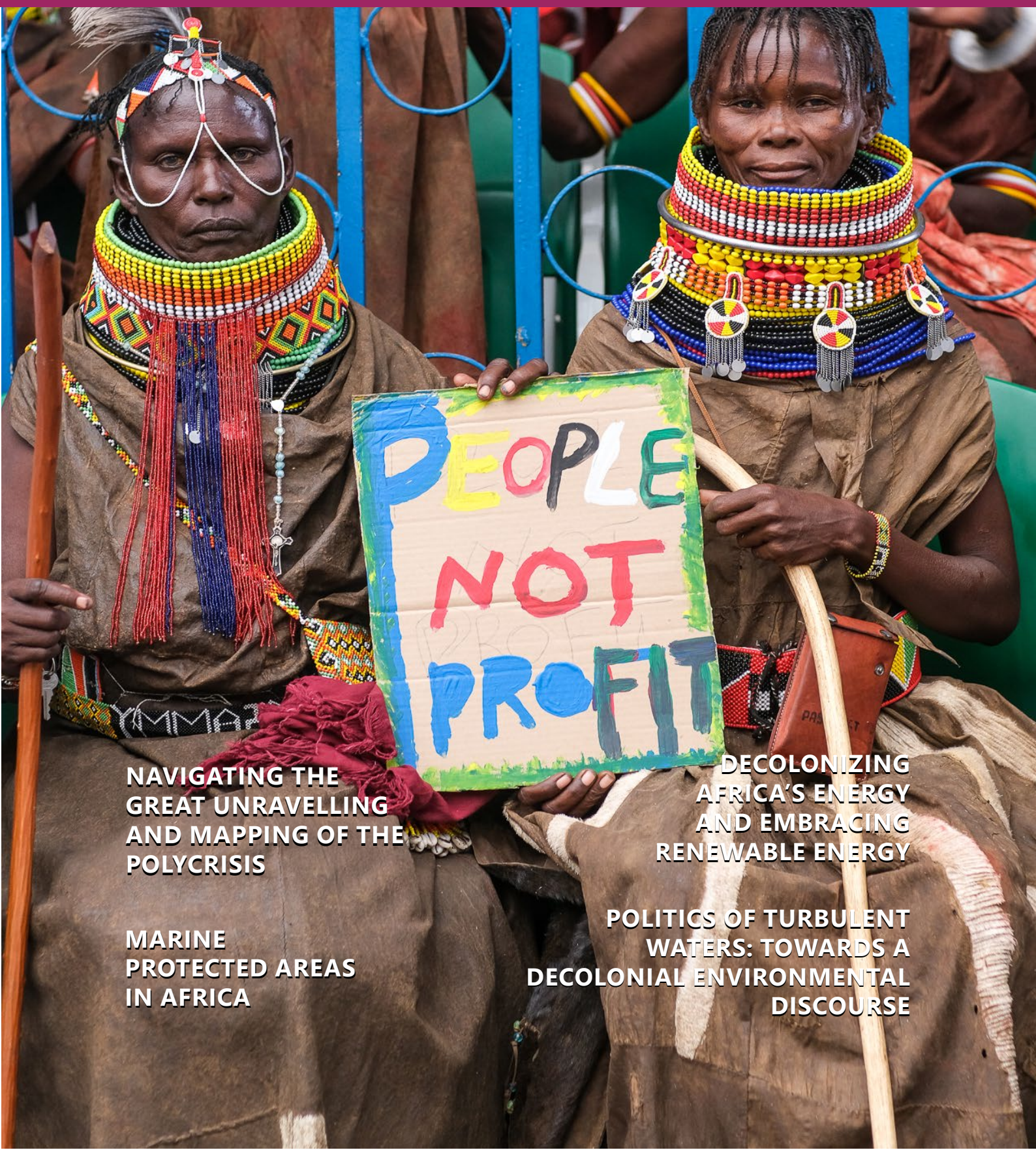


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ISSUE #41 - SEPTEMBER 2023

# INSTIGATOR

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION



**NAVIGATING THE  
GREAT UNRAVELLING  
AND MAPPING OF THE  
POLYCRISIS**

**MARINE  
PROTECTED AREAS  
IN AFRICA**

**DECOLONIZING  
AFRICA'S ENERGY  
AND EMBRACING  
RENEWABLE ENERGY**

**POLITICS OF TURBULENT  
WATERS: TOWARDS A  
DECOLONIAL ENVIRONMENTAL  
DISCOURSE**



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

## Home Run

After celebrating a decade of great achievements in the struggle for environmental justice and food sovereignty, we are back in the trenches and the journey continues. Memories of the moments of reflection are brought to you by the keynote paper presented by Prof Niyi Osundare, the number one bard of the Earth. We also share a crisp review of our book, *Politics of Turbulent Waters*. Get the book and get immersed in a decolonial environmental discourse. Let's up our efforts in fighting for ecological justice for the people and the planet.

We have been busy building ways of ensuring the defence of our ecosystems and communities. Community managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are one way of liberating and conserving our collectively owned marine ecosystems for the present and future generations and protecting the continent from any negative agenda of the so-called green or/and blue economy. Together we can blunt the greed economic systems.

We are in an era of the polycrisis. It is a reality that the world must understand and organise to address. In this edition we bring you an article from a wise elder unpacking the polycrisis. We also bring you an article on the problem of having our air, food and water contaminated with plastics and another on GMOs. Ecuadorians voted for keeping crude oil in the soil and thus protecting the planet, the world cannot fold hands and do nothing. Calls for decolonizing Africa's energy and embracing renewable energy are mounting across Africa.

As you digest the narratives in this packed edition of the *Eco-Instigator*, be on the lookout for poems that relax your nerves and get you ready for actions for ecological justice. Follow up on our coming activities and remember to get and read the recommended books. Enjoy the edition!

Do not forget to drop us a line or share feedback, stories, articles, poems or photos at [editor@homef.org](mailto:editor@homef.org) or [home@homef.org](mailto:home@homef.org). We look forward to hearing from you.

Until Victory!



## **A Decade After, the Struggle Continues**

Health of Mother Earth Foundation, on 19 June 2023, marked its ten years in tackling the unjust relations with the earth and people, leading to inimical exploitation of nature.

The celebration is evidence of the think-tank's commitment to the continued advocacy and building of movements against impunity in the environment. Felicitations extended to HOMEF from home and abroad were a demonstration of the extensive support and comradeship that keep alive and make impactful the struggle against the exploitation of peoples and nature. This comradeship was physically expressed, during HOMEF's 10-year celebration, by Chief Eric Dooh, Umo Isuaiko, Lovelyn Ejim, Gloria Okon, and Betty Abah who represented their communities and CSOs in a panel session of experience sharing.

Ten action points, for the continued struggle, as presented by director of the ecological think-tank, Nnimmo Bassey include: commitment to issuing a State of Environment publication annually; ending destructive extraction; demanding climate

debt for centuries of ecological exploitation and harms; requiring remediation and restoration of degraded territories; and supporting food sovereignty including agroecology. The other actions steps are: adopting and promoting African cultural tools and philosophies; democratising renewable energy adoption process; ensuring the right to water; advocating for the rights of Mother Earth and codifying Ecocide as a crime; and ensuring Africans right to living in a safe and satisfactory environment.



Former Minister of Environment in president Buhari's administration, **His Highness, Emir of Nasarawa State, Ibrahim Usman Jibril**, recognises the much needed role of the Nigeria government in advancing the struggle for environmental justice, given the challenging position of some powerful people and organisations.

During delivery of his keynote — *Environmental Governance: Between Policy and Practice* — on the day of HOMEF's anniversary celebration, he called on governments at the sub national level to give

more priority to environmental challenges in their areas of governance.

**The Ibenanaiwei of Ekpetiama Kingdom, his Royal Majesty, King Bubaraye Dakolo**, makes a case for continued struggle, noting that the community people tagged 'oil thieves' are in truth 'the victims' of oil pollution and the real oil thievery. The king explained that the victims are called the thieves because they came to understand the injustices meted on their people. This understanding is one of the many positive results of the continued struggle for environmental justice, and the rights of people and nature.

The struggle is for all to partake in and those with literary prowess have a major role in it.

**Prof. Niyi Osundare** used Nnimmo Bassey to drive home his presentation on, 'Eco-Musings: Writing our Planet Back to Equitable Health'. The professor extolled Bassey's deployment of different written discourse in awakening people's consciousness to environmental injustices though he is an architect by profession. He unequivocally alluded to the accompaniments of the continued struggle when he stated thus: "You can't preach the sanctity of a tree in communities living in *impoverisation* nor stop them from turning a portion of the environment into dump hills without providing them facilities."

**Dr. Isaac Asume Osuoka** sees no way to have real environmentalism without justice. He narrated how efforts of people from the global south positioned climate justice in the climate change challenge discourse and as encompassing all other forms of justice (social, economic, gender, equality, etc.) for people and communities. It has also been made clear that the religious angle can no longer be left out of the environmental justice discourse.

**Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah** while delivering his Keynote—Our Duty of Trusteeship over Creation— gives the religious grounds for the continued struggle. "We are dust of the earth and our bodies





***“The struggle is for all to partake in and those with literary prowess have a major role in it.”***

are made up of elements of the earth.” Yet “The violence in our heart is connected to the sickness in the soil.” The Bishop remarks. The violence he refers to is the ruinous relations with nature which is polluting the different ecosystems that man is meant to tend to. He draws inferences from the book of Luke chapter 16 in the Holy Bible as he states: “a crafty steward is related to the crooked politics in Nigeria diminishing the quality of life in Africa. A bad steward will not be awarded in the manner in which they expect.” He explains that, people could have become much

richer if humans had showed little care to the environment. Instead, what is seen is the despoliation of the environment and concentration of resources in the hands of a few.

The struggle for environmental justice requires ‘Re-imagining Development in Africa’. Discussants—**Ken Henshaw, Ifeoma Malo, Emem Okon, Tijah Bolton Akpan, Amara Nwankpa, and Nafisa Atiku**—delved into the matter of development in Africa at the panel session during HOMEf’s ten-year anniversary celebration.

The discussions highlight the situation of African economies built on the plunder of natural and human resources, mostly due to externally imposed development frameworks which the continent is battling with. Solutions presented for changing the paradigm of development include: the decolonization of development in Africa; paying keen attention to vulnerable populations; desisting from outward facing development where everything is meant for export leaving little for domestic use; inclusiveness of young people and women; looking at energy transition from the African perspective; and reposition education as well as promoting inter-generational dialogue.

All the above-stated are strong reasons for the continued struggle for environmental justice and food sovereignty that HOMEf is at the heart of.



# **Politics of Turbulent Waters: Towards a Decolonial Environmental Discourse**

**By Isaac 'Asume' Osuoka**

At a time when the world is faced with the grim realities of climate change, communities in several countries of the Global South bear the disproportionate impact. In Africa, climate change is compromising the land's ability to sustain the local populations and exacerbating conflicts and displacement in places such as the Sahel. *Politics of Turbulent Waters* is a timely and significant contribution to the conversation.

The traditional Euro-Western view of the climate change challenge



focuses more on decarbonisation and less on justice. Within that dominant tradition in the climate discourse is a fixation on deploying alternative energy technologies to reduce the emission of CO<sub>2</sub>. While accepting the necessity for energy transition and the imperative technological changes, the climate justice discourse offers a holistic and systemic approach. It recognises that the production of greenhouse gasses is interconnected with the creation of injustice—economic inequality, poverty, racism, gender inequality, etc.

In short, climate change is a consequence of colonialism and capitalist exploitation of people and nature. Today, climate justice is widely used and has become main-streamed into the climate lexicon. But it was not always so. By the turn of the millennium, the idea of climate justice was pushed by a few radical environmental justice advocates. Among them was Nnimmo Bassey, editor of *Politics of Turbulent Waters*.

Nnimmo Bassey, together with other comrades in Africa, Latin America, North America and Asia in the 1990s participated in the global environmental movement in solidarity but also to confront the narrow Euro-Western orthodoxy. It took the effort of radical voices from the global south for the world to begin to appreciate that ecosystem protection and the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, while necessary, is not sufficient without the elimination of the structures of colonisation and oppression that enable the exploitation and destruction of nature and people. Environmentalism cannot be complete without justice. We find the continuation of the anti-hegemonic discourse in the *Politics of Turbulent Waters*.

The book contains fifty chapters drawn from insightful articles published in the *Eco-Instigator* during the past ten years. The overarching theme of the book, as indicated by its title which is same as that of one of Bassey's articles in the volume, is a critique of the power dynamics and economic development policies that have led to exploitation and environmental degradation in Africa.

