convergence of business men and women—shop owners, construction workers, farmers, hunters, fishermen and women whose trade attracted patrons from far and near. The environment was their source of livelihood. Nonetheless, before arrival of December, the month when most Nigerians celebrate their feats throughout the year, their homes were inundated, leaving them in an unfair fight for their lives. A video documentary recorded with the help of drones and satellite imaging of the flood impacted regions showed that Nigeria resembled a vast inland sea. This was recorded after the flood had settled into almost every nook and cranny of the nation.

The impact of the flood was felt all over the country and beyond its borders. For several days,



the routes connecting Kogi-Abuja expressway and East-West Road to Port Harcourt, usually travelled by all, were impassable. Several affected persons managed to escape to high dry lands while others got trapped in their houses. More than 10,000 houses and business centres including factories, schools, shops, markets, banks, offices, etc. had to close temporarily. Price of foodstuff doubled, among other issues. Fears of the toxicity of the flood waters did not deter people from swimming through it, as a final and only option.

The swollen and overflowing rivers became unsuitable for fishing. Farmers lost their sources of livelihood and had their dreams shattered into more pieces. Local transport, electricity and water infrastructures were also damaged. No one deserves to suffer this brutal manifestation of a manmade disaster.

### **Insinuations about the cause of the ravaging flood**

Nigerian news headlines and reporters summarized the flood impact, saying, "Over 2 million people have been displaced from their homes: farmlands submerged, uncountable roads and bridges swept away, 600 people dead in the flood of the century caused by the released of excess water from Lagdo Dam in Northern Cameroun".

There were claims and evidence of warnings about the release of the water but this is in

no way enough. As the impacts of flooding intensifies in Nigeria, the government continues to fail in designing responses that are both effective and sustainable.

### **Voice of flood-impacted persons in Niger Delta communities**

A visit to the impacted communities did not only reveal the severity of the flood but also the people's coping mechanisms. Below are tales of their woes and survival strategies:

*"My name is Odinaka Osu. I live in this community. I gave birth to my baby when the flood started. Since then, I have been sleeping out here with the baby. No food and clean water. I use the flood water to bathe my baby and she drinks the flood water too."*

A female resident from Mbiama community in Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State, who preferred not to say her name, said, "We are predominately farmers and petty traders. Our farms were affected. I lost so much – rice, yams, banana. My plantain farm was destroyed but what we are after now is shelter".

A lady by the name Joy Ovbiye, said, "We are not happy with what is happening. I have been stranded here on this road (the road leading to Ahoada) for three days now. I went to Abua community (in Abua/Odual LGA, Rivers State, Nigeria) to buy gallons of oil for my business. I am unable to go home because the road is



*covered with flood. The fare is very expensive. I have not eaten or had my bath for days now. This is the worst flood we have had since 2012 when we thought we had seen the worst. Churches, markets, and schools have all been taken over by flood water."*

*Another affected person said, "I am a farmer. People are suffering. Flood has chased us away from our different houses. We have become refugees in our homes".*

*A female farmer narrated, "Our resources including cassava, plantain, vegetables, potatoes, groundnuts, land, tools, fishing gears, seeds, food items, animals, cash, jewellery and other items of value have been completely submerged. Corpses have been exhumed from the ground by the flood. Schools have been shut down."*

These are a few of the many stories of environmental plights that many communities are forced to bear. I was deeply touched by their tales of agony, not as an activist but as someone who experienced firsthand the hardships these communities are contending with.

I could immediately relate to the many experiences of fellow brothers, sisters and comrades in Mozambique, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Bangladesh, Thailand—places now faced with an annual reality of floods and the loss of loved ones. In these countries, women and children are always the most affected, and the poor—the least contributors to climate change—suffer the most. These vulnerable persons are mostly found in informal settlements in valleys and on the hillsides across Africa—areas most susceptible to floods and landslides.

### **What can we do differently?**

Looking at information gathered during



Photo Credit: Francis Odeyemi / unsplash

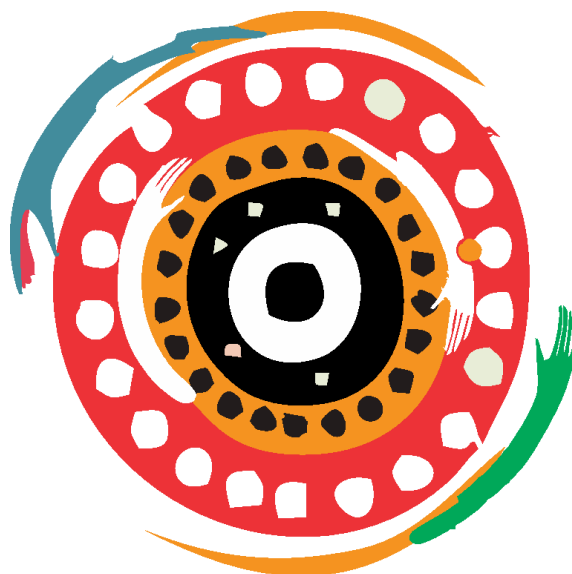
a HOMEF research on the flood situation, it becomes pertinent that the Nigerian government improve their emergency response procedures in the areas of flood forecasting, warning and victims' evacuation. There should be effective strategies put in place to reduce the speed and size of floods. Such strategies may include but not restricted to moving embankments back from rivers; restoring wetlands, floodplains and meanders and; slowing down run-offs. There has to be improvements in dam management. Dams exacerbate floods when they overtop, collapse or are poorly operated.

A safety assessment of existing dams is, therefore, critical and plans for remodelling unsafe dams should be prioritized.

People must be discouraged from living in areas most vulnerable to flood.

# HEALING TERRITORIES

INSIGHTS FROM HOMEF'S TEAM BUILDING PROGRAMME



From 13 to 18 February 2023 HOMEF team members from the various offices (Benin, Abuja, Port Harcourt and South Sudan) came together for her team building and annual general meeting. The team was joined by partners and community representatives who made inputs to plans and strategies for the 2023 work year. The theme for the year—Healing Territories—was set in motion through the various interactive, interesting and productive sessions of the programme. Aimed at giving team members opportunities to bond, reflect on the past year, and strategize for the year 2023, the team building event spurred conversations around gratitude, mindfulness, recovery, trust, values, intentionality, stress management, team work, and clear communication.

All over the world, different unpropitious events threaten the happiness, stability and

wellbeing of the human race. In many local communities, especially in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, community people suffer marginalization, environmental degradation and all manner of injustice. Amidst increasing inflation across countries and struggles with post-pandemic effects, there is a strong need to prioritize and promote total wellness. All of these prompted HOMEF's 2023 theme—Healing Territories—which entails a state of wellness

Wellness is to be free from disruptions, exploitation and ecological corruption. It is a condition of being that is a basic human and environmental right. This wellness is sought for all, at the individual, communal and territorial levels. HOMEF's focus for 2023 is, thus, on the cultivation of wellness and the healing of individuals, their communities and territories. A territory is healthy when the members (beings) are respected,

enjoy dignity and have control over their objective conditions. HOMEf seeks a state of wellness that spans beyond geography to the cultural, spiritual, social and economic spheres. The guiding philosophy is that of balance, meaningful (individual and collective) activity and intentional recovery.

The programme kicked off with a discussion on *Eti-Uwem*—“the good life.” The good life signifies a generosity of spirit, a great heart, kindness, love, peace and selflessness. Tied to it, are some of the values that the society has lost—values of communality, shared

gratitude and mindfulness. These entailed lessons on non-judging, patience, self-acceptance, having a beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and so on.

Active listening is key to HOMEf’s work with communities as it is critical for promoting healing. Team members learned to be present, listen actively, acknowledge emotions and resolve conflicts throughout the course of any task. There were also discussions on self-care, health, making better lifestyle choices, financial fulfilment and recovering from burn out.



PHOTO CREDIT: BABAWALE OBAYANJU

respect for nature, hard work, honesty, etc. Preventing humans and other beings from the good life, are the unspoken traumas suffered and sicknesses for which healing seem to be farfetched.

To deliver the good life, we as humans must address our trauma and take steps towards recovery. We must attentively listen to one another, build trust and reclaim our values, and live in cohesion with other beings with whom we share the planet.

Team members shared key reflections from 2022 and decisions for 2023. There were activities on building trust, cultivating

Participants also learned about sustaining community engagement as a necessary strategy for actualising the mission and vision, mobilizing more community members, building trust, fostering innovation, uncovering new opportunities, accelerating growth and development and, contributing to peaceful, well-governed and stable societies.

Part of the highlights of the programmes was the reading of, reflection and sharing of thoughts on a few stories from the book,





Akamba Mfina, written by two HOMEF team members. Akamba Mfina is an Ibibio phrase that means “big trouble”. The book is a collection of short stories told from the point of view of animals and other beings sacrificed for the pleasure of humans. It conveys the drastic effects of climate change on these species.

The earth is a shared home; through storytelling, the publication is another way of speaking up for the community of beings who suffer the brunt of the commoditization of the earth.

Download a free digital copy of Akamba Mfina on the HOMEF website: [www.homef.org](http://www.homef.org)



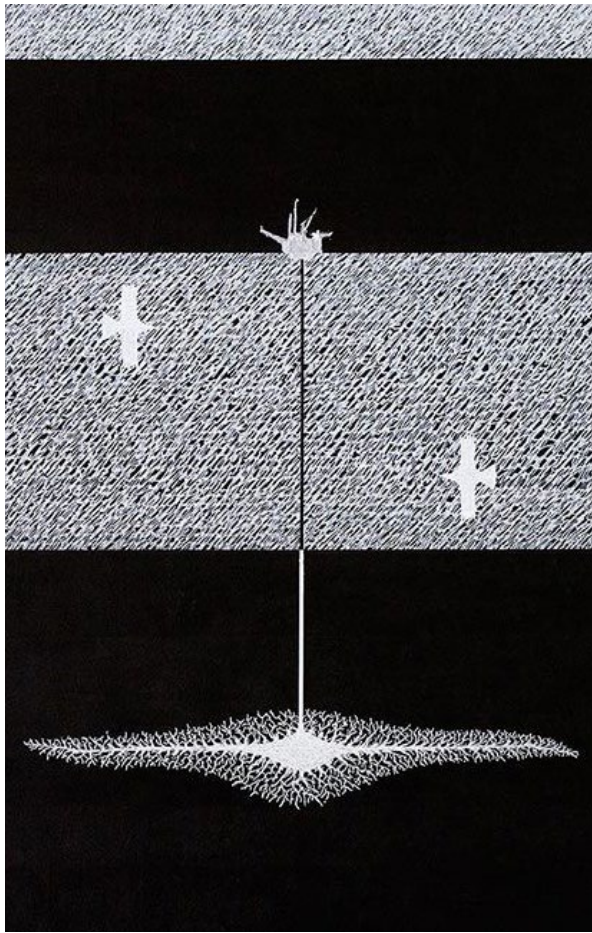
# THE UN SUSTAINABILITY OF EXTRACTIVISM

By Nnimmo Bassey

EXTRACTIVISM LIES AT THE BASE OF THE CLIMATE AND FOOD CRISES. IT IS PROPELLED BY A COMPLEX OF MENTALITIES AND POWER DIFFERENTIALS THAT ARE BASICALLY SELF-REINFORCING IN PRACTICE, UNDERWRITING AND RATIONALIZING SOCIO-ECOLOGICALLY DESTRUCTIVE MODES OF ORGANIZING LIFE THROUGH DEPLETION, AND NON-RECIPROCITY.

It builds dependency by entrenching the mindset that nations or territories can only transform their economies through this means. Extractivism is clearly unsustainable. Sustainable development or even growth in the context of extractivism is an ugly oxymoron. Extractivism was built by colonialism and subjugation and has been sustained by coloniality and forced submission to the forces of capital and socio-ecological exploitation.

Consequent upon these forces, the earth, as we know it, is at great risk and rapidly becoming unsuitable for human habitation. The propensity to extract, consume, exploit and trash has triggered multiple crises including climate change and the smouldering food crisis. The human induced climate chaos is responsible for droughts, floods, sea level rise, coastal erosion, desertification, marked temperature rise and others. These stressors have triggered



famines, forced migration and conflicts. The challenge is that there are no signs that humans are ready to take the path of rectitude regarding the exploitation of Nature or to transition to more benign modes of production and consumption.

Platitudes have remained the order of the day, at national, regional, and markedly at multilateral conversations on the issues. This scenario continues to play out because the key discussants have a sneaky belief that whatever catastrophe may be looming will not manifest in their own lifetime. Humans may never have been more selfish and narcissistic since the first human rose from the dust.

The world celebrates the temperature target of 1.5 degrees Celsius as per the Paris Agreement, but a country like Nigeria has already experienced a 1.6 degrees Celsius temperature rise above preindustrial levels. Think about that and tell us if it makes sense for Nigeria to lay any stock on a temperature target that she has already exceeded. What

we are facing is an emergency.

We are faced with an acute emergency because we are pressed from all sides by the unfolding crises. Eleven states in northern Nigeria are being challenged by desertification. Communities along our 850 kilometres coastline are losing land as the rising ocean level eats away huge swaths of land yearly. Indeed, many significant cultural landmarks have faded into memory in their watery locations. Add to this the unchecked and reckless exploitation of territories by extractivist corporations and the resulting oil pollution, deforestation, mining and water stress and it becomes clear why we are faced with a precipitous food crisis. The resilience of our indigenous agricultural system has been challenged in all sectors: farming, fisheries, and pastoralism. The unfolding non-solutions driven by agents of monopoly and favoured by politicians introduce new impediments to resilience building.

Biodiversity loss, genetic engineering, geoengineering, and other challenges are building up intergenerational crises that will not only negatively impact the environment but may probably upend human nature, and the survival of other beings.

We need to school ourselves on the ecological costs of extractivism. Such schools of ecology should provide us with the scaffolds for the construction of just socio-economic relations as humans, communities and nations interact with each other and with Mother Earth. They would be spaces to remind us that there are many individuals, groups and communities who are already taking steps to ensure a liveable future. We must enact these schools in our streets, village squares and town halls so as to learn together, build together and forge ways forward in solidarity.





# HAVE YOU READ THE NIGER DELTA MANIFESTO FOR SOCIO ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE?

IF NO IS YOUR ANSWER, HURRY TO

**[WWW.NDAC.AFRICA](http://WWW.NDAC.AFRICA)**

TO DOWNLOAD A FREE COPY TODAY.





# Coping with Floods by Ogechi Okanya

**F**lood episodes with resultant losses have been recorded in Nigeria for many decades. From the 1940s to the recent past decade beginning from 2010 and the present, beginning from 2020, there have been records of increasingly destabilizing flood events.

For each year, from 2010 to 2020, a HOMEF report titled 'Floods, climate change & Covid-19' laid out flood incidents with their crushing impacts on different states in Nigeria. The losses continue to increase as the flood momentum intensifies and the reach widens.

With climate change leading to the continuous acceleration of sea level rise, increased melting of European glaciers, intensifying rainstorms and, swelling ocean storms and tidal waves, Nigeria is increasingly witnessing heightened coastal, river and urban flooding as well as flash floods. The soil moisture in many parts of the country is saturated meaning that the

empty spaces between the solid soil particles (i.e. the pores of the soil) are filled with water. This spells doom for farmers and their crops—doom for our food security and even our food sovereignty.

There is regular experience of heavy rainfall; more and more water is being accumulated in major river channels, making them unable to contain any additional water. The climate continues to change and the result is flooding among other disturbing environmental events. In spite of these, many Nigerians have singled out the release of excess water from the Lagdo dam in Cameroon as the cause of both the devastating floods of 2012 and 2022. It is pertinent to note that the 2022 floods began in January—seven months before the release of water from the Lagdo dam. Nigeria currently has about 17 dams yet flood incidences have been on the rise in the country.

To state more emphatically, the rains and flood experiences in 2022 began in January 2022 and increasing precipitations accompanied by strong winds followed in June before ever excess water was released from the Lagdo dam in September. With this, it becomes fallacious to attribute the 2022 flood, and as a matter of fact, other flood incidents in Nigeria, solely or majorly to the release of water from any dam(s). To make this attribution is to espouse a myopic sense of the environmental crises that Nigeria faces alongside other countries in the world. It would also focus attention more or even exclusively on temporary flood mitigation measures while abrogating or downplaying the much needed real climate actions.

Building more dams may seem sensible. But dams as well as similar engineered infrastructures like floodwalls and levees wane. They deteriorate even more rapidly in nations with low maintenance culture, hence, cannot be totally depended upon for flood control. Many are yet to fully come to terms with climate change (aggravated by destructive patterns of production) being at the root of the various environmental and

climate calamities befalling Nigeria, from North to South, East to West. But while the doubts and inactions linger, the daunting question is: How are impacted communities coping with flooding?

Experiencing the disastrous 2022 flood in Bayelsa State, an 8-member team, three from Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW) and five from Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) embarked upon an on-the-spot study to find out the coping mechanisms of selected communities ravaged by the flood.

The study was carried out in 19 severely impacted communities in five states. In Bayelsa, five communities were visited: Tombia, Etegwe, Imiringi, Opolo and Igbogene. Oweto, Usha, Ushugbudu, Ogbagaji, Okokolo and Akpeko were visited in Benue. For Edo State, Udaba-Ekphei and Anegbette were visited. In Kogi, the researchers visited Odogu and Enweli and in Rivers, Mbiama, Edagberi (also known as Betterland or JK4), Akinima, Joinkrama 1 or JK1 were visited. The selected were among the frontline states, along the courses of Rivers Niger and Benue, predicted to be impacted by the excess water released from the Lagdo dam (in Cameroon) and the overflow of the Kainji, Shiroro, and Jebba dams in Nigeria. The communities were selected using the criteria of accessibility and severity of impact.

The research effort produced two documents—the full research report and a barefoot guide for equipping communities with coping mechanisms for flood incidences. The research report revealed great similarities in the impacts of the flood and in the coping mechanisms of the affected communities. However, certain peculiarities were observed. In terms of terrain, some areas, specifically in Benue and Kogi States, had hilly parts, and farm lands supposedly on high grounds which some of the flood victims used as temporary settlements during the flood events. Also, some of the coping mechanisms found, for example, drinking and bathing with flood water coupled with open defecation, signal



impending public health crisis.

According to some of the major findings reported, the main losses incurred by the affected persons, aside from the lives lost, are the destroyed farmlands and farm produce and, the dislocation of major livelihood sources.

The impact of the floods on farms and livelihood has resulted in increased logging in some impacted communities. Many of the flood victims had moved into other livelihood sources for survival. Fishers, farmers, teachers and persons in other professions resorted to fishing in the flood waters in the communities as rivers had risen and overflowed their banks, making fishing in them impossible.

The floods had submerged entire communities, forcing the inhabitants to move to main roads, farms and bushes (with the risks of being bitten by reptiles) on high grounds and, to hilly and rocky areas where they existed. Roads became residential zones, business grounds and parking lots. Several viable recommendations were made at the end of the study. Among the recommendations was the need for communities to be sensitized on the link between climate change and flooding so that they can build mitigation and adaptation capacities against climate change and other environmental disasters. It was also recommended that communities in flood prone areas be given all support needed to have communal farms including fish and livestock farms in identified high land areas, for example, the corners of main roads which as the research shows are not always flooded.

The study also put forward the need for government and leadership at community, clan, local government, state and national levels to search out spacious and comfortable public infrastructures on high land areas and designate them as IDPs

camps for flood victims.

It was equally suggested that compensations be paid to the flood victims as bulk of the blame for flood incidences do not rest on the affected persons and communities. It was advised that the construction capacity of community men and women be developed to enable them design and build more solid platforms and homes that are flood adaptive, for example, floating houses. Another important recommendation made was that communities be sensitized and trained on how to purify dirty water through



PHOTO CREDIT: KELLY-SIKKEMA // unsplash

procedures such as boiling, filtration, distillation and chlorination.

Ministries of health in the different states were called out to work through and with community health centres and personnel for quick deployment of health personnel and distribution of medication to not just IDPs camps but also the makeshift shelters in and around impacted communities. In the same vain, the Ministry of Water Resources was advised to have effective plans for the supply of portable water to IDP camps and impacted communities using local water bodies.

It was also recommended that special maritime security and rescue team be deployed to impacted communities to protect the lives and property of commuters on the flood. Look out for the full research report at [www.homef.org](http://www.homef.org)



# IKIKE

After a long and hard search for concepts that best capture our learning spaces, we settled on the word IKIKE.

This word has important meanings in two Nigerian/African Languages.

In Ibibio, it means listen, reasoning power, common sense and intellect. In Igbo, it has multiple meanings including rights, authoritative, capability and jurisdiction. In resolving to call our knowledge space Ikike, we anchor on reasoning power, intellect and rights.

Ikike is thus the umbrella word for our Sustain-Ability Academy, School of Ecology, Community Dialogues and our occasional Conversations.

To learn more about **IKIKE**, Kindly visit <https://homef.org/ikike/>

# The Bitter Transmogrification of Ecological Cases

by Dieworimene Koikoibo





May it be untrue, for the sake of all the Earth. But it is becoming increasingly difficult not to be persuaded to accept that corporations consider it a good thing to make profit at the cost of human lives, environmental damage and to scheme to abscond from responding to the dire consequences of their operations. One must be persuaded as evidences abound in the gory sights of the many coal, oil and gas-infested sites across the world.

This piece seeks to demonstrate the unapologetic and hostile manner with which corporations, otherwise called 'the polluters', and their partners in pollution contest lawsuits demanding justice for ecological horrors. It is absurd! Take, for example, the oily and burning situation in the Niger Delta, particularly in Iwherekhan community, Delta State, Nigeria. In the community, there are at least three fiery beasts (gas flares) belching the toxic fire on the environment and people despite a 2005 Federal High Court ruling on the "Gbemre Case". The ruling, which was appealed by the polluter, marked the Nigerian courts' first attempt at condemning gas flaring as a gross violation of the right to life, dignity and a healthy environment and ordered its cessation.

Sadly, the court later granted a conditional Stay of Execution of the ruling. A Stay of Execution temporarily stops the beneficiary of a ruling/judgment from enjoying the benefits of that ruling/judgement while the appeal is being heard. One of the conditions of the Stay required both Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to submit a detailed plan aimed at achieving zero gas flaring by 30 April 2007. But the cohort did not obey the Order. The matter was further muddled by the sudden transfer of the judge, Nwokorie J., to another judicial division and the mysterious disappearance of the case file. Subsequently, SPDC was granted a further Stay of Execution with no known condition attached.

The above case is a testament to the fact that the Nigerian Government and multinational oil companies (MOCs), in cohorts, do not give a hoot about the ongoing environmental and public health consequences of MOCs' operations in the Niger Delta. These partners may pursue the case up to the Supreme Court, until they have the ruling overturned. The Gbemre Case, which has already lasted over a decade, is still unfolding and the best outcome in the shortest time is prayed. To show that these are not issues that are peculiar to the Niger Delta region, in another clime, there is yet another textbook case—one riddled with grotesque plot twists and ironies.

The case is one of odious contests and sensibility-insulting denial of liability. It is the lawsuit over the ecological damage and harm to public health in the Lago Agrio region of the Ecuadorian amazon. A case of contamination—the result of nearly 30 years of oil operations spearheaded by Texaco Petroleum (Texaco), Chevron's subsidiary, in partnership with Petroecuador, Ecuador's state-owned oil company.

This contamination case began in November 1993 when the Lago Agrio plaintiffs (comprising small farmers and indigenous people) sued Texaco in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York. By 2018, 'after traversing across a quarter century,

three continents, and three jurisdictions', the matter transmogrified into the breach of a bilateral investment treaty in which the Lago Agrio plaintiffs had 'neither voice nor standing'.

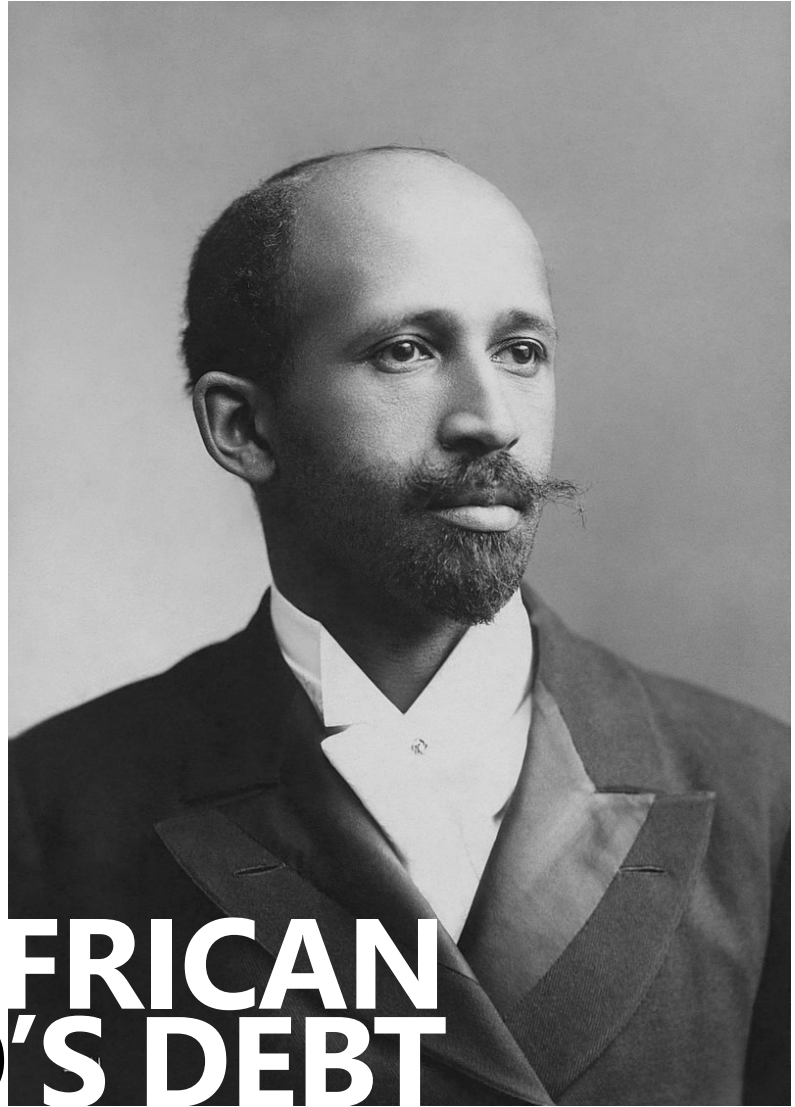
This was how it happened.

In May 2001, the US District Court for the Southern District of New York directed the lawsuit to be heard in Ecuador on the grounds of **forum non conveniens** and international comity. Forum non conveniens allows a court which has jurisdiction over a case (or the court chosen by the suing party, in this case Lago Agrio region) to dismiss it (the case). The dismissal is done on the grounds that the court is not convenient for the witnesses or poses needless distress on the defendants. It is the defendants, in this case the oil companies, who petition the court for an order shifting the case to a court deemed more convenient. By October of the same year (2001), Texaco and Chevron finalized their merger agreement—an agreement which was later sought to be used as a shield to escape liability in the case. In May 2003, the Lago Agrio plaintiffs sued Chevron in the Provincial Court of Justice of Sucumbíos. By October, the Lago Agrio Case began in the Provincial Court of Justice of Sucumbíos and, in February 2011, the court rendered an \$18 billion judgment—later reduced to \$9.5 billion—against Chevron for the contamination resulting from crude oil production in the region.

It is worth noting, as Suzana Sawyer, who has provided a most critical analysis of the case in her 417-page book titled *Small Matter*, recognized, that "neither disparities, nor improprieties, nor scientific truth determined the legal outcome in Ecuador. Rather, the limitations and indeterminacies of science, the compromised quality of corporate contractual arrangements, the expanded modes of legal recognition, and the sociomateriality of "facts" and their making enacted a legal reality in Ecuador that led to this unparalleled and fiercely contested ruling".

The reality included evidence of the company's prior knowledge of potential harm, technical expertise and capacity to prevent the harm, as well as the court's reliance on a "new type of liability" based on the principle of **ubi emolumentum, ibi onus** (where a benefit is found, responsibility follows). The said principle holds, and the judge reasoned, that the absence of guilt through proof does not exonerate the custodian of things (or owner of the operation) from liability. Thus, where Chevron alleged absence of "regulation or numerical standards" at the time of its operations as a defence to the claim, the judge found and forcefully reiterated that "the lack of regulations cannot be understood as implicit permission to defile the water, or engage in practices that have placed human health at risk". Chevron insisted that poor living conditions were the cause of harm to public health, here again, the judge found that since "other provinces with similar poverty indexes" are not confronted with the same health concerns, "it is not poverty that directly [caused] mortality, but rather a common denominator [contamination]".

Indeed a shining example of conscientious judicial acumen, this judgement was affirmed by three other Ecuadorian courts including their supreme court. But it was far from the end of the matter.



# THE AFRICAN WORLD'S DEBT

By Ike Okonta

TO W.E.B. DU BOIS

I have just finished reading David Levering Lewis' two-volume biography of the African American intellectual and architect of the American Civil Rights Movement, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois. The two books won the Pulitzer Prize an unprecedented two times and cemented Professor Lewis' reputation as one of the world's leading biographers and historians. The prose deployed in the books is sinewy and lyrical. The argument is engaging and muscular. The overall effect is one of joy and gratitude—that an African American historian would pay tribute to one of the world's greatest intellectuals in a manner worthy of great literature.

Dr. Du Bois, for the uninitiated, was born in Massachusetts, United States, in 1868. He died in exile in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana in 1963, at the ripe age of 95. Du Bois was into journalism, political activism, and fiction and non-fiction



writing. He was the first black American to earn a doctorate in Sociology in Harvard University. He was to quickly prove that he fully deserved his PhD.

One of his earliest books, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is still read all over the world today and taught in leading universities. His other books include *Gift of Black Folk*, *Black Reconstruction* and *The World and Africa*. It is in these books that Dr. Du Bois gave to the world such concepts as 'Double Consciousness,' 'The Talented Tenth' and the twentieth century being the century of the colour line.

Dr. Du Bois is also hailed as the father of Pan-Africanism. As early as the year 1900 he called a meeting of black intellectuals and political activists in London and charged the gathering with the task of reviving the economic and political fortune of all people of African descent in the motherland and the diaspora.

It was in the speech he delivered at this historic meeting that Du Bois prophesied that the twentieth century would be a very turbulent century politically and that non-Europeans in Africa and Asia would rise up to challenge the hegemony and imperialism of Europeans. Du Bois was to follow up this 1900 meeting with several congresses of the Pan African movement, culminating in the epochal congress in Manchester, United Kingdom in 1945 where the likes of Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta came into their own.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, one of Nigeria's leading nationalists, was directly influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois when the former was studying in the United States in the late 1920s. One of Azikiwe's earliest journalistic pieces, an essay on the killing of Igbo women by British colonialists during the Aba Women's War in



1929, was published in *The Crisis*, the very influential monthly magazine of African American affairs which Du Bois edited at the time. As an undergraduate in the Nsukka campus of the University of Nigeria in the early 1980s, I was thrilled encountering the names of prominent African Americans on several university buildings.

The fiction section in the university library was also stocked with the works of the leading African American writers of the 20th century—Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison among others. I read these authors with relish and was introduced to the life and travails of our black brothers and sisters in America. This experience shaped and continues to shape my

politics.

It is, however, significant to note that Dr. Azikiwe, who founded the University of Nigeria in 1960 did not name a single one of the buildings in the University after Dr. Du Bois. I have often speculated on the reason. Could it be because Dr. Du Bois was a socialist and indeed joined the Communist Party of the United States in the evening of his life? As is well known, Azikiwe was an arch capitalist and in his writings did not hide the fact that one of the major motivations of his life was to accumulate as much wealth as possible.

Du Bois travelled widely in his old age and met such personages as Chairman Mao of China and Nikita Krushchev of the Soviet Union. The American government, which was at the time in a cold war with China and the USSR did not like the fact that Du Bois was fraternizing with the 'enemy' and in fact confiscated his passport for a period. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the ultimate pragmatic politician, might have steered away from Du Bois during this time so as not to offend the United States and Great Britain.

Dr. Du Bois is not widely known in Nigeria unlike in Ghana where he is celebrated as a Pan African icon. This is tragic because Nigeria and indeed all African countries owe Du Bois a debt of gratitude. Without Du Bois' path-breaking work in the early decades of the 20th century as an implacable Pan Africanist, the rise of the likes of Dr. Azikiwe, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Dr Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana would have been inconceivable.

Until he breathed his last in Accra where he was working on an encyclopedia of the African world, Du Bois hungered for the day when the countries of Africa and its diaspora would be able to stand up on their own and

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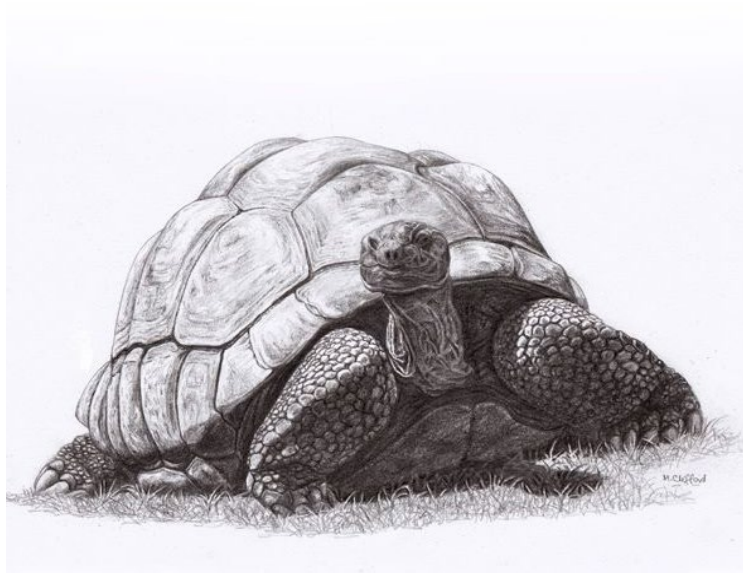
take their place in the comity of nations. He had total and unswerving faith in Africa and her peoples, and was confident that the day was not far off when the continent would astonish the world with her advances in culture, science and technology.

The Covid 19 outbreak and Africa's laggardly response to it has brought home the brutal fact that Africa will have to swim or sink on her own efforts. The present situation wherein Africa's ruling class since the 1960s have been looting the continent and stashing away the money in European and American banks must be confronted.

A new Africa founded on the dreams that Dr. Du Bois so selflessly and bravely

enunciated must be allowed to take root. The best way to pay back Dr. W.E.B Dubois is to simply continue the work from where he left off—the project of a nascent African world taking her proper place in the world.

*Dr. Okonta was until recently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of Politics, University of Oxford. He presently lives in Abuja, Nigeria.*



# The Ones Who Suffer

by Onome Olive Etisioro

**A**japa was a tortoise with a purpose. That, and a single-minded focus, too. That was why he was hurtling along the riverbank that led further and further away from the safety of the forest ... or was it, the danger of the forest? He could not exactly say that his home was any safer than the place he was now heading toward—not after the famine that kept ravaging

the kingdom, and certainly not after seeing what the infestation of the accursed oil had done to both him and his family. If anything, the settlement of the sons of men would prove even more lethal, and yet, Ajapa kept trudging on, feet digging resolutely into the sand, with the black oil soaked into the soil staining his feet a gruesome black.

Ajapa had already considered the fact that he was probably also dying, just in the same way that his nephew, Kola the Turtle,

was dying. Just in the same way that his wife, Ajoke, was dying—maybe the oil was already bubbling inside his veins—slowly, insidiously, until it would be too late to change anything.

No. Ajapa refused to accept it; the defeat ... the resignation. He was never going to resign himself to a fate as filthy as this, not even when all the other animals were. Not even if Kola already had. He was going to fight, and fighting meant that he had to find the Earth Doctor, the one Kola



had said helped animals sickened by the crude oil.

And that was why he had a single-minded focus; why the crude oil-soaked soil did nothing to deter him from his march onward, towards the most dangerous place any animal would ever dare to venture – into the settlement of the sons of men. Deeper into the maze of buildings where, according to Anansi, the air was thick with soot and smoke, and the people were more monsters than men.

"What are you doing so far from your home, Tortoise?" The voice pulled him up short, but it was the appearance of the feet in front of his path that made him freeze, Ajapa stopped, letting his eyes slowly travel up, up, up. The son of man standing before him had the biggest eyes he had ever seen, large as they were behind the thick magnifying effects of the glasses resting on his nose.

Ajapa's first instinct was to duck his head into his hell, and hope it gave him a measure of protection from this man's sudden appearance, but when the son of man squatted down in front of him and reached his hand out as if to touch him, Ajapa lost his temper. He saw images of his dying nephew and his poor wife, as well as the pitiful birds all dying from failing internal organs all because of the sons of men and their greedy grab for power and wealth. All because they

kept poisoning the land with oil.

And Ajapa snapped back then. He snapped outward, closing his teeth around the man's reaching hand, and heard the crunch of his teeth breaking the skin.

"Ow!" the man, who turned out to be a teenager, yelped and tried to snatch his hand back, nearly tearing off more of his skin as he kept dragging his hand out of Ajapa's angry teeth. "Ow, ow, ow! Dad! The tortoise is biting me! It hurts!"

Ajapa's ears tingled. Dad? That meant that there was another human around. And even he knew that two against one were not very good odds. He let go of the boy's hand, and the teenager smartly scrambled away, cradling his bitten hand up close to his chest. "What did you do to it?" a second voice inquired, and Ajapa finally saw the man's feet as they came into view, and when his eyes traveled up, he found a certain older man squinting down at him sans the glasses. No, this man had sharp, piercing eyes that made Ajapa feel like he was being run through with a spear.

"Me?" the boy sputtered in obvious indignation. "I didn't do anything to it! I wanted to touch it, and it just launched itself at me and ... and attacked me!" The man smiled, and Ajapa did not like that curve of his mouth one bit. "You must have done something to anger the tortoise," he said, squatting down just like his

son had done, and Ajapa barely restrained himself from lunging at this man too.

"I'm telling you; I didn't even touch it!" the boy griped, glaring down at Ajapa.

"Maybe it's rabid..."

"Who're you calling rabid?"

Ajapa spat back and the boy flinched, inching further away from him. "This is all your fault, you nasty child!" And, while he knew he was probably taking out his anger on the wrong target, having a target at all to focus on felt really good.

The boy gasped and threw his hands up, glancing back at his father with a bewildered stare. "I swear, Dad! I didn't even touch him! He attacked me first!"

The man's smile only widened, and Ajapa began to think over the possibility of getting away with it if he threw caution to the wind and bit the man's index finger or more off, too. Those odds, though ... still did not look too good to him.

"You seem to be in a hurry, Mr Tortoise ..."

***The story continues in the book *Akamba Mfina: Climate Chaos in the Animal Kingdom****

**N**igeria is one of the countries in Africa that is most susceptible to climate change. About 51.2% of Nigeria's GHG emissions is from agriculture, forestry, and other land use activities. The country is currently not practicing agriculture that is climate resilient. Transitioning to Agroecology—an approach for sustainable farming and food system—is the best line of action.

Nigeria's agricultural policy and practices, for the time being, are still focused on scaling up monoculture and large-scale soil tillage. These are faulty practices that lead to full and constant dependency on imported inputs as well as heavy use of chemical pesticides, genetically engineered varieties, tillage, etc.

This present system of agriculture leads to Nigeria's soils being degrading and having a constant deficit in nutrient supply and carbon/water holding capacities; erosion; biodiversity loss; lack of food security and food sovereignty—a situation where Nigerians can no longer decide what they eat. All this is happening as the Federal Ministry of Agriculture projects that the demand for staple food will increase by 50% in the country due to increase in population.

Another vital issue with the current agricultural practice in Nigeria is that it is characterised by high use of hazardous pesticides and higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The result has been food shortage, inflation in the price of food yet low income for smallholder farmers. There is also the risk to health as evidenced in a current research carried out by the Alliance for Action on Pesticide in Nigeria (AAPN) and Small-scale Women Farmers Association in Nigeria (SWOFON). The research titled 'Pesticide use among small scale women farmers: a snapshot of survey by AAPN and SWOFON' showed that, 53% of the active ingredients in the pesticides brands used by the farmers surveyed are carcinogenic.

Aside the ingredients that can cause cancer, the remaining 47% of the active ingredients in the pesticides were found to have other adverse health effects leading to different



sicknesses. Some of the possible illnesses are tumour, mild skin irritation, immune system disruption, blood and nerve disorders, endocrine disruption, diarrhoea, birth defects, genetic changes and even coma or death.

With the maladies associated with the contemporary agricultural practices and the detrimental effects on the environment, climate and overall food system, a switch to agroecology is the most reasonable thing to do.

Agroecology should be the norm in agricultural practice not just an alternative. Agroecology builds resilience against climate change and improves market shocks while empowering big and small producers. The concept and principles of agroecology extend beyond the farm and food production, to the whole



# Transitioning to Agroecology - the Opportunities and Challenges

By Donald Ikenna Ofoegbu

*"This present system of agriculture leads to Nigeria's soils being degrading and having a constant deficit in nutrient supply and carbon/water holding capacities; erosion; biodiversity loss; lack of food security and food sovereignty—a situation where Nigerians can no longer decide what they eat."*



food distribution and consumption pathways. Ecological agroforestry—or regenerative agriculture as agroecology is also called—is widely considered to be a major factor in solving the problems of poverty, climate change, unemployment, migration, and food insecurity in rural areas. As a farming approach, agroecology works with nature rather than against it. Agroecological farming uses mostly natural and environmentally friendly methods and techniques in farming, therefore, enhances the productivity of the land.

With agroecology, Nigeria can practice agriculture that is 100% pesticide free. This is already being practiced in the Yangoje Agroecological Farm (in Kwali, Abuja) where no chemical fertilizers or inputs are used and 99.9% of farm inputs are generated on the farm. The Yangoje farm operates a circular ecosystem with zero waste—a system which returns more to nature than it takes out.

Agroecology can tackle most of Nigeria's socioeconomic and environmental problems from their root causes. It can ensure the regeneration of natural ecosystems, for example, improving ground water levels and restoring biodiversity; guaranteeing higher productivity and income for farmers and herders and; generating new jobs. Agroecology is a way to stimulate and sustain rural development. With agroecology, there is better land use efficiency per hectare compared to a system of agriculture that is based on monoculture and the use of chemicals. From large scale agrofarms to small farms and gardens, agroecology guarantees higher returns on investment, increases assets in the hands of farmers and all year harvests.

### **Challenges to the Transition to Agroecology**

As it is with every good thing that is worth doing, the move to transition to agroecology is not without its challenges. There are wrong and poor narratives, weak food safety messaging, poor networking, limited knowledge and capacity for agroecological practices, Consumers,

government and farmers are ignorant of the hazards of monoculture and the use of highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs). There is also poor knowledge about agroecology practices/practitioners and of alternatives to monoculture and HHPs.

The pursuit of fast money is another challenge. While farmers pursue fast money, consumers go for cheaper food. It

***“Agroecology guarantees higher returns on investment, increases assets in the hands of farmers and all year harvests.”***

is a case of health and safety vs short term economic growth (not sustainable economic development).

Another issue, is the weak and bias government support. The government still provides support for monoculture with weak policies to regulate its havoc while there remains limited interest in agroecological solutions. Thus, no encouragement for agroecological farmers and promoters who produce safer food and restore the environment.

There is also the dominance of international agro-companies. These large-scale, industrial agro-companies and their deep pocket lobby groups promote the pesticide and GMO safety message as well as the monoculture development models. They are making great efforts to capture the food sector and regulatory policies of developing countries.

Other challenges include the loss of indigenous species, deforestation, increasing



biodiversity losses, limited funding and connectivity for agroecological campaigns and campaigners.

Setbacks are also experienced in getting and going beyond bankable data on yield per hectare. And there is the problem of insecurity in farms.

### **Opportunities for the Transition to Agroecology**

Despite the challenges, opportunities abound to make for a smooth and just transition to agroecology. There is increasing awareness and undeniable evidence of the hazards of monoculture, GMO and HHPs (i.e. health hazard evidence), loss of food export revenue evidence and the emergence of local scientific evidence.

Again, there is growing global movement for food justice, and increasing willingness to collaborate locally by building local alliances and leveraging to support agroecology practice, policies and movement.

But most importantly, solidly present are the existential traditional and cultural farm systems which can serve as proofs that agroecology is connected to our history and

its practice contributes in sustaining our cultural practices. There is equally available evidence of the benefits of agroecological practice in Nigeria which can be upscale when passion and partnership are leveraged.

Adding to the list of opportunities are proofs of capacity for biodiversity restoration, soil regeneration, new jobs creation, increased yield and crop variety per hectare, engenderment of peaceful coexistence between herders and farmers, increased local income, etc.

There is new collaboration and partnerships for improved regulations, new policy plans for agroecology, etc. The subnational government's openness to agroecology is also an opportunity to push further the transition. The push is further strengthened by the flexibility of agroecology which makes possible its practice at any scale, from kitchen corners to the large, industrial.

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# **NIGERIA'S UPCOMING FATS AND OILS REGULATIONS: A STEP FORWARD FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY**

Report from CAPP

**O**n December 16, 2022, Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPP) held a sensitization and media event in Lagos, Nigeria for small and medium enterprises in the fast-moving consumer goods industry. The event was attended by 32 participants, including food producers, managers, and operation officers. The purpose of the event was to provide information about Nigeria's soon-to-be-gazetted Fats and Oils Regulations, 2022.

The Nigerian government, through the National Agency for Food & Drug Administration (NAFDAC) and the Federal Ministry of Health, has been working to enact an improved regulation for trans fatty acids in the country's food supply chain since 2018. This effort is in line with a global mandate championed by the World Health Organization to



eliminate industrially-produced transfat from the world's food supply chain. In his opening remarks, Akinbode Oluwafemi, Executive Director, CAPPA, noted that after nearly four years of intensive work, the journey towards an enhanced regulation on transfat in Nigeria was almost at its end. Presently, NAFDAC has completed its update on the fats and oils regulations. This update was further reviewed by the Ministry of Health with the final document now awaiting the approval of the Ministry of Justice. Akinbode specially thanked NAFDAC for being a worthy champion and partner in the work towards a regulation on transfat in Nigeria.

According to a goodwill message delivered by Ms. Joy Amafah, Nigeria Coordinator, Global Health Advocacy Incubator, a gazetted regulation on transfat will elevate public health in Nigeria and help reduce the rising cases of non-communicable diseases like cancer, and obesity, often triggered by the heavy consumption of food containing transfat. She also remarked that the passage of the fats and oils regulations will place Nigeria on the map as the second country in Africa to have such a regulation.

A presentation delivered by Mr. Abdusalam Ozigis who represented the Acting Director General of NAFDAC, Ms. Monica Eimunjeze, enlightened participants on the provisions of the Fats and Oils Regulations, 2022, including the negative impact of partially hydrogenated oils and trans fatty acids on human health. The reviewed Fats and Oils Regulation of 2022 applies to all edible fats, oils, and foods containing these products that are manufactured, imported, exported, advertised, sold, distributed, or used in Nigeria.

The Regulation requires that these products be registered and meet certain quality standards. For example, they must be sourced from either vegetable or animal origin, and must not contain impurities such as heavy metals, petroleum products, foreign particles, or naturally occurring impurities like gossypol. In addition, edible fats and oils must not contain any foreign matter, have a rancid odour or taste, or contain dyes like

azo. The regulation also includes provisions related to labelling. For example, refined oils must be labelled with the specific name of the oil and, if it is a blend of multiple sources, the specific names of the oils must be listed in the ingredients.

Violations of the Regulation can result in fines and imprisonment for individuals, and fines for organisations. The reviewed Fats and Oils Regulation of 2022 specifies the following penalties for violations of its provisions:

For individuals: imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year, or a fine not exceeding N800,000.00 (Nigerian Naira), or both.

For organisations: a fine not exceeding N5,000,000.00 (Nigerian Naira).

Additionally, the regulation specifies that directors, managers, secretaries, and other similar officers of organisations can be held liable for offences committed by the organisation unless they can prove that the offence took place without their knowledge, consent, or connivance. These individuals can be punished in the same manner as if they had personally committed the offence. Finally, the regulation allows for the forfeiture of any assets or property constituting proceeds derived from or obtained as a result of the offence, as well as any property or instruments used in the commission of the offence.

The interesting presentation generated robust exchanges from participants who also thanked the NAFDAC representative for sharing with them the latest provisions of the improved Fats and Oil Regulations, 2022. The meeting concluded with pledges by all participants in the room to work together with NAFDAC and other relevant bodies to eliminate transfat and improve Nigeria's public health systems and processes.

# BOOK YOU SHOULD READ



## **The African Voices by HRM Bubaraye Dakolo**

"The African Voice is a memoir-like account of an experience of the King of Ekpetiama Kingdom, a Nigerian first class traditional ruler whose Africanism and thoughts about the urgency of a Pan-African state and the nature of the African continent reverberates loud in his travel tale, told through the corridors of literary and cultural activism, in a sublime, original, and bold way that connects the entire continent of Africa." Inetsol Eyal Oru, Writer & Editor

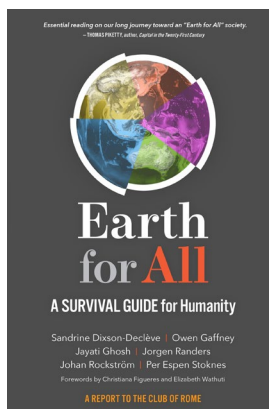
"This fascinating book by HRM Bubaraye Dakolo is quite difficult to classify. While written in the style of a travelogue, the author nonetheless infuses the elements of a memoir, and his reflections on the African continent are mini-essays in themselves. In this manner the book manages to be many things in one – travelogue, memoir, love story, a collection of socio-political essays, and reflections on the problems and potential, of Africa." Martin Egblewogbe, Author, The Waiting



## **Precolonial Black Africa by Cheikh Anta Diop**

In this book, Diop compares the political and social systems of Europe and black Africa from antiquity to the formation of modern states. Throughout, his intent is not to provide a history as such, but rather guidelines for historians and others who seek a scientific understanding of precolonial societies in Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe and their links with the earliest known stages of human development. Students and scholars of Africa and world history will be challenged by Diop's original—though controversial—analysis of the similarities and striking differences between black Africa and the West.

Those who read this book seriously are in for a shock and rewarding experience in learning. This is a major work by a major Black historian. At least, the renaissance of African historiography from an African point of view has begun, and none too soon.



## **Earth for All – A SURVIVAL GUIDE for Humanity**

Examining the multiple crises confronting the world and offering practical solutions is a very ambitious undertaking. The solutions offered in the Guide may be difficult for those benefitting from the broken system, but the truth remains that the planet has limits and inaction will be extremely expensive. It is either we act now or face uncontrollable disruptions. Leaders may argue that they cannot do all that is needed, but it will be a big shame to read this book and do nothing. The Guide is a must read.

# UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- COMMUNITY DIALOGUES AND TRAINING
- FARMERS' TRAINING AND CSOS CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP



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