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ECUADOR

Can Oil be Kept in the Ground?

TRUTH ABOUT EXTRACTIVISM,
CLIMATE CHANGE, AND FOOD
CRISES

CRUDE CHRISTMASSES IN
THE CREEKS

BUILDING RESILIENT MOVEMENTS,
PEOPLE POWER, AND CHALLENGING
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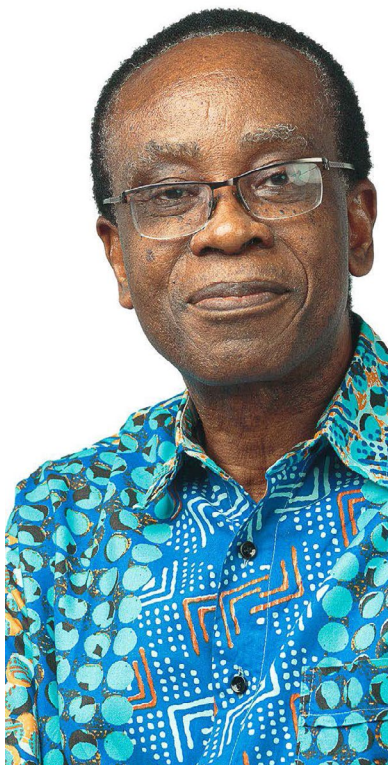
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HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH foundation

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NNIMMO BASSEY,
Director, Health of Mother
Earth Foundation

...we cannot rest easy knowing that the need to rein in fossil fuel extraction and burning goes beyond the climate question. It is about protecting the Rights of Nature and of the peoples and communities that suffer from havoc wreaked by extractivism.

Home Run

The ebbing year was tremendously significant for us at HOMEf. We had a moment to look at the ten years that have rolled by since our commencement as an ecological think tank and advocacy organisation. That moment was loaded with gratitude as we recalled milestones of deep acceptance by the broad spectrum of communities, networks and alliances we have interacted with.

COP28 confirmed our reading that serious climate action will be driven from below and not from multilateral spaces deeply captured by corporate interests. Highlights of the COP included the operationalizing of the Loss and Damage Fund and the grudging acknowledgement that the world must transit from burning of fossil fuels for energy. But we cannot rest easy knowing that the need to rein in fossil fuel extraction and burning goes beyond the climate question. It is about protecting the Rights of Nature and of the peoples and communities that suffer from havoc wreaked by extractivism.

In a referendum held in August 2023 the people of Ecuador voted massively to halt extraction of crude oil in the Yasuni ITT oil field. It was a victory for the people who had doggedly pushed for this for over a decade. The vote to keep the oil in the ground at Yasuni also signifies that people power can help end the destructive addiction to fossil fuels and also promote real climate action.

We bring you some poems in this edition and also articles and reports underscoring the urgency of tackling the pervasive multiple crises. You will find reports highlighting the need to build the capacity of smallholder farmers to enable them to continue producing safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food while confronting the hunger and climate crises. We also share reports on artisanal fishers, fish processors, maritime workers and other critical stakeholders as human rights defenders who play critical socio-economic roles in our society .

We produced a video documentary on the Ororo-1 oil well that exploded and has been burning since May 2020. See [here](#).¹ Both the oil companies and the government have kept a blind eye to the atrocious incident and remain deaf to the cries of the impacted communities. The truth is that we are all impacted! We invite you to sign our petition calling on government to stop this menace with utmost urgency. Sign the petition [here](#).²

We love hearing from you. Do drop us a line or share feedback, stories, articles, poems or photos at editor@homef.org.

Have a happy and fulfilling season and see you all in 2024.

Until Victory!

¹ <https://youtu.be/W339bWRkUtl?si=DnWTjiM259sU8IKc>

² <https://www.change.org/p/a-call-to-end-ororo-1-well-fire-at-awoye>

COP28 and the Evasion of Climate Justice

BY NNIMMO BASSEY

The foundation for voluntary emissions cut by nations was laid in the Copenhagen Accord (2009) and consolidated in the Paris Agreement (2015) under what is known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). The voluntary mechanism essentially blunted the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), a cardinal justice principle of the UNFCCC. Whereas in the past, rich, industrialized, and polluting nations were grouped as Annex 1 nations and had binding emissions reduction requirements, under the NDCs, there are no binding obligations. Nations simply have to do what is convenient for them to do and report back on what they have done to the COP. Such submissions were made for the stocktake at COP28.