From the foreword, we see what corporations like Shell mean to people and the planet. Jay Naidoo recollects a journey through the Niger Delta. He highlights the horrific environmental and health impacts of oil extraction. Naidoo describes the region as a "chess board of intrigue, conspiracy and violence," where the local people's livelihoods are devastated, and their rights disregarded.

## **"Climate change is a consequence of colonialism and capitalist exploitation of people and nature"**

Other contributors in the Oil Politics section critique the capitalism-driven status quo that prioritises profit over environmental sustainability.

Beyond the environment, oil exerts influence over society including non-governmental environmental organisations. Reputable organisations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) could become tools for propagating ideas and "science" that serve corporate interests. In one of the chapters—*A Critique of the IUCN-Niger Delta Panel Final Report*—Richard Steiner criticises the IUCN for their Niger Delta Panel (NDP) report which was supported by Shell to examine 'Sustainable Remediation and Rehabilitation of Biodiversity and Habitats of Oil Spill Sites in the Niger Delta.' Steiner states that the report "fails to meet its professed objectives, presents little new information, contains inaccuracies," and undermines IUCN's credibility.

Beyond Nigeria, the book spotlights the impacts of fossil extraction in other parts of Africa. For example, the chapter "Resisting Shale Gas in Shala, Algeria" by Hocine Malti explores Algeria's controversial move towards shale gas extraction, revealing widespread public dissent over environmental and health concerns,



particularly in the Saharan town of In Salah. The first section of the book addresses the climate crisis—one of the consequences of petroleum and fossil fuels in energy use. Beginning with a chapter by Nduka Otiono, who contemplates life during the COVID-19 lockdown. As humans retreated indoors, he observed an upsurge in wildlife activities worldwide, a phenomenon he termed “Naturecracy.”

For Otiono, the pandemic also ushered in an era of “Artocracy,” a creative outburst to cope with the global crisis. Overall, Otiono highlights the importance of appreciating the “small things,” like nature and art, that provide solace and sustenance during challenging times.

The point made by the different contributors is that climate change and related global problems cannot be addressed without disrupting the hegemonic capitalist order, including its expression in state power.

In the chapter “Civil Disobedience: A Key Strategy in the Fight for Climate Justice”, Femke Wijdekop advocates for use of civil disobedience as a tool to expose and challenge the fossil fuel industry’s insatiable appetite for resources and land, as well as press for urgent climate action.

The need for direct action to advance climate justice is informed by the tardy pace of global action. The inadequacies of the annual Conference of Parties (COP) of the UNFCCC are presented in several chapters. In “Burning the Planet, One Climate COP at a Time” Mary Louise Malig laments the transition from legally binding emissions cuts to voluntary pledges and contributions. This demonstrates the world’s major polluters’ lack of commitment to reducing emissions.

In the chapter, “Never Trust a COP,” Babawale argues against false solutions such as REDD and REDD+, which allow corporations to exploit lands and forests in the name of reducing deforestation. Similarly, the chapter, “The Coming Green Colonialism” by Nnimmo Bassey criticises the concept of nature-based solutions, stating that they are merely excuses for businesses to continue polluting while feigning environmental consciousness.

In the chapter, “Want Real Climate Ambition? Keep Polluting Industries Out and Make Them Pay” Patti Lynn, Nnimmo Bassey, and Lidy Nacpil urge policymakers to bar polluting industries from obstructing climate justice and make them pay for their damages. Contributors like Hamza Hamouchene urges the fight against land

and water grabs and emphasises the importance of grassroots organising and local engagement to challenge corporate power and achieve environmental and social justice.

Part of the debate about climate change is on the question of responsibility: should we focus on the role of individuals, or should we focus on government (public) responses through binding regulations?

In "Watch Your Carbon Footprints", Sonali Narang suggests that small steps like conscientious electricity usage, paper reduction, and limited use of animal products can have large cumulative effects. Magdalene Ime Idiang, in "Green New Deal: A Done Deal or A Doom Deal?", writes on the potential impact of the GND on Africa, questioning if the GND, developed in the global north, might exacerbate existing issues in the global south.

The second section of the book focuses on GMOs and food security. Hans R. Herren's "GMOs for Food and Nutrition Security: A Costly Distraction" highlights the flawed dependence on genetically modified (GM) crops and the Green Revolution (GR) approach to addressing food insecurity and agricultural challenges in Africa. The chapter, "Food Sovereignty and Matters Arising", by Benita Siloko, argues for the prioritisation of culturally appropriate and sustainably produced food over industrial agriculture and its impacts on local communities and the environment.

The last section on KNOWLEDGE SPACE focuses on how capital seeks to maintain hegemony on global environmental discourses and the need to challenge such discourses. For example, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) on resource extraction in Africa is always presented as a good thing

for the countries in the continent and a driver of economic growth. But Firoze Manji's chapter, "Development or Amputation: The Role of Extractive Industries," calls into question the supposed benefits transnational corporations bring to African development. Vandana Shiva's "How Economic Growth Has Become Anti-Life" critiques the obsession with limitless growth, arguing that it neglects

sustainability, justice, and human dignity. She asserts that, "Limitless growth is the fantasy of economists, businesses and politicians." The chapter, "Global Blackness" by Hakima Abbas is a potent reflection on the contemporary struggles and movements of Black communities around the world, embodying an inspiring message to the Black grassroots in the U.S. and elsewhere. Another article by Firoze Manji discusses the concepts of white saviourism, victimisation, and violence in the context of Burkina Faso. He argues that true empowerment and self-

determination are essential to counter white saviourism.

Overall, the "Politics of Turbulent Waters" is a deep, comprehensive exploration of the intersecting issues of environmental justice, climate change, food sovereignty, and economic development. It is not only an appraisal of the problems but also a call to action, stressing the need for systemic change and the activation of 'people power' to counter the injustices faced.

*[The article was extracted from Isaac Asume Osuoka's review of "Politics of Turbulent Waters: Reflections on Ecological, Environmental and Climate Crises in Africa" presented at the lunching of the book at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada on 27 June 2023.]*

*[Dr Isaac 'Asume' Osuoka coordinates Social Action International.]*

**" Climate change and related global problems cannot be addressed without disrupting the hegemonic capitalist order, including its expression in state power"**





# **Writing Our Planet Back to Equitable Health: The Bassey Example**

By Niyi Osundare

My resounding congratulations to Nnimmo Bassey, founder and nurturer of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), whose ageless organisation is one busy decade old this season, thus occasioning a commemoration that provides a much-needed platform for a sober consideration of the plight of this Earth, Our Earth.

Those with no adequate knowledge of the depth and range of Nnimmo Bassey's commitments in the past three decades would think that his sole preoccupation is ecological activism and the defence, protection, and preservation of the Earth. And they would be right in thinking so; for this warrior has deployed virtually every literary genre (poetry, prose fiction, faction, polemics, satire, travelogue, and journalism), all in a passionate effort at waking up slumbering Humanity to the reality. His writings warn us of the ecological Apocalypse that is sure to result from our present environmental nonchalance and denial arising, most times, from power blindness and unenlightened self-interest.

But Nnimmo Bassey is so many things at one and the same time: architect by training and profession, Humanist by deep persuasion, socio-political thinker-critic by conviction, ecological warrior-activist by inclination. A common thread there is to all these engagements, for Bassey the architect has designed and built for them all one large house with rooms whose doors open to one another, and whose walls are transparent on vital planes. And what makes him such an 'equal opportunity' landlord is, his possession of that sympathetic imagination and boundless conscientiousness that derive from intellectual polyvalence enhanced by visionary versatility. For, in the last analysis, what is an architect if not that thinker-doer who lives in a house before it is built? What is the visionary artist if not that curious *imager* who dreams up and fore-sees the future and its yet unborn possibilities? A remarkable artistic impulse serves as the organising principle in Bassey's multiple *thinkings* and doings. When Bassey calls Earth our 'Home', he does so as an architect who thinks like a poet, and a poet with the intricate figurations of the architect.

Dear readers, I write neither to praise Nnimmo Bassey nor to sell him to the world. I just thought you should know the artist

whose risky fight for democracy and human dignity during those years of Nigeria's murderous military dictatorship produced a collection titled *Poems on the Run*. The anthology was put together at the time when the poet himself was the one in hiding. It was when General Abacha's hitmen were out to thrust the bayonet in the mouth of the Human Rights activist, and that unpaid, unprotected warrior who enlisted himself in the Salvation Army of this Earth, Our Earth.

That man who stood up for Democracy is the one who keeps standing for the preservation of the Earth, Our Home. The binding virtue between these two stances, these two darings, these two activisms is, Justice and its moral and existential imperatives. But as I have said above, I have not come to praise Nnimmo Bassey, but to show how his conscientiousness seeks to redeem our world, how his words and declarations strive to sustain our sanity; how his Pen protects our Planet.

To let you know he is not alone, here are the words of other thinkers, writers, and doers whose overriding missions pertain to the urgency in 'writing' this Earth, Our Earth, back to equitable health.

Permit me to poach their eco-musings from one of the opening pages of my new book of poems—*Green: Sighs of Our Ailing Planet*:

*Ale ni nin a (The Earth owns us)*  
*la ni l'ale (We own the Earth)*  
*Ira aye, giri giri ko ni l'ale (People of the world,*  
*do not trample the Earth)*  
*Tee jeje; tee jeje (Step gently on it, gently,*  
*gently; step gently on it)*

---Yoruba song

*We do not inherit the Earth from our*  
*ancestors; we borrow it from our children.*

-- A Native American saying

*The care of the Earth is our most ancient and*  
*most worthy, and after all, our most pleasing*  
*responsibility*

--- Wendell Berry

*The biggest enemy we face is anthropocentrism. This is that common attitude that everything on this Earth was put here for [human] use.*

---- Eric Pianka

*Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and, in the process, heal our own—indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life, with which we have shared our evolutionary process.*

*Today, over 50 years later, the stream has dried up, women walk long distances for water, which is not always clean, and children will never know what they have lost. The challenge is to restore the home of the tadpoles and give back to our children a world of beauty and wonder.*

--- Wangari Maathai,  
Founder of The Greenbelt Movement  
Nobel Peace Laureate

*Waters are dying, forests are falling. A desert epidemic stalks a world where the rich and ruthless squander earth's wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while millions of people perish daily from avoidable hunger. Tomorrow bids us tread softly, wisely, justly, lest we trample the eye of the EARTH.*

--- Preface to *The Eye of the Earth*, 1986.

Let us come right home, to the Delta, hotspot of Nigeria's environmental degradation, showpiece of the country's criminal neglect. Yes, the Delta, the goose that lays Nigeria's golden egg. This region is not only the epicentre of the use and abuse of the country's oil fortune, it is also home to and place of origin of some of Nigeria's most accomplished literary figures whose works teem with deep and disturbing revelations of

the plight of a once admirable eco-paradise.

This is the home and base of Gabriel Omomotimi Okara, Poet of the Delta, Poet of the World, Poet of the River Nun which, once a clean, majestic phenomenon, now flows "tiredly" towards the Atlantic Ocean, weighted down by the debris of a disintegrating environment. J.P. Clark surveyed the entire region, the wheeling and dealing involved in the oil trade and its deleterious consequences for the whole region. *All for All* was veteran Clark's literary presentation of the situation, complete with its historical trickeries and their contemporary repercussions.

[Adapted from Niyi Osundare's Keynote Address at the 10th Anniversary celebration of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), June 19, 2023, Abuja, Nigeria, with the title '**Eco-Musings: Writing Our Planet Back to Equitable Health.**' There will be a second series in the next *Eco-Instigator* edition]

[**Prof. Niyi Osundare** is a poet, dramatist, critic, essayist, and media columnist. In 2015, an annual festival of poetry readings, scholarly conferences, and literary outreach, 'The Niyi Osundare International Poetry Festival (NOIPOFEST)', was established in his honour.]



# Used and Dumped

By A.S. Afereno

Lady Oloibiri was a beautiful Angel  
Her wings so high above the sky  
She was so fertile and green  
In her womb were all sorts of produce  
Cassava Yam Plantain, and the fish-able  
rivers  
Her children were never hungry birds

Lady Oloibiri was the most sought after  
Her beauty attracted men from across  
the Atlantic  
She was an irresistible ripe mango  
Many men bid for her bride wealth  
Until Mr. Shellingham Darcey got her  
hand in marriage  
And did live not happily ever after

She was promised so many good things  
Golden roads  
Silver bridges  
Diamond schools  
Platinum scholarships  
But all to no good end

She gave birth to millions of barrels  
She nurtured kilograms of the gas  
A thousand pipes  
Buried under her fertile ground

If she had known this 1956 plot  
That these were a death trap

Now  
Our beautiful Oloibiri  
Can no longer show her face  
She is now uglier than Pinocchio  
Now dirtier than a pig's abode  
What an irony

Oloibiri  
Now littered with black blood  
Gas  
Flaring at will  
She is always a topic for the headlines  
But this time  
For the bad news of her ugliness

Who shall come to her rescue  
Where is her handsome woo master  
Who will cater for her children  
Who will cleanse her ugliness  
A pathetic story it is  
That of Lady Oloibiri  
Once top of the news now used and  
dumped



# Liberation of our Waters

By Nnimmo Bassey



Colonialism is beyond the political control and exploitation of one nation by another; it extends to our relationship with Nature. The colonisation of Nature sees it being exploited and its resources being transformed for economic gain without much regard to the socio-ecological impacts that ensue. This bent has led to myriad problems including climate change, biodiversity loss and conflict. Terminologies such as Green and Blue economy have been coined as fig leaves to actions that seem good but merely provide cover to negatives activities.

Why should Blue Economy, such a beautiful name, be a cause for concern. The term and concept of "economy" has become so pervasive that it is taken as a given that aquatic ecosystems are for nothing other than meeting the ends of capital accumulation through the *business* of exploitation. Although Blue Economy is conceptualised as the *sustainable* management of aquatic and marine ecosystems and resources, it sails on the idea that anything done for reasons other than that of economic

**“Colonialism is beyond the political control and exploitation of one nation by another; it extends to our relationship with Nature.”**

profit or power is seen as unreasonable or as not viable. This is a cause for concern.

Economy ought to be a third leg of sustainability, but the other legs, social and environment, have been roundly diminished that the table largely stands on one leg. So it is that the Blue or Green Economy is a term that must be taken with a dose of salt. Blue Economy is conceptualised as the extraction of economic value from aquatic ecosystems through deep seabed mining, modern biotechnology, geoengineering, industrial fishing and a variety of other activities. Some of these activities lead to ocean acidification and compound climate change impacts besides outright pollution.

The Blue Economy portends the exploitation of the sea and then sky after the extreme exploitation of the land. Just as lands have been demarcated as mining blocs, the same is overtaking the seas. The wellbeing of 200 million Africans who depend on fisheries for food and nutritional security is clearly at risk. The implication of the grabbing of our water bodies is that very soon they may be partitioned and claimed as private properties. No doubt, once these areas have been claimed, they will become inaccessible to our fisher folks and coastal communities. The partitioning and claiming of aquatic territories may seem far fetched but that is only if we deny that this is happening already. Industrial installations, such as crude oil platforms, command swathes of territories around them, ostensibly, as security buffers. Stories from fishers who have tried to move into the high seas in pursuit of their business is that large parts of the continental shelf and beyond are off limits because they have been claimed and literally cordoned off by extractive industries' installations.

Another debilitating factor is that of unregulated industrial fishing in our waters. Our concern, however, is to promote the resilience of our ecosystems and secure them from being grabbed by wielders of power and capital. Some people see the promotion of the Blue Economy as a means of securing life under water as highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals. In the

Niger Delta, there isn't much life under water besides those coated by layers of crude oil and contaminated to outlandish levels above safe limits. What life is under water in Bayelsa State, for example, where the recently released report by Bayelsa State Oil and Environment Commission reveals that "the concentration of noxious chemicals, such as Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons, exceed safe levels by a factor of million, according to some of the samples taken."

**“ Environmentalism from below mandates those who depend on the environment for their basic needs to stand up to reject attempts for the territories to be appropriated for mindless exploitation by the powerful and connected individuals, governments and corporations. ”**

To pursue our concerns as a people, there is need for the practice of environmentalism from below. This requires that we overturn the notion that environmental concerns are for those who have met their basic needs, are sated, and have the pleasure of thinking of luxuries. We also need to demolish the distorted notion that environmentalism begins and ends with the forcing of citizens to evacuate waste from drainages once a month, only to pike them on the edges of the drainages to be washed back into drainage channels by the rains.

Environmentalism from below mandates those who depend on the environment for their basic needs to stand up to reject attempts for the territories to be



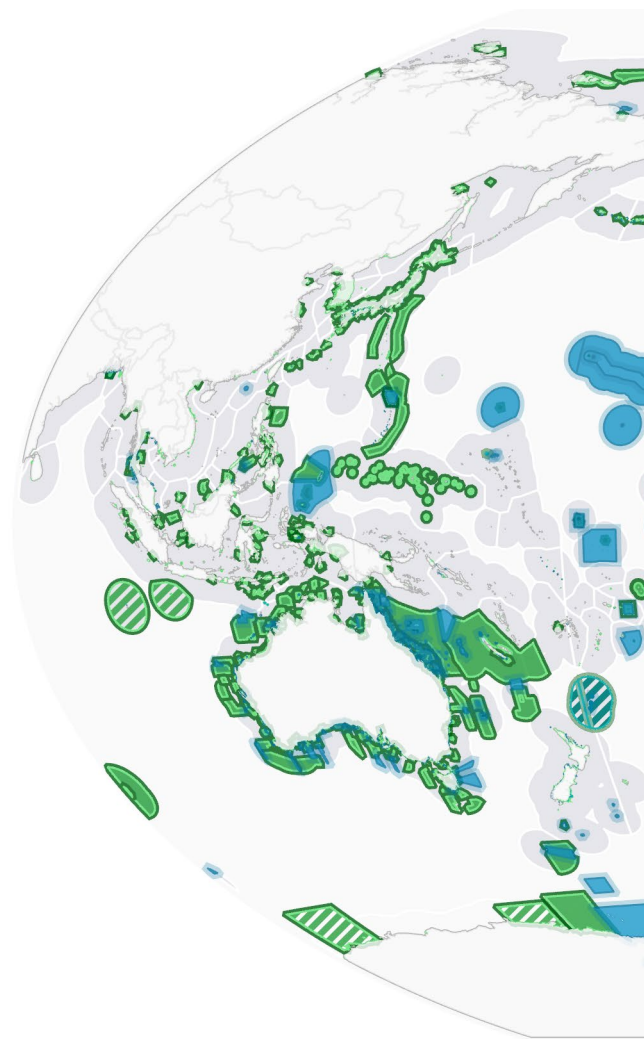
appropriated for mindless exploitation by the powerful and connected individuals, governments and corporations.

We have a situation where access to healthy water bodies is becoming more and more difficult by the day due to industrial installations and related pollution. In recent times, we have been witnesses to massive oil spills from blowouts at well heads at Santa Barbara River and at Ororo-1 well; from explosion of FSPO "TRINITY SPIRIT"; and the incredibly polluting blow up of oil laden vessel and burning of bush refineries by the security forces.

With about 90 percent of sea-based pollution, including plastic wastes, in the Gulf of Guinea traceable to the Niger Delta, it is time for our governments (and ECOWAS) to declare an environmental emergency in the region. We need this to ensure that our peoples have a safe environment to carry out their economic, socio-cultural, recreational and spiritual activities.

One immediate step that must be taken to ensure that our aquatic commons are not enclosed and grabbed is to have community-managed Marine Protected Areas. Such protected areas could cover rivers, creeks, swamps, and continental shelf.

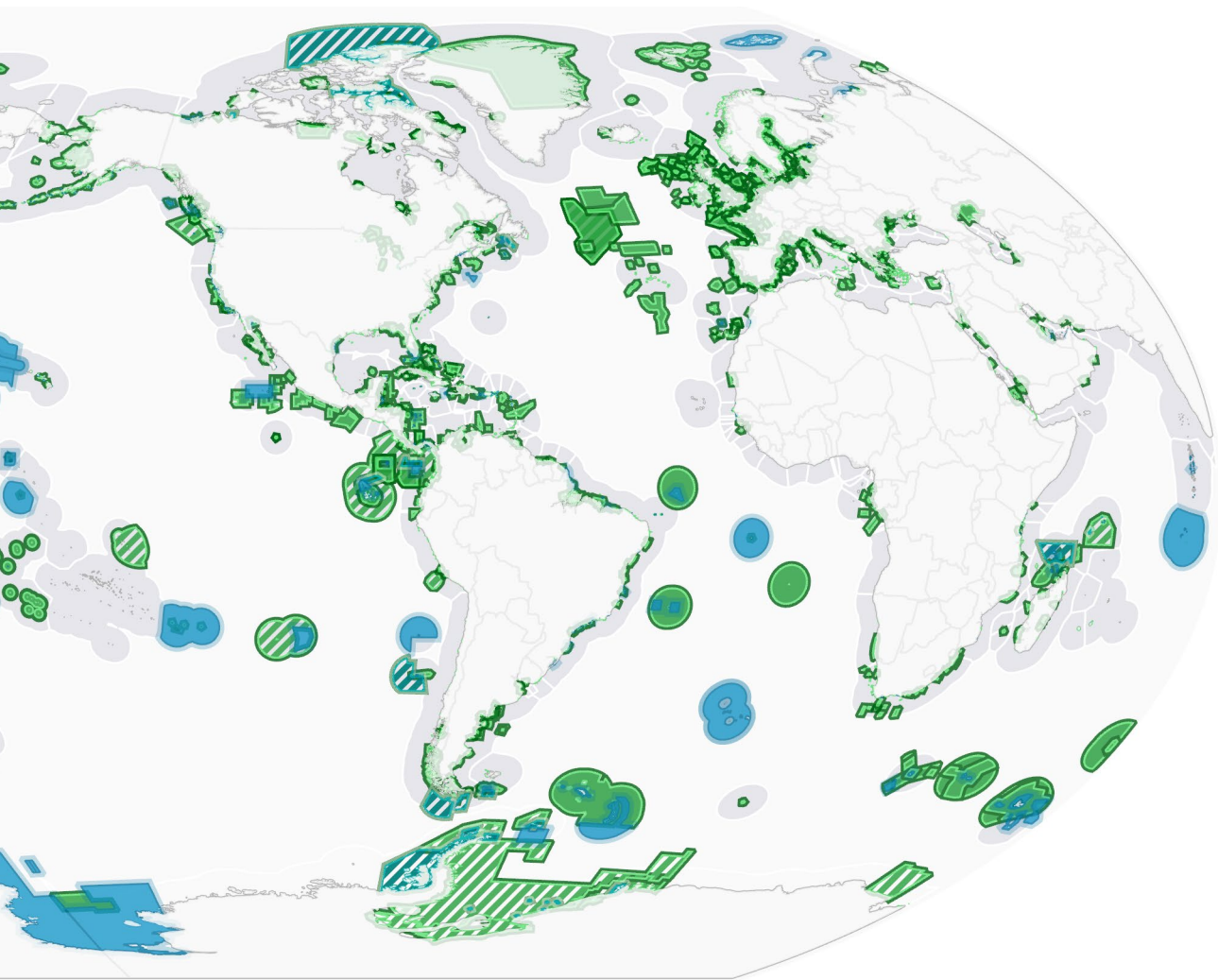
The advantages are numerous and deeply connected to the peoples' history and socio-cultural outlook. Such people-managed MPAs would see restoration of degraded areas, rebuild biodiversity, revive cultural practices, restore dignity and reinvigorate local economies. In sum, we need to work together and figure out ways of liberating Nature, from the bottom up.



## Marine Protected Areas

### Level of Protection

-  Highly-Fully Protected Zones
-  Less Protected Zones / Unknown



Credit: Marine Conservation Institute

## MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN AFRICA

By Salome Eloo

The future of Africa's blue economy (keeping in mind and campaigning against the negative applications of the concept) is promising but depends on effective management. Both its failures and successes can teach Africans how to approach the protection of its marine ecosystems. Stories of marine protected areas across Africa illustrate the importance of conservation, community engagement and communication, as well as transformation and hope.

At the start of advocacy for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), many African communities were opposed to the idea. This was due to mistrust towards the real motives behind the instituting of the MPAs. As the mistrust slowly disappears, stories of transformation

and hope concerning Marine Protected Areas are springing up across the African continent.

There are currently over 1,500 MPAs in Africa, covering approximately 4.2% of the continent's marine and coastal areas. The majority of these MPAs are in East and Southern Africa, with fewer numbers in West and North Africa. As earlier mentioned, African continent now has noticeable stories of transformation that deserve to be mentioned, including successfully managed MPAs.

One of the successfully managed MPAs in Africa is the Coral Reef Conservation Project in Tanzania, the largest East African country. The project, initiated in areas such as Zanzibar, has local communities participating in the management and monitoring of marine resources. The Coral Reef Conservation Project has been able to achieve a significant increase in fish biomass and the recovery of degraded coral reefs. By involving local communities in the management of the MPA, the project ensures that the benefits of conservation are shared equitably. Tanzania also has the Marine Protected Areas of Mafia Island. The MPA was established in 1995 and has since become a success story for community-based conservation. The MPA's strict no-take policy and community involvement have allowed fish populations to recover and the coral reefs to thrive.

The Bazaruto Archipelago National Park in Mozambique, a South-east African country, is another successful MPA example. It is the first and oldest (over 50 years) marine national park in the country, founded 25 May 1971. The Park covers an area of 1,430 square kilometres, protecting the five Islands of the Bazaruto Archipelago, including neighbouring waters. It contains a diverse range of marine habitats, including coral reefs, seagrass beds, and mangroves. The MPA has helped to protect the region's biodiversity, including endangered species such as dugongs, turtles, and sharks. Additionally, the Park has supported sustainable tourism and fishing, providing

economic benefits to the local communities.

Morocco, in Western North Africa, has the Souss-Massa National Park measuring 33,800 hectares and situated on the Atlantic coast between Agadir and Tiznit, and on the mouths of the Oueds Souss and Massa. This MPA was established in 1991 to protect the endangered monk seal and other marine species in the area. It houses the last colony of bald ibis (a type of bird) in the world. The MPA's strict regulations on fishing and tourism have allowed the monk seal population to recover and the marine biodiversity to thrive.

The Sainte Anne Marine National Park is yet another MPA situated off the coast of Mahe in Seychelles, East Africa. The MPA which was established in 1973, is the oldest in the Indian Ocean. It protects 6 coral Islands—Sainte Anne, Round Island, Cerf Island, Long Island, Moyenne Island, and Ile Cachee. The MPA's strict management has allowed fish populations to recover and the coral reefs to thrive. It is a popular spot for snorkelling, diving and picnics which are allowed only in designated areas of the MPA.

Located in the north-east of Jijel on the Mediterranean coast in Algeria, a North African country, is the Taza National Park. The MPA is said to have been established as far back as 1923 to protect the Mediterranean monk seal and other marine species in the area. It originally covered an estimated surface area of 230 hectares but was extended to 3,807 hectares around 1984. In 2004, UNESCO recognised it as a World Biosphere Reserve. The MPA's strict no-take policy and community involvement have allowed the monk seal population to recover and the marine biodiversity to thrive.

The aforementioned successes highlight the importance of effective management and enforcement of MPAs, as well as the need for community involvement and sustainable ecotourism in African countries. However, many challenges remain and have seen the unsuccessful management of many MPAs.

One of such challenges experienced



across Africa is poor enforcement of MPA regulations. Many MPAs lack the resources and capacity to monitor and enforce regulations effectively. As a result, they continue to suffer illegal fishing, poaching, and other illegal activities. These undermine the effectiveness of MPAs and exacerbate the depletion of marine resources.

The lack of community involvement in many MPA management across Africa is another challenge. Many MPAs have been found to be designed and managed by external organisations without the involvement of local communities. This often leads to conflicts between conservation goals and the needs and aspirations of local communities. It takes away from local communities, the feeling of ownership of and will to support MPAs.

Another challenge is the fact that conservation is not yet recognized for its essential role in food security in Africa. As the steady stream of overfishing and climate change drown out the viability of fisheries, many fishing communities have been left desperate, facing food insecurity. Examples of failed MPAs in Africa, resulting from the above challenges abound. There is the case of the Watamu Marine National Park in the central part of the coast of Kenya, East Africa. The MPA was established in 1968 and was one of the first in Africa. It houses the green turtle and diverse marine life. However, overfishing, pollution, and coastal development have led to the degradation of the coral reefs and loss of marine biodiversity in the supposed MPA. This is irrespective of UNESCO's recognition of the park as a Biosphere Reserve.

The Sine Saloum Delta National Park in Senegal, West Africa, is another example of a failed MPA. It was established in 1976 to protect the mangrove forests and marine biodiversity in the area. It is also categorised as a vital Bird Area. However, illegal fishing and pollution have continued to occur, leading to declines in fish populations and degradation of the mangrove forests.

Another case is that of the Toliara Coral Reef

in Madagascar. The MPA was established in 2007 to protect the coral reefs and marine biodiversity in the Toliara coral reef system. However, illegal fishing, mining, and coastal development have continued to occur, leading to declines in fish populations and degradation of the coral reefs. The MPA suffers intense exploitation which community organisation lacks the capacity to handle.

In Mozambique, Quirimbas National Park, is another failed MPA. It was established in 2002 to protect the coral reefs and marine biodiversity in the area. In terms of biodiversity, the park is reported to be the richest in Mozambique. It is categorised as UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve. However, illegal fishing, poaching and coastal development have continued to occur in the MPA, leading to declines in fish populations and coral cover.

MPAs are critical for the conservation and management of marine ecosystems in Africa. The failed MPAs highlight the challenges of effectively managing and enforcing MPAs in Africa where poverty, lack of resources and weak governance can hinder conservation efforts. Successful examples of MPA management, such as the coral reef conservation project in Tanzania and in Mozambique, still have significant challenges. Those challenges include poor enforcement of regulations, poor communication, and lack of adequate community involvement in MPA management. Addressing these challenges will be essential for the effective management and conservation of MPAs in Africa. Community engagement is critical and determines MPA success in Africa. Finally, communication that focuses on the benefits of MPAs to nature is important. It is important that while advocating for MPAs, the narrative should be about protecting nature, people and the other than humans.

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## Advancing the Cause for **MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

By P. N. Sigbara, T. Odocha, K. M. Deeue, T. T. Kalio, A. N. Effiong, L. Nuka & I. A. Okon

**A Marine Protected Area (MPA)** is basically an area of the ocean where human activities are more strictly managed than in the surrounding waters. It could also be viewed as a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. Advancing MPAs is crucial for conserving marine biodiversity and ecosystems in communities.

Pushing for MPAs would involve quite a number of activities, one of which is scientific research and data collection. Conducting comprehensive scientific research to identify ecologically significant areas, critical habitats, and species should be among the first steps to instituting MPAs. This would entail the collection of data on biodiversity, population dynamics, and ecosystem health necessary for making informed decisions about a proposed MPA design and implementation. Another line of action would be to engage stakeholders concerned. The involvement of local communities, fishers, NGOs, scientists, and government agencies in the MPA planning process is critical to its success. Engaging stakeholders early ensures that a proposed MPA's goals align with local needs and concerns, and fosters support for the initiative.

Another necessary step forward is the establishment of clear legal protections, backed by strong governance and enforcement mechanisms. Without effective legal enforcement, MPAs may be subject to illegal fishing, poaching, and other detrimental activities. The design and zoning of MPAs is another process that needs to be well thought out. Scientific data collected at the initial stages would provide information to be used in creating a well-designed MPA network with various zones catering to different conservation objectives. The design could specify no-take zones, restricted-use zones, and areas for sustainable use, while considering connectivity between areas to allow for species migration. Apart from zoning, long-term monitoring and research remain vital for sustainable MPAs. An example is the continuous monitoring of an MPA's ecological status and its impact on biodiversity and fisheries. Long-term monitoring provides essential data for adaptive management and helps evaluate MPA success. Adaptive management strategy allows for regular reviewing of the MPA's effectiveness and the adjusting of management strategies based on new data and insights.

Even so, the role of education and outreach in promoting the cause of MPAs cannot be overemphasized. Raising awareness about the importance of MPAs and marine conservation through educational programmes, workshops, and public

campaigns is key to promoting the value of MPAs in preserving biodiversity, supporting fisheries and other ecosystems services.

Collaboration and networking are important twin element in MPA success. On a regional scale, there can be collaboration with neighbouring countries or regions to create transboundary MPAs that protect migratory species and critical habitats that span borders. Networking with other marine conservation initiatives can also foster knowledge sharing and support. Another twin element that might be considered for MPAs is that of expansion and connectivity. The need may come to expand existing MPAs and create new ones to achieve broader conservation goals. Ensuring connectivity between MPAs can facilitate genetic exchange and resilience in the face of environmental challenges.

There is also the issue of securing sustainable financing for MPA establishment, management, and monitoring. Sources of such funding include government budgets, grants, public-private partnerships, and ecotourism revenues. Aside sustainable funding, climate change considerations must be made. It is of utmost importance to factor in climate change when designing and managing MPAs. This would entail, among other things, addressing the potential impacts of rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and warming waters on marine ecosystems and species within the MPA.

Central to the sustainability of MPAs is policy advocacy. There has to be increasing advocacy for supportive policies and legal frameworks at local, national, and international levels to strengthen marine conservation efforts and encourage the establishment of MPAs.

The benefits of Marine Protected Areas are numerous, ranging from the advantages of biodiversity conservation to cultural and spiritual significance of MPAs. In terms of biodiversity conservation, MPAs act as sanctuaries for marine species and habitats, protecting critical ecosystems, breeding grounds, and nurseries. By reducing human activities in these areas, MPAs can help maintain and restore biodiversity. MPAs hold benefits for fisheries management. Well-designed MPAs can help sustain



fish populations by allowing fish to grow to maturity and reproduce within their boundaries. As fish population increase, they can spill over into adjacent areas, benefiting local fisheries. There is also the advantage of ecosystem resilience. MPAs contribute to ecosystem resilience by preserving the health and integrity of marine habitats. Healthy ecosystems are more capable of withstanding environmental stressors like pollution, climate change, and disease outbreaks.

MPAs are grounds for research and education as they serve as living laboratories for scientific research, allowing scientists to study marine life and ecosystems in relatively undisturbed conditions. They also provide educational opportunities for the public to learn about marine conservation. Their role in promoting tourism and recreation is widely recognized. MPAs can become ecotourism attractions, generating income and employment opportunities for local communities. Responsible tourism can be compatible with MPA conservation objectives. But it does not end with tourism as MPAs often hold cultural and spiritual significance for local communities. This is because they may be associated with traditional practices, myths, and customs related to marine ecosystems.

Despite the many benefits of MPAs, they are not without consequences. The establishment of no-take zones or restricted-use zones within MPAs can displace fishing activities, impacting the livelihoods of local fishing communities. Alternative livelihood options and support mechanisms are essential to address this consequence. Limited access to resources is also a consequence as fishing restrictions in MPAs may limit access to marine resources. This may lead to conflicts between conservation goals and local resource-dependent communities. In addition, some MPAs face enforcement challenges due to insufficient resources or their remote locations, leading to illegal fishing and poaching. This is linked to the effectiveness and spatial design of an MPA which depends mostly on its size, location, and level of protection awarded. Poorly designed or, arguably, small MPAs may not deliver significant conservation benefits.

There is the problem of high cost and insufficient funding tied to the designing, establishing, and managing of MPAs. This is why sustainable funding sources are required to ensure long-term effectiveness. Another area of challenge is that of ecological connectivity. While MPAs protect specific areas, ecological connectivity between protected and non-protected areas is crucial for the long-term survival of many marine species. Isolated MPAs may not be sufficient to support migratory species or species with large home ranges. Finally, there is the challenge of non-compliance and inadequate public awareness. For MPAs to be successful, compliance with regulations is essential. Increased public awareness and education are necessary to garner support and cooperation from stakeholders and local communities.

Overall, the benefits of marine protected areas in conserving marine biodiversity and ecosystems outweigh the consequences. Addressing the challenges associated with MPAs requires careful planning, stakeholder engagement, adaptive management, and consideration of social and economic factors to ensure successful conservation outcomes.

[The article is an output of scholars' engagements during HOMEf's School of Ecology (SoE) sessions on Marine Protected Areas.]

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# NAVIGATING THE GREAT UNRAVELLING AND MAPPING OF THE POLYCRISIS

By Michael LernerOpte abus publicerum nes horbemne es nis

How can we explain the explosive emergence of global awareness of the polycrisis over the past year, 2022-2023? Three years ago, almost no one had heard of the polycrisis.

## What happened?

First, let us roughly define the polycrisis. Some claim it is nothing new. We believe the polycrisis is new. We believe a confluence of environmental, social, technological, financial-economic, natural, and other forces are interacting with ever increasing unpredictability, rapidity and power. We believe these unpredictable interactions are causing future shocks of ever greater frequency and amplitude.

Because the polycrisis looks different, feels different, and is explained differently everywhere, there will not be any single understanding of it. Think of the polycrisis as a global weather system. Weather everywhere is deeply interrelated, but local

weather looks different in each place.

The polycrisis has many names—cascading crises, the metacrisis, the permacrisis, the great unraveling, the great simplification, “the end of the world as we know it” [TEOTWAWKI], and more. In Latin America it is called “eco-social collapse.” The French call it “collapsologie.” Or one can simply call it turbulent times or a rapidly changing world.

It does not matter much what we call the polycrisis. What matters is whether we recognize that it is real, that we are living in it, and that it is changing our lives. If we accept that much, we will recognize that we have to navigate it—and that good maps are essential to skilful navigation.

Asher Miller and Richard Heinberg at the Post Carbon Institute and Resilience.org use this powerful phrase for the task ahead for all of us: “Navigating the great unravelling.” Resilience.org is focused on energy, economy, environment, food and water, and society. Its tagline is “insight and inspiration in turbulent times.” In my judgment, Post Carbon Institute and Resilience.org are among the best and most accessible polycrisis resources in the United States.

At every level, we must learn to navigate the polycrisis. We have no choice. The only choice is whether we prepare to navigate it consciously—or just let it unfold and respond as it does.

“The future is already here,” the great science fiction writer William Gibson has said. “It’s just not very evenly distributed.” We know that all over the world millions of people have lived under polycrisis conditions for a very long time. The polycrisis is not new to them. It is just now coming home to roost everywhere.

Let us look at how some experts are seeking to understand and map the polycrisis. I will be using three overlapping terms to describe these maps. The first is world view maps. The second is systems analysis maps. And the third is narrative maps. These are very crude concepts since all the maps tend to include all these elements in different ways.

The comprehensive worldview maps include orientations like techno-optimism, neo-Marxism, critiques of colonialism and imperialism, religious or spiritual understandings, and many more. It matters whether you believe in an enlightened spiritual future or a future that belongs to the powerful. It matters whether you think we will be governed by humans or trans-humans or algorithms. It matters whether you see the future as hopeful or tragic or perhaps both.

Then there are the systems analysis maps. Unlike worldview maps, systems analysis maps seek to be analytically neutral—albeit there are often deeply embedded biases.

The concerned capitalists of the world and their powerful friends gather annually at the World Economic Forum in Davos to opine on the state of the world. Their Global Risks Report 2023 is extensive and their prognosis dire. They offer a top 10 list of global risks for the next two years and the next ten years, along with a global risks landscape map. An additional Global Risks map puts global risks at the centre surrounded by natural ecosystems, security, human health, economic stability, and digital rights. The outer circle then lists perhaps one hundred specific issues. Kate Raworth’s “Donut Economics” is a highly influential systems map. “Humanity’s 21st century challenge is to meet the needs of all within the means of the planet. In other words, to ensure that no one falls short on life’s essentials (from food and housing to healthcare and political voice), while ensuring that collectively we do not overshoot our pressure on Earth’s life-supporting systems, on which we fundamentally depend—such as a stable climate, fertile soils, and a protective ozone layer. The Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries is a playfully serious approach to framing that challenge, and it acts as a compass for human progress this century.”

Raworth’s elegant donut diagram has an outer circle of an ecological ceiling for nine sectors (climate change, ocean acidification, chemical pollution and the like). It



has an inner circle of social foundation that lists human needs by sector (food, water, health, education and the like). The map elegantly allows her to show where we have already exceeded the ecological ceiling and where we have undercut the social foundation of human needs. A third systems analysis

scholarly study of the polycrisis looks like—and why governments and others around the world should invest in it.

A fourth systems map comes from the Fan Initiative which also has a strong team of scientific experts behind it. The Fan has an

risks more generally, environmental risks, and justice risks. Unlike the other projects above, they are less comprehensive on the polycrisis and more focused on explicitly existential risks to human survival. Another outstanding contributor to polycrisis understanding is Nate



comes from Thomas Homer-Dixon and his colleagues at the Cascade Institute in British Columbia. Homer-Dixon is among the foremost analysts of the polycrisis. In books like "The Upside of Down" and "Command Hope," he has explored the polycrisis in depth. His thinking is deeply influential in Canada and internationally. I cannot point to a single map because Cascade Institute has produced multiple maps. In my judgement, Homer-Dixon shows what sophisticated

influential categorization of twelve "blades" of the fan that interact. They include toxification, soils, population, oceans, health, governance, freshwater, energy, economy, climate, biodiversity, and behaviour.

There are academic centres focused on variants of the polycrisis like the Center for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge. Their research interests include biotechnology, artificial intelligence, technology

Hagens' The Great Simplification and his podcasts, 'Frankly'. His tagline is "people, society and earth's systems midway through the carbon pulse." Here is an example of his thinking: "How do the catalysts triggering the SVB collapse compare to the 2008 financial crisis? What might world financial market reactions indicate as we move closer to The Great Simplification? One thing I'm pretty confident of: world governments and central banks are gonna need bigger

boats as more and more entities require bailouts and guarantees. Eventually that 'boat' may become so large that it will be 'Too Big to Save.'"

A major recent development in the field is the United Nation (UN) Foundation's Accelerator for Systemic Risk Assessment. "The UN Foundation announced today the new Accelerator for Systemic Risk Assessment (ASRA), to be led by Ruth Richardson as its inaugural Executive Director. The three-year initiative is designed to contribute to the emerging field of systemic risk analysis with particular attention to helping leaders and practitioners—especially those in the public sector—better understand, assess, and incorporate sensitivity to systemic risks into their decision-making. It will work closely with practitioners, multilaterals, academics, the public and private sectors, as well as other partners across institutions, sectors, and geographies."

Historically, one of the most influential of all systems analyses of the polycrisis came from Donella Meadows and her colleagues in their report to the Club of Rome,

"Limits to Growth" in 1972. What is remarkable about their model is that it has proven highly accurate for fifty years.

These are simply examples. What they have in common is their effort to understand the underlying drivers of the polycrisis and their interactions in some systematic way.

There is another way of thinking about the polycrisis that we might call narrative maps. We are taking this approach in our Omega Resilience Awards project, which focuses on exploring polycrisis maps with younger leaders in the Global South. This approach focuses on exploring different narratives of the polycrisis as they are understood in different places and different situations. These are not necessarily systematic maps. This is story telling or meaning making in a vast variety of forms.

Many contemporary commentators offer us narrative maps—though these maps are also often systematic. The Columbia historian Adam Tooze, the New York Times contributor Ezra Klein and the Financial

Times Chief Economics Commentator Martin Wolff are analysts whose ongoing analyses of different dimensions of the polycrisis are widely respected. Science fiction—or speculative fiction—offers another influential example of a narrative approach. "The Ministry for the Future" by Kim Stanley Robinson is a brilliant example of the genre of speculative utopian fiction that examines in detail how the climate crisis could actually be resolved. Poets, novelists, filmmakers, artists, and video game producers are among the many creative people who are telling stories and making narrative maps of the polycrisis.

*[This article is an excerpt from the original publication, 'Navigating the Polycrisis—Life in Turbulent Times', published by Independent Media Institute.]*

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Nanoplastics: Polystyrene particles in the nanometer range (Electron microscopy image, colored, 50.000x). Image: Empa / ETH

# NANOPLASTICS ARE ENTERING OUR BODIES

By Erica Cirino

*Plastic is in the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. How does it get there and what does it mean for human health?*

The air is plasticized, and we are no better protected from it outdoors than indoors. Minuscule plastic fibers, fragments, foam, and films are shed from plastics and are perpetually floating into and free-falling down on us from the atmosphere. Rain flushes micro- and nanoplastics out of the sky back to Earth. Plastic-filled snow is accumulating in urban areas like Bremen, Germany, and remote regions like the Arctic and Swiss Alps.

Wind and storms carry particles shed from plastic items and debris through the air, over dozens, even hundreds of miles before depositing them back on Earth. Dongguan, Paris, London, and other metropolises around the world are enveloped in air that is perpetually permeated by tiny plastic particles small enough to lodge themselves in human lungs.

Urban regions are especially full of what scientists believe is one of the most hazardous

particulate pollution varieties—synthetic tires’ debris. As a result of the normal friction caused by brake pads and asphalt roads, and of weathering and wear, these tires shed plastic fragments, metals, and other toxic materials. Like the plastic used to manufacture consumer items and packaging, synthetic tires contain a manufacturer’s proprietary blend of poisons meant to improve a plastic product’s appearance and performance.

Tire particles from the billions of cars, trucks, bikes, tractors, and other vehicles moving across the world escape into air, soil, and water bodies. Scientists are just beginning to understand the grave danger. In 2020, researchers in Washington State determined that the presence of 6PPD-quinone, a byproduct of rubber-stabilizing chemical 6PPD, was playing a major factor in a mysterious long-term die-off of coho salmon in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. When Washington’s fall rains heralded spawning salmon’s return from sea to stream, the precipitation also washed car tire fragments and other plastic particles into these freshwater ecosystems.

Up to 90 percent of all coho salmon returning to spawn in this region have died—much greater than is considered natural. As the study’s lead author, environmental chemist Zhenyu Tian, explained in a 2020 interview with Oregon Public Broadcasting, 6PPD-quinone appears to be a key culprit: “You put this chemical, this transformation product, into a fish tank, and coho die... really fast.”

While other researchers had previously searched for and detected microplastic dispersed in indoor and outdoor air, Alvis Vianello, an Italian scientist and associate professor at Aalborg University in Denmark, was the first to do so using a mannequin emulating human breathing via a mechanical lung system. He published his study’s results in 2019. Despite the evidence his research provides—that plastic is getting inside of human bodies and could be harming us—it was not until 2022 that modern health researchers first confirmed the presence of microplastics in human lungs. And as comprehensive health research has ramped up, we are just beginning to understand how having plastic particles around us and in us, at all times, might be affecting human health.

Vianello and his colleague Jes Vollertsen, a professor of environmental studies at Aalborg University, explained that they have brought their findings to researchers at their university’s hospital for future collaborative research, perhaps searching for plastic inside human cadavers. “We now have enough evidence that we should start looking for microplastic inside human airways,” Vollertsen said. “Until then, it’s unclear whether or not we should be worried that we are breathing in plastic.”

When I met Vollertsen in 2019, he had speculated that some of the microplastic we breathe in could be expelled when we exhale. Yet, even if that is true, our lungs are indeed holding onto some of the plastic that enters, potentially resulting in damage.

Other researchers, like Joana Correia Prata who studied microplastics at the University of Aveiro in Portugal, have highlighted the need for systematic research on the human health effects of breathing in microplastic. “[Microplastic] particles and fibers, depending on their density, size, and shape, can reach the deep lung causing chronic inflammation,” she said. Prata noted that people working in environments with high levels of airborne microplastics, such as those employed in the textile industry, often suffer respiratory problems. The perpetual presence of a comparatively lower amount of microplastics in our homes has not yet been linked to specific ailments.

While they have dissected the bodies of countless nonhuman animals since the 1970s, scientists only began exploring human tissues for signs of nano- and microplastic in earnest during the late 2010s and early 2020s. From 2010 to 2020, scientists have detected microplastic in the bodies of fish and shellfish; in packaged meats, processed foods, beer, sea salt, soft drinks, tap water, and bottled water. There are tiny plastic particles embedded in conventionally grown fruits and vegetables sold in supermarkets and food stalls.

As the world rapidly ramped up its production of plastic in the 1950s and ’60s, two other booms occurred simultaneously: that of the world’s human population and the continued development of industrial agriculture. The latter would feed the former and was made possible thanks to



the development of petrochemical-based plastics, fertilizers, and pesticides.

By the late 1950s, farmers struggling to keep up with feeding the world's growing population welcomed new research papers and bulletins published by agricultural scientists extolling the benefits of using plastic, specifically dark-colored, low-density polyethylene sheets, to boost the yields of growing crops.

Scientists laid out step-by-step instructions on how the plastic sheets should be rolled out over crops to retain water, reducing the need for irrigation, and to control weeds and insects, which could not as easily penetrate plastic-wrapped soil.

This "plasticulture" has become a standard farming practice, transforming the soils humans have long sown from something familiar to something unknown. Crops grown with plastic seem to offer higher yields in the short term, while in the long term, use of plastic in agriculture could create toxic soils that repel water instead of absorbing it, a potentially catastrophic problem. This presence of plastic particles in the soil causes increased erosion and dust as well as the dissolution of ancient symbiotic relationships between soil microbes, insects, and fungi that help keep plants and our planet alive.

From the polluted soils we have created, plants pull in tiny nanoplastic particles through their roots along with the water they need to survive, with serious consequences. An accumulation of nanoplastic particles in a plant's roots diminishes its ability to absorb water, impairing growth and development. Scientists have also found evidence that nanoplastics may alter a plant's genetic makeup in a manner increasing its disease susceptibility.

Based on the levels of micro- and nanoplastics detected in human diets, it is estimated that most people unwittingly ingest anywhere from 39,000 to 52,000 bits of microplastic in their diets each year. That number increases by 90,000 microplastic particles for people who regularly consume bottled water, and by 4,000 particles for those who drink water from municipal taps.

In 2018, scientists in Austria detected microplastics in human stool samples collected from eight volunteers from eight

different countries across Europe and Asia. By 2023, scientists had detected the presence of plastic particles in people's lungs, bloodstreams, veins, placentas, feces, testes/semen, and breast milk. And while the long-term health impacts of plastic on the human body are still unknown, it is well understood that plastic has toxic effects on laboratory animals, marine wildlife, and human cell lines.

In a 2022 study, researchers showed that nanoplastics less than 100 nanometers wide can enter the blood and organs of animals and cause inflammation, toxicity, and changes in neurological function.

Clearly, micro- and nanoplastics are getting into us, with at least some escaping through our digestive tracts. We seem to be drinking, eating, and breathing it in. And these tiny particles are just one component of plastic's myriad forms of pollution. From the moment plastic's fossil fuel ingredients are extracted, to its production, transportation, use, and eventual disposal in landfills, incinerators, and the environment, the plastics pipeline emits toxic chemicals that pollute Earth's air, soils, waters, seas, animals, plants, and human bodies, and releases greenhouse gases that drive the climate crisis. Most often harmed are already underserved groups, including Black, Brown, Indigenous, rural, poor, and fenceline communities everywhere, driving severe injustice worldwide.

*[The article was originally adapted from the author's 'Thicker Than Water: The Quest for Solutions to the Plastic Crisis' for online publication by Independent Media Institute using the current title.][Erica Cirino is a contributor to the Observatory, a science writer and artist exploring the intersection of the human and nonhuman worlds. She is a recipient of fellowships from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY, and a gold Nautilus Book Award.]*

# THE FAILURE OF GMOs

By Joyce Brown

The world today, Africa inclusive, battles with several food system related issues—biodiversity loss, soil degradation, non-communicable diseases, and climate change. While these challenges require urgent attention, it is pertinent that we carefully examine approaches that are formulated to solve them. There is a popular saying that “two wrongs cannot make a right”. It is also said that the best way to get out of a pit is to stop digging. It is absurd to think that the same model or approach responsible for these issues would solve them.

Industrial agriculture is shown to be the leading cause of anthropogenic climate change especially with the production of inorganic fertilisers, transportation over long distances and intensive animal production. It is also one of the major causes of deforestation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss. Its use of large volumes of chemical fertilizers and pesticides is linked to various adverse health effects—cancer, immune malfunction, developmental delays in children and more.

Industrial agriculture produces mainly commodity crops such as the cereals: rice, maize and wheat, used in a wide variety of calorie-dense foods and grown mostly for processing. About 60 per cent of all dietary energy is derived from just these three cereal crops. This calorie-based approach fails to meet nutrition recommendations, such as consumption of fruits, vegetables and pulses or legumes. The popularity of processed and



packaged food is increasing across the world. Proportionately, obesity is on the rise globally and many suffer from avoidable diet related diseases like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.

Industrial farming entrenches inequality. Although small farms make up 72 per cent of all farms, they occupy just about 8 per cent of all agricultural land. In contrast, large farms, which account for only 1 per cent of the world's farms, occupy 65 per cent of agricultural land. This gives large farms too much control. Also, industrial farms use over 70 per cent of the world's resources but produce less than 30 per cent of food consumed, as they produce mostly for machines. Small farms, on the other hand, use less than 30 per cent of available resources to produce over 70 per cent of food consumed.

GMOs (genetically modified organisms) are a major component of industrial agriculture. Global adoption of products of this technology has been limited despite three decades of robust marketing. Twenty-six countries have banned them while 64 countries currently require manufacturers to label foods with GMOs.

GMOs were introduced with two main promises: to increase crop yield and reduce pesticide usage. New York Times did a comparison using United Nations Data on crop yield in most parts of Europe where GMOs are rejected and North America which has largely welcomed GMOs. The assessment revealed that North American GMO crops showed no gains over non-GMO crops in European countries (France and Germany, among others) with comparable agricultural technology. In almost 30 decades since their introduction, GMOs have not solved world hunger as promised. This is because, in fact, GMOs were not designed to solve world hunger and have not increased crop yields. Rather, population of bees have been shown to reduce over time and this has direct implication on crop yield as pollination by bees have been found to significantly increase yield.

The claim that GMOs would reduce pesticide use is also pure fallacy considering that the same companies making the genetically modified (GM) seeds make pesticides to accompany them. Pesticide use—including herbicides and insecticides—has increased, despite claims from Monsanto (now Bayer) and others that the GM seeds would create

plants that are resistant to pests. The report by New York Times cites data showing that herbicide use in the US has increased by 21 per cent in the last two decades. Soybeans herbicide use has grown by 250 per cent since the introduction of GM seeds; use in corn was actually decreasing before GMOs but doubled between 2002 and 2010.

After years of exposure to the herbicides, weeds become resistant to them. This is leading to the development of super weeds. Glyphosate, a widely used herbicide that is a major component of Roundup and many other pesticides used by farmers in Nigeria is globally subject to massive litigation claims and awards and is implicated in the causation of multiple cancers. These pesticides destroy not only the target pests but also beneficial soil organisms as well as predators that help to keep pests at bay.

GMOs have also failed the coexistence test, showing the ability to contaminate neighbouring farms. A popular case is that of Percy Schmeiser who got into a legal battle with the then Monsanto after genes from genetically modified Canola planted in nearby farms were transferred into his farm. Until now, mechanisms for compensating farms contaminated by GMOs are lacking.

GMOs are not designed to build or strengthen local economies. Farmers lose the right to save, share or reuse seeds due to royalties/patents imposed on GM seeds. Farmers/communities have to depend on the corporations to get seeds and the accompanying pesticides year in year out. This weighs much on the farmers economically in addition to the fact that they require even more pesticides to address the resultant super pests.

Given freedom and the right information, citizens will reject technologies such as genetic modification of food crops that abuse our food, our bodies and the planet. The recombinant bovine growth hormone injected into cows for increased milk production was rejected in Canada after it caused severe diseases in the animals.

Bt Cotton was also rejected by farmers in Burkina Faso in 2015 because of its inferior quality. Across the world, civil society and consumers groups strongly resist the introduction of GMOs into the food system especially owing to the fact that they are designed mainly for profit for the corporations making them and as tools of control.

Such information, stated above, are usually not considered by the Nigerian government. Part of consideration and sometimes the only consideration before permits are granted for GMOs importation into the country, as in the case of the WACOT maize, is that the GM products were approved in "other jurisdiction."

In Nigeria, over 20 genetically modified products are approved for importation for various reasons including for food, feed, processing, and field trials. Cowpea and Cotton have been approved for commercial use. One of the key issues with GMOs in Nigeria is that citizens have no sufficient knowledge on the GM varieties approved for commercial use or those illegally imported into the country. In a community which had received the Bt Cowpea for planting, a farmer, when interviewed, said he would not plant the crop variety because of the problem of pests.

**" To solve the food crises, there is need to address the root causes—over consumption, the exploitation and commodification of Nature, disregard for the knowledge, experience and rights of small holder food producers, conflicts, inequalities, and industrialization of agriculture."**



Clearly, he was unaware of what exactly it is that the crop is designed to do. A 2022 study done with support of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) also revealed that farmers do not have sufficient knowledge about the Bt Cowpea. The farmers rely on information supplied by the agencies handing them the products. The Bt Cowpea, said to be resistant to the lepidopteran insect pest, was approved for commercial release in 2019. The problems with this approval include the absence of molecular risk assessment to demonstrate safety; measures to prevent gene flow from the Bt cowpea; data on the susceptibility of non-target organisms; and a feeding study. In summary, the safety of consumption of the Bt cowpea is not shown.

While there are products from some countries that carry labels showing GMO content and allowing the purchaser opportunity of choice, labelling does not solve the problem of choice in Nigeria. This is because the majority of Nigerian citizens purchase food from open markets where items are sold in cups and measures. It is also not likely that people who sell local foods like *akara* (made from beans), *moi-moi* (also from beans), *ogi* or *akamu* (made from maize), etc. will label their products to show GMO content.

Nigeria has a National Biosafety Management Agency Act enacted since 2015 to regulate the use of GMOs. This Act, in its present state, cannot guarantee human, animal or environmental safety. There are fundamental flaws in areas of risk assessments and management; access to information; public consultation and participation; liability and redress; the right to know; decision-making and; appeals and reviews.

The composition of the Governing Board of the agency is arbitrary and constitutes serious conflict of interest. For example, the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) which is the major promoter of the GM technology sits on that board, yet there is no sufficient representation of civil society, farmers, and consumers. It does not make sense for NABDA to be on the board

since it is their conduct, their technology, and products that the law aims to regulate.

To solve the food crises, there is need to address the root causes—over consumption, the exploitation and commodification of Nature, disregard for the knowledge, experience and rights of small holder food producers, conflicts, inequalities, and industrialization of agriculture. The solution is to embrace agroecological farming, which is able to cool the planet, transform the food system and assure food sovereignty. Food security will best be accomplished under the atmosphere of food sovereignty.

To safely and effectively generate crops with complex desirable properties, such as higher yield, drought tolerance, and disease resistance, we can use natural breeding, augmented, where useful, by marker assisted selection. Conventional breeding combined with agroecological farming methods can fulfil all our current and future food needs.




# *Soot on Great Gran's Tales*

By Ogechi Okanya Cookey

I put out my head slightly, peering out the  
window eyes closed  
My expectations were a beautiful scenery  
I envisioned a sweet embracing air  
Grass smelling sweetly fresh as my Bobo's hair

Oh! The many waters of my nature rich zone  
The beaches were waiting for my embrace  
Crystal soft earth underneath my feet  
Hmmm! Finally! Great gran's tales



And the greenery on stilt in her backyard  
Aaayeee! An assortment for my bowl  
All for my relish each time  
The taste stood vivid on my tongue

But hot breezy air hit my dimples  
My vision yet bulged with every hit  
The soothing air would follow  
Great gran's tales would come

That sweet scent was crawling in  
My eyes parted only turning to meet my Bobo's chuckle  
It was his hair all along  
If only the little cute human knew

Eyes darting back and forth in the darkness  
Fears not known creeping forward  
Yet, great gran's tale stood strong  
Nudging me to brace up to the darkness

The light soon came parting my eyelids  
Over a quarter mile and heat simmered in the dark  
It was a sunlike and firelike moon dangling  
Nothing round or cool about it

The earth beneath me was toast  
Sky above me smeared with soot  
It was where stars could not shine  
Grey and soot were the new green and white

Kins sat in incomplete circles keenly mulling over  
In what was once the greenery in great gran's backyard  
Scant trees short as the amputated  
Adah stood atop my supposed assortment grove

A hunk of a man of oily soot  
Sclera red as flare and pupil dark as soot  
He chortled, spreading arms as the beach in great gran's tales  
I ran into hope smelling or crude and soot

Hot tears strolled from my lacrimal glands down a sooted thigh  
Ayagogo Ayagogo great Adah's voice sang hope  
Before! Beneath! Above! Around me! Stood great gran's tale  
But it was all soot on great gran's tale.

# COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND THE SCOURGE OF COLONIALISM

By Cadmus Atake-Enade

Community refers to a group of people with similar agenda, vision, or direction. A community is driven by a common culture or belief, provides a sense of belonging and connectedness, offering extra meaning and purpose to everyday life. Culture is the knowledge and traits of a specific group of people that defines their religion, language, social habits, art, music, and cuisine.

According to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, culture is a shared standard of interactions, behaviours, understanding, and mental processes learned through socialization. A community and its culture is centred on building a people of like minds—builds and shapes the peoples' morals, guiding them on the path to follow.

The African culture guides the way Africans relate with nature and celestial beings. There is the belief that nature has a mind of its own and various deities that protect various aspects of nature. In traditional Africa, it is believed that when a person defaults in obeying the rules and norms of the community where they belong, they are expected to make certain sacrifices or pay fines. Some acts against the culture of the land are considered sacrileges against the deities of nature and the land.

Africa had accommodating societies living in harmony with all that is around them. The people of Africa had environmental consciousness built around the ideology that everyone and everything around them matter.

## **“ Colonialism is the direct and overall domination of one country by another”**

This positively impacted individual responsibilities and roles in the community. However, a new era began, following the scramble for Africa which cumulated in the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 also known as the Congo Conference or West Africa Conference of 15 November 1884, and after an adjournment concluded on 26 February 1885. There was a division of Africa among foreign powers—the colonizers.

Colonisation and the introduction of Christianity by the West brought about new beliefs, morals and laws. Many African norms, beliefs and traditions soon became obsolete and were tagged injustice against humanity. The colonial masters made Africans believe



that their culture, beliefs and traditions were barbaric. The weakening of African belief system gave room for the massive invasion of Africa's land and massive extraction of the continent's natural resources.

Colonialism is the direct and overall domination of one country by another. It is worthy of note, that the colonisation of Africa by European powers was necessitated by several factors. Notable among the factors, was the industrial revolution which brought about rapid socio-economic change and the high need for raw materials and natural resources in the European countries.

The Western colonisers, thus, came with the mindset of exploitation combined with violence and oppression. Colonialism made Africans become subtle, scared to speak and stand up for themselves. The present crop of African leaders, instead of seeking to make Africa more relevant and secured with its abundance of natural resources, become busy selling out African nations to seek for aids and support from same Western colonizers who have plundered and pillaged the continent.

Colonialism introduced a mono-culture economy to Africa. It also dehumanized African labour force and traders, forcing Africans to work in colonial plantations for very low wages, while dispossessing them of their lands.

As a result of colonialism and the exploitation that followed, African communities evolved from being accommodating to becoming hostile to their own environment and to one another. The colonial masters had created division that weakened Africans' way of living.

It is, therefore, very important that as Africans, we go back to our root—to identifying that which made us what we used to be in the past. We need to ensure that the ideology of interconnections is restored. We must ensure that we become a United Africa where everyone works in singleness of purpose. This is important for the development of Africa as a large community

with great and diverse cultures and beliefs. However, for this to work we must begin to learn and re-learn our cultural differences across the different African sub-regions.

Cultural awareness will help break cultural barriers within Africa and lead to support for cultural differences as well as adoption



of better ways of coping in modern African society. It will enable all Africans connect respectfully with different African communities. It will also enable deep thinking on how to liberate Africans from the mental slavery that has resulted to more dependence on the West.

We as Africans must consciously see Africa as a community with all the resources needed to build a strong and united front. We must see ourselves as a community of resilient people building narratives that bring about healing to us all, and as a community living in harmony with nature.

Our communities and cultures make us who we really are as Africans, thus, we must sustain that which has, over time, made us strong and morally upright.



# ECUADOR VOTES PLANET PROTECTION, BEATS THE GUN FOR GLOBAL ACTION

By Dorothy Guerrero and Ivonne Yanez


*Ecuador's brave and historic vote to end oil drilling in the Yasuni National Park is only the beginning. Now the world needs to come together to help the transition from fossil fuels.*

History was made on 20th August 2023. The people of Ecuador voted to become the first country in the world to limit fossil fuel extraction through direct democracy – making them a global trailblazer. More than 5.2 million people voted in favour, giving a margin of almost 20% when compared with the 3.6 million that voted against. This means the development of all new oil wells in the Yasuní National Park in the Amazon, one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet, is now set to be halted.

This is of particular significance, given that Ecuador's economy relies heavily on oil exports. Indeed, it is part of the inter-state conflict surrounding the just transition: who, globally, should be halting oil and fossil fuel extraction first? Who will be expected to face the consequences of continuing destructive practices on one hand, and stopping on the other, at the risk of economic loss?

Conversely, who is profiting from the choices we make and who is asked to make sacrifices?

The conflict here was on two levels: that of the state, and that of class. Oil-rich countries that developed their oil resources became rich. Oil executives who are also in governments became billionaires and, to some extent, were able to give their citizens a higher standard of living. Ecuador could have also aspired to, and followed, this model. But campaigners in Ecuador have shown they want another way. They recognise that it will only be transnational corporations and local elites who will get richer if oil extraction continues



. This will be at the great expense of campesino and indigenous populations who would have continued to be driven off their lands and communities.

Crucially, this is not a position that Ecuador should have ever had to face. Environmental justice need not have been placed in opposition to economic justice. The two can go hand in hand. Were former president Rafael Correa's calls 16 years ago for the international community to contribute \$3.6bn in exchange for a ban on drilling heeded, this would have been possible. But it is not too late for the international community, particularly rich nations, to act now.

Indeed, it is now imperative that the international community actively gives political, economic, and financial support to hold up Ecuador's transformative decision. This would not simply be a "nice thing to do": it is a matter of reparative justice. If our governments truly want to prove they are serious about ending climate catastrophe, payment in the form of reparations is an essential tool, ensuring that the progressive, transformative climate action that is absolutely essential to our planet's wellbeing is made possible.

If the governments are looking for a way to fund such climate action, they can start by taxing the mammoth profits made by oil-polluting companies who, while our planet burns and people are stretched to the brink of a cost of living crisis, are raking in billions. A recent study by environmental non-profit One Earth estimated that were the world's top fossil fuel companies to pay compensation to communities

most damaged by their destructive practices, it would amount to at least \$209 billion annually. It is also now more urgent than ever for leaders in the global north to enact a just transition away from fossil fuels. The time for lip service is over.

The battle is not over in Ecuador. The current Ecuadorian government has stated that it is not willing to respect the result of the democratic vote. Ecuadorian climate and environmental justice movements will continue the battle to see the result respected and implemented in a way that is fair and just for Ecuador.

The victory of Ecuadorian campaigners who fought tirelessly to make this happen should serve as inspiration for our climate movements in the UK, resisting oil development from Cumbria to Rosebank. Ecuador's choice to reject oil extraction reveals the inherent contradiction at the heart of Rishi Sunak's eager embrace of more oil, coal and gas. The UK can, and must, also say no to mining and yes to life and the planet. Ecuadorians have blazed a bold, fearless path. Now the rest of the world must take note and demonstrate solidarity.

*[The article was also published by Big Issue Magazine with the title 'The people of Ecuador voted to protect the planet. Now it's time for the international community to step up.]*

*[Dorothy Guerrero is an author, speaker and activist from the Philippines and Head of Policy and Advocacy at Global Justice Now. Ivonne Yanez is a founding member of Acción Ecológica, the international network Oilwatch and of the Plataforma Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Justicia Climática.]*



# **Decolonizing Africa's Energy and Embracing Renewable Energy**

By Kome Odhomor

Africa is a continent rich in natural resources yet has historically faced numerous challenges in harnessing its energy potential due to centuries of colonialism. Africa's energy sector, scarred by the legacy of colonialism, has long been shackled to processes promoting mindless exploitation and dependency. The lingering legacy of colonialism has seen many African nations continue to rely on outdated and exploitative energy systems introduced and utilized by multinational companies in Africa.

These foreign entities have always been the key players in Africa's energy sector. Limited infrastructure and financial resources often leave African nations dependent on the multinationals' investment and expertise, making the continent constantly vulnerable to exploitation. The companies continue to dictate the extraction and utilisation of Africa's abundant natural resources, leaving local communities marginalized. Legacies of exploitation have shaped the power dynamics and economic relationships between Africa and the rest of the world.



Africa possesses vast reserves of energy resources, making it an attractive target for foreign powers seeking to secure their own energy needs. Global powers, thus, compete for access to Africa's energy resources to maintain their own energy security and geopolitical influence. This competition often leads to political interference and unequal partnerships that prioritize the interests of external actors over the needs of the people of Africa. That is the reason names like Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Total BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto, Anglo American Platinum, Xstrata and Barrick, resonate across Africa in the most negative way.

Experts call Africa's experience energy colonisation. This refers to the exploitative practices employed by foreign powers and multinational corporations to control and extract Africa's vast energy resources for their own benefit, often at the expense of the continent's socio-economic and environmental well-being.

Energy colonisation perpetuates a pattern of economic exploitation, where African nations receive limited benefits from the extraction and export of their resources. Multinational corporations often negotiate unfair contracts, resulting in minimal revenue for African countries while generating huge profits for foreign entities. Despite Africa's rich energy resources, a significant portion of the continent's population lacks access to reliable and affordable energy services.

Energy colonisation hampers the development of domestic energy infrastructure, as foreign entities prioritize exporting raw materials from Africa rather than investing in local energy production and distribution. Energy extraction and production in Africa often occur without adequate environmental regulations. The multinationals perpetrate mindless exploitation with little to no penalty from governments of African countries. This results in ecological damage, including deforestation, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. And African communities always bear the brunt of these environmental impacts which have put their

health, livelihoods, and food security in a sorry state.

Sadly, after massive destruction of the environment, the multinationals leave without remediation using the cover of divestment. Example of this is the ongoing divestment in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

## **“ Energy colonisation perpetuates a pattern of economic exploitation, where African nations receive limited benefits from the extraction and export of their resources”.**

The question then is: **How can Africa gain its energy independence?** Decolonizing Africa's energy sector represents a transformative opportunity to address the aforementioned issues and pave the way for sustainable development. One of the primary steps towards decolonizing Africa's energy sector is reclaiming ownership and control over energy resources. By reclaiming control over energy resources, adopting renewable technologies, and promoting local participation, Africa can reshape its energy landscape to meet the needs of its people and safeguard its environment.

To reclaim control, African nations would have to enact policies that prioritize resource sovereignty and ensure that energy resources are managed and utilized in the best interest of their own people. This would necessitate renegotiating contracts, establishing equitable revenue-sharing mechanisms, and promoting responsible extraction practices.

As the world confronts climate change, Africa stands at a crossroads and must decide to

lead the charge towards renewable energy and the battle against climate change. Transitioning to renewable energy is crucial for decolonizing Africa's energy sector which is fossil fuel dependent. It is time for a shift to renewable alternatives such as solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal power.

Investing in renewable energy infrastructure not only reduces dependence on exploration of oil and gas but also mitigates the environmental impacts of energy production, thereby reducing a nation's carbon footprint.

Moreover, the decentralized nature of renewable energy empowers local communities to generate their own power and reduces vulnerability to centralized energy systems.

Decolonizing Africa's energy sector requires the active involvement and empowerment of local communities. In a bid to do this, African nations would need to prioritize policies that promote local participation, ownership, and capacity building in the energy sector.

This can be achieved through the establishment of training programmes, educational initiatives, and entrepreneurship opportunities that enable Africans to take an active role in energy production, distribution, and management. By fostering local expertise and entrepreneurship, Africa can unlock its full energy potential while creating job opportunities and stimulating economic growth.

Collaboration and cooperation within and between African nations is essential for a successful decolonization of the energy sector. By forming national-subnational and regional partnerships, communities and countries can share knowledge, resources, and infrastructure, leading to mutual benefits and increased energy security. Regional initiatives can facilitate the development of interconnected energy grids, enabling the transfer of surplus energy between countries and optimizing resource utilization. Furthermore, collective bargaining power in international energy markets can be strengthened through regional cooperation,

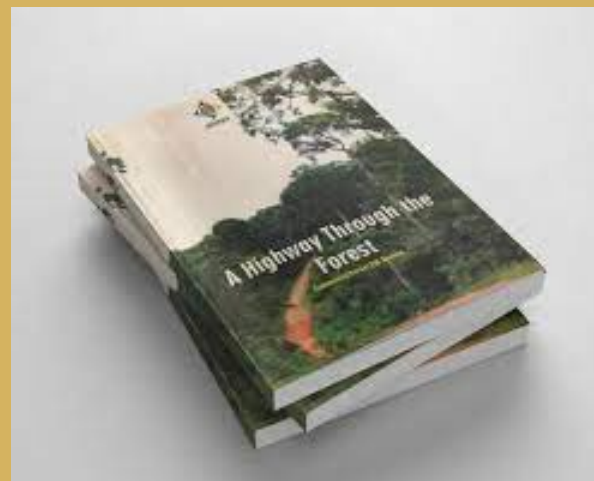
ensuring fair trade and pricing.

Decolonizing Africa's energy sector should be aligned with the principles of sustainable development.

This entails integrating social, economic, and environmental considerations into energy planning and policy-making. African nations should prioritize energy access for all, particularly for marginalized communities, while minimizing the carbon footprint and environmental degradation associated with energy production. By adopting sustainable practices, such as energy efficiency measures and conservation programmes, Africa can lead the way in building a greener and more equitable future.

Decolonizing Africa's energy sector is a complex and multifaceted task, but it is essential for the continent's sustainable development. Just as gaining political independence was never given on a platter but through resilience in struggle, Africa must wriggle its way to energy independence by implementing the above recommendations.

By so doing, Africa can pave the way for a more equitable, inclusive, and just energy sector.



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# JUST ENERGY TRANSITION: A Priority for Africa

By Babawale Obayanju

Africa, home to one-fifth of the global population, is reported to have contributed about 3% of the world's carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, representing the lowest emissions per capita. Yet, the continent faces the most devastating consequences of climate change, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts.



As the continent's leaders and global climate policy makers meet for the Africa Climate Week, 4 - 8 September 2023, in Nairobi, hosted by the Kenyan government, it is expected that they embrace an equitable approach to climate policy. Africa requires an approach that safeguards the environment, lifts up communities and instigates actions toward a just and feminist energy transition.

While Africa's carbon emission is comparatively minor, its vulnerability to climate impacts is immense. Recent events, such as the 2022 Nigerian floods and Cyclone Idai's devastation in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi in 2019, underline the urgent need for comprehensive climate policies. These incidents, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities, emphasize the necessity for immediate and ambitious climate mitigation strategies.

## **“ Addressing the historical climate debt owed to Africa is essential for equitable progress”**

Amid the climate crisis, Africa's energy landscape presents a formidable challenge. Millions on the continent lack access to reliable electricity and clean cooking facilities. This shows the extent of energy poverty in Africa. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is now putting immense pressure on the continent's energy resources, as both Western and African governments seek to expand their search for oil and gas in Africa. The African Union's stance on incorporating gas into the energy transition mix raises concerns. Their position contradicts the global push for drastic reduction of global average temperatures below 1.5°C by moving away from dirty energy sources towards clean renewables. Europe's wavering commitment to having gas in its own energy mix while bolstering fossil fuel investments in Africa, risks exacerbating environmental

degradation and climate injustice, and furthering the patterns of neocolonial extractivism on the continent.

Africa holds unparalleled potential for harnessing renewable energy sources, including solar and wind, which could transform its energy landscape. However, the challenge lies not only in adopting clean energy but also in ensuring an equitable transition process. The transition must prioritize protecting ecosystems, local livelihoods and communities, while providing universal access to energy. Grassroots resistance, in South Africa and Mozambique, to harmful energy projects exemplifies imperative calls for environmentally conscious development.

Amid the race to combat climate change, caution must be exercised against embracing false solutions, in the form of carbon markets, offsets, and removals.

Part of the agenda of the Africa Climate Summit, held concurrently with the African Climate Week, is to operationalize the carbon market initiative, proposed by US consultancy McKinsey and Company in collaboration with Sustainable Energy for All, the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, and the Rockefeller Foundation. This will compromise the environment and vulnerable communities.

Geoengineering initiatives like solar radiation, sky whitening, ocean fertilization, and ill-conceived 'nature-based solutions' risk masking the deep-rooted changes necessary for meaningful emissions reduction. Instead of relying on carbon markets and offsets, a people-led energy revolution grounded in democratic, locally informed clean renewable solutions, is imperative.

The African Climate Summit holds immense potential to redefine Africa's energy future. Africa must prioritize a just transition to renewable energy, opt for a complete phase-out of fossil fuels and halt new dirty energy projects. The focus should be on clean, safe energy sources, respect for indigenous and



community rights, safeguarding biodiversity, and minimizing environmental harm.

This will decentralize energy access, bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, and balance resource demand with environmental stewardship. The first step is to reject all false narratives that support gas as a transition fuel, and any form of false solutions including carbon markets, offsets, and removals in Africa.

Addressing the historical climate debt owed to Africa is essential for equitable progress. Funds should flow into the Loss and Damage finance mechanism established at COP27, free from loans or insurance that could exacerbate economic imbalances. Utilizing existing funds, including those hidden in tax havens, could fuel Africa's renewable energy revolution.

A successful transition hinges on simultaneously addressing climate debt and inequality, buttressed by favourable political and economic conditions. This discussion should be at the heart of the Summit. The Africa Climate Summit has the potential to redefine Africa's trajectory in confronting

the climate crisis. By centring on a just energy transition, the Summit can foster equitable development, clean energy access, and environmental stewardship.

**“ Africa must  
prioritize a just  
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fuels and halt new  
dirty energy projects”**

▪

The urgency is undeniable: Africa's challenges are global, and the continent's success in navigating the energy crisis can serve as a blueprint for a sustainable future worldwide. In the end, the pursuit of a just transition is not only Africa's responsibility but a collective endeavour for a more resilient and harmonious planet.



# Revolutionizing Climate Justice struggle in Africa

By Magdalene Idiang

One of the major causes of poverty, conflict and instability today in Africa is climate change. The rising ocean is negatively impacting coastlines and coastal ecosystems in Africa. Drought is spreading and forcing many Africans to abandon their homes. Climate change and its many impacts is steadily disrupting age long agricultural practices, exacerbating hunger and driving an unusual pattern of forced migration across Africa.

Each passing year, these impacts become even more intense and threatening. The combined effect of desertification and shrinkage of lake Chad have resulted in pronounced

migration of climate refugees. These migrants who flee literally to greener pastures, are usually met with fiendish fences, unwelcoming borders, and gruesome death. Over 3,231 migrants were reported to have died or gone missing in 2021 while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea according to UNHCR spokesperson, Shabia Mantoo. For Africa, the stark reality is that the future of the continent and its people is closely tied to actions taken



suffers 50 percent more. The report predicted that by 2030, about 75 to 250 million Africans will lack access to potable water. Already, the continent is suffering the worst floods and droughts ever recorded.

Considering the climate change impacts and Africa's vulnerability,

concerning climate justice.

The current occurrence of climate change is not primarily a natural phenomenon. It is the result of capitalists, extractivists and imperialists' exploitation of people and the planet. There is a class war; not just by the rich against the poor, the working class and those who till the land but also against the earth and its resources. The scourge of climate change is driven by choice made by Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and Western governments, backed by international law and might, and in collaboration with domestic elites and militaries to keep burning fossil fuels. Fossil related activities, involving the release of heavy amounts of greenhouse gasses, notably carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, have been identified as the major cause of climate change. Not only is Africa the worst hit, but the continent is also left with the burden to cope, adapt to, mitigate, and generally bear the brunt of capitalist exploitation of the earth and its peoples.

The 2021 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) revealed that Africa is impacted harder by climate change for two reasons. First, because of its higher poverty levels, deficient infrastructure, political instability and, in several areas, endemic violence. Second, for every degree of global temperature increase, Africa

the continent should be weaned off fossil fuels. Yet, more scramble for fossil is being witnessed in pristine ecosystems in Africa. The Niger Delta region in Nigeria, protected areas in Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo, Okavango region in Botswana, and Saloum Delta in Senegal have been among such areas in Africa that are suffering plunder and pillage. Many of these areas suffer daily massive release of greenhouse gases and toxic chemical from the oilfields through gas flaring and other natural resource exploitation activities by multinationals.

The level of pollution in the Niger Delta has driven life expectancy to about 41 years, far lower than the national average which is 54.

In Uganda, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline threatens the Lake Victoria basin and the livelihoods of over 40 million Africans. The more fossil extraction gains momentum and continues without checks or hindrance, the more Africa descends into environmental chaos, and justice is sacrificed on the altar of greed and imperialist might.

Africa is least responsible for climate change but suffers some of the most damaging consequences. Industrialised regions, such as Europe and North America, not only suffer fewer impacts but also have better coping mechanisms. These regions are most responsible for climate change yet refuse to



take meaningful action. They form the global power structure driven by corporate interest and backed by merciless military machinery. Their power play and unwillingness to take responsibility is intensifying the injustice of climate change.

Climate Justice means a recognition of the historic responsibility of the industrialised West in causing climate change, bearing in mind the disproportionate impacts suffered by African countries and communities. It entails recognizing the role of power in shaping how climate change came to be and who carries the burden. Climate justice, therefore, demands the awakening of revolutionary movements against climate change and environmental crimes.

It is clear from the just concluded 27th climate negotiations under the UNFCCC that real climate actions will not be applauded by powerful polluters nor by emerging economies who insist on having the right to catch up and gobble up whatever atmospheric space is left for carbon.

This is why proposed solutions for climate change so far have been market-based, neoliberal and top-down in approach. Polluting permits and subsidies are awarded multinationals and extractive companies. Response to climate change is left in the hands of greedy elites who feed fat on fossil revenues while the planet incinerates. This means that the chances for survival for Africa range from slim to non-existent.

Real climate solutions do not reside in the chambers of elite conferences, but with the mobilization of the dispossessed, by creating solidarity linkages between peoples' formations across Africa, joining social forces and driving active engagements in communities. Real solution lies in resisting all forms of fossil extraction activities and pushing for real actions.

Thus, what is needed to achieve climate justice for Africa is the awakening of the revolutionary energy of the working class against the forces and industries causing climate change. A revolutionary movement

akin to the anti-colonial and pan-African liberation struggles, in the spirit of the guardianship methods of Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Thomas Sankara, etc., is vital at this point. This revolution must be backed with the understanding that climate justice is inseparable from social and economic justice.

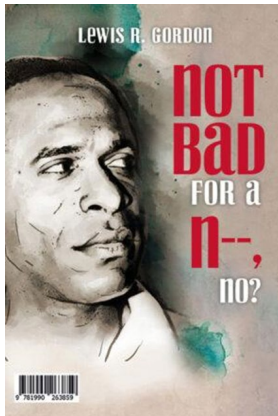
There is need for a radical political

**“ Climate Justice means a recognition of the historic responsibility of the industrialised West in causing climate change, bearing in mind the disproportionate impacts suffered by African countries and communities”.**

alternative—a moral commitment from African brothers and sisters in the struggle—to redress the injustices emanating from an economic system that is waging ecocidal war in Africa. Africans have a duty not to only indict the system and shut it down, but to build new ways of being, doing and sustaining.

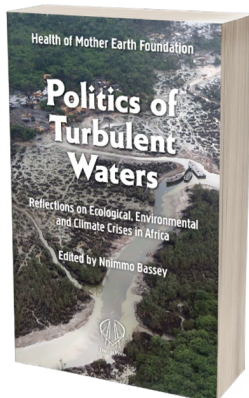
Africans must stand up to the imperialist power sponsoring activities contributing hugely to climate change and its impacts in Africa. Without this, Africa cannot begin to reclaim and repair the environment or nurture its people into achieving a decent existence where the people live and flourish in dignity.

# BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ



## **Not Bad for a N--, no? An encounter with Frantz Fanon by Lewis Gordon**

Written during the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations of the publication of Frantz Fanon's *Peau noir, masques blancs* ("Black Skin, White Masks"), "*Not Bad for a N—, No?*" offers reflections on the circumstances of the publication of this classic work with Fanon's insights on what he called the attempted "murder of man" and the urgent need for humanity to become "actional."



## **Politics of Turbulent Waters: Reflections on Ecological, Environmental and Climate Crises in Africa, Edited by Nnimmo Bassey and published by Daraja Press**

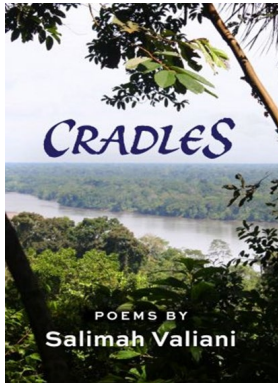
***Politics of Turbulent Waters*** is published to mark the tenth anniversary of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF). The title is taken from one of editor Nnimmo Bassey's articles from *The Eco-instigator*, HOMEF's quarterly magazine. The book is a compendium of selected articles from the 36 issues of *The Eco-instigator* published from 2013 to 2022.

For ten years HOMEF has been on the front line of the struggle for environmental justice, climate justice and food sovereignty in Africa and around the globe. It has been a decade of nonstop probing of the exploitation of resources, peoples and nations.

The book crystallizes the dire condition of Africa and its waters and the power imbalance together with the spatial disposition that plunged the continent into the calamitous environmental situation it faces. It speaks of the politics of economic development and market fundamentalism that avows to maintain the status quo in terms of destructive exploitation of Africa's marine and other natural resources.

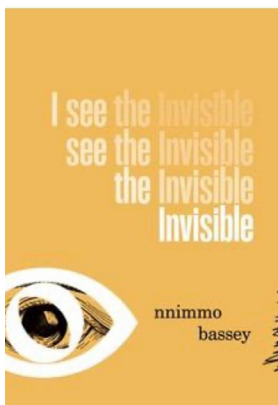
# BOOKSBOOKS

# BOOKS YOU SHOULD READ



## **Cradles by Salimah Valiani**

Cradles is a collection of poems on the nature and nurturing that cradle us. They are divided into four parts: Womb is the first cradle, both 'nature' and 'nurture', under-acknowledged and often unmentioned. Beyond the physical womb of individuals, there are collective wombs that incubate on yet grander and greater scales. Lands are the cradles we typically identify as our 'origins', but as the Cradle of Humankind teaches, the many lands of today are interlaced in many concealed ways and originated in a single, little understood place. Tides are the many migrations and cycles of time that shape us. They can shift, upset, and remake the nurturing of cradles but also cradle us in cycles of wreckage. Wind sets us free of places and times of origin. This detachment can bring freedom, a sense of loss/lostness, and the many things in between. The freedom/loss/lostness spiral whirls with the wind and transforms. In surrendering to it, we can alter its pace to our needs and desires.



## **I see the Invisible by Nnimmo Bassey**

**I See the Invisible** is forthcoming collection of poetry by Nnimmo Bassey. See [www.darajapress.com](http://www.darajapress.com) for more information.

# BOOKSBOOKS

# UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- **Community Eco-defenders training**
- **Community dialogues and training**
- **SOE- Building Resilience and People Power**

## **Volunteers Needed!**

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to join our team  
of volunteers.**

**Kindly visit  
[www.homef.org/volunteer](http://www.homef.org/volunteer)**

## Pesticides: A Global Threat

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Go to <https://aapn.org.ng>