Voluntary emissions reduction can work in a situation where there is no crisis and no urgency for action. However, the world has already progressed from global warming to global heating and the prognosis for



the future shows very dire situations. The evidence of the trend is presented in the various IPCC reports as well as in UNEP's Emissions Gap Report (EGR). The EGR issued just before COP28 showed that rather than reducing, global greenhouse emissions increased by 1.2 per cent from 2021 to 2022 to reach a new record of 57.4 Gigatonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent. In addition, an aggregation of the NDCs proposed by nations showed that the world was heading for a 2.5 to 2.9C temperature increase above

pre-industrial level. At that temperature level, there will be a spike in freak weather events and the overall conditions will make parts of the world uninhabitable.

The reliance on NDCs lock in inequality and injustice in the entire climate negotiation process. With this understanding, my initial conclusion is that COPs conducted on an unjust basis will continue to yield hollow outcomes that at best scratch the surface of the climate crisis.



The restriction of the open-ended transition to renewable energy gives the industry the space to keep drilling for production of plastics, petrochemicals, and diverse products.

COP28 has three significant accomplishments, but around each are bubbles of uncertainties and loopholes. The three highlights are the adoption of Loss and Damage mechanism, the agreement to triple renewables capacity and double energy efficiency by 2030, and the agreement to transition away from fossil fuels in energy. Yet, in all, the real winners are the army of fossil fuels lobbyists and the petrostates.

After kicking and screaming for decades, the COP finally agreed to acknowledge that burning of fossil fuels must end. The phrase of transitioning from fossil fuels for energy was so carefully crafted it leaves an ocean-wide space for the fossil fuel industry to keep on prospecting for and extracting the resources. The restriction of the open-ended transition to renewable energy gives the industry the space to

keep drilling for production of plastics, petrochemicals, and diverse products. In other words, that celebrated clause does give a lifeline for the petroleum civilization to trudge on.

The wordsmiths of the COP play with the imagination of the world and it is time to wake up to this fact. At COP26 the phrase “phase down” instead of “phase out” was introduced. A phasing down of coal, for example, simply indicates there would be some efforts to tinker with production and consumption volumes of the hydrocarbon. It does not by any stretch suggest halting dependence on the dirty energy source. A lot of energy was spent at COP27 and COP28 to push for the “phase out” language in the outcome documents. The draft outcome document of COP28 particularly gave several options on how the language for “phasing

out fossil fuels” could be couched. While negotiators and politicians tried to wrap their heads around the clause, which would remain a clear ending of the fossil fuels age, the wordsmiths came out with “transitioning from fossil fuels in energy.” So, there is the phase down, phase out and then a partial transition. Strikingly, the document also highlights the continued role of transition fuels—a clear reference to fossil gas. Fossil fuels moguls must lift glasses to that.

There is also the issue of carbon trading. Whereas there was no agreement on adopting a UN sanctioned mechanism for carbon trading, aspects of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement opened the floodgates for carbon capture and utilization and storage, carbon dioxide removals and variants of geoengineering. Carbon capture introduces the notion of pollution abatement,

an interesting term. Whilst it is clear that the best action is to stop pollution at source, the COP says keep polluting, but capture the pollution before it escapes into the environment. If it does not work, all the polluter needs to do is to show that it is sucking or removing the errant carbon from the atmosphere. The cheers that accompanied the closure of the COP has always reminded some of us of the same reaction we see when bells are rung at the stock exchange. Carbon polluters anonymously unite!

The carbon market business has been a speculator's paradise, with scant transparency or integrity. This state of play allowed carbon cowboys and dealers to trade in phantom carbon or even forests, leaving investors in limbo. With the matter now rolling over to COP29, observers now wonder if the tide of land and forest trading desks across Africa would be stemmed. In the run up to COP28 there were reports of deals aimed at selling off huge swathes of African territories to be utilized as carbon sinks.

There are reports of nations inking memoranda of understanding or agreements to cede huge segments of their territories for carbon credits. Zimbabwe has put 20% of its forests on the chopping block, Zambia and Liberia are extending 10% while Tanzania is said to offer 8 million hectares of forest. Nigeria's Niger State offered to sell 760,000 hectares of land to Blue Carbon, a UAE

Whilst it is clear that the best action is to stop pollution at source, the COP says keep polluting, but capture the pollution before it escapes into the environment. If it does not work, all the polluter needs to do is to show that it is sucking or removing the errant carbon from the atmosphere.

carbon focused company, for afforestation programme that would see the planting of 1 billion trees.

The thing to note is that the lands or forests are not sold in perpetuity. The leases have stipulated years over which the investor would find ways of securing the carbon in the land, sea, or forest. They could also engage in carbon farming through, for example, clearing the territory and then creating a tree plantation which should be seen as a colonial euphemism for monoculture cash cropping. The investor farms carbon and owns the credit accruing from there.

The investor can use the carbon to offset his polluting activity at home and can even sell off some to help others



offset their polluting activities. The investor can count a carbon sink in Africa as part of their Nationally Determined Contributions actions. The country that sold its territory may not do so. A question that requires answers in this market environmentalism project is about what happens with the sequestered carbon if a new buyer steps in after the expiration of the lease over a forest or territory. Supposing the new buyer embarks on land use changes, of what value was the carbon offset business beyond being carbon fiction or trading on hot air?

More concerns are raised around the issue of Loss and Damage. Adopting Loss and Damage on the first day of the COP was a master stroke. After years of demands

for payment for loss and damage suffered by victims of climate change, this was a great moment. The slack was that the funds would be warehoused in the World Bank, an institution that has a reputation of being anything but a bank of the world. Seen as a heavy-handed neoliberal institution, the bank is loathed by citizens of nations over which it has engineered poverty despite its glossy poverty reduction papers. Aside from keeping the funds with the World Bank, a very instructive lesson was on how much funds were pledged for the fund on that first day.

Pledges came from the UAE, Germany, USA, and others. The \$100 million pledged by UAE was a mark of generosity that, nevertheless, blunted the justice principle that requires that those with historical responsibility for the crisis should be the first to step forward. A total of a little over \$400 million was recorded on the first day and this climbed to over \$700 million by the close of the COP. The highlight of the pledges was the miserly \$17.3 million made by the USA. The point this made was that the unwillingness of polluters to stop polluting and to financially support climate action including loss and damage is not due to lack of financial resources. To back this assertion, one only needs to look at how much is expended by the rich polluting nations in military action around the world. NATO, for instance, had a budget of \$1.2 trillion in 2022.

It is not surprising then that climate justice was enclosed in quotation marks, signaling distance from or disapproval of the struggle. This says a lot about the mindset of the nations regarding the disproportionate climate change impact on vulnerable communities, territories, and nations.

It is not surprising then that climate justice was enclosed in quotation marks, signaling distance from or disapproval of the struggle. This says a lot about the mindset of the nations regarding the disproportionate climate change impact on vulnerable communities, territories, and nations. The COP26 outcome document did not place climate justice in quotes but added that it was only important to some. In other words, climate justice is not something of universal concern. COP28 avoided that blatant disregard of the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), a clear climate justice principle in the climate convention. In keeping with the general wordsmithing approach of the COPs, the principle and reality was now placed in harmless quotes.

African negotiators who went to the COP loaded with the outcomes of the recently held African Climate Summit did

not help matters. Among the key outcomes was the need for the continent to demand sufficient finance for the needed energy transition and the operationalizing of the Loss and Damage Fund. African politicians see the continent as having limitless land and resources, including the so-called green or critical minerals, ripe for exploitation in exchange for cash. The leaders resolved to aim for green development and green industrialization. They also agreed to develop green hydrogen and its derivatives. Largely, the highlights of the document may not have influenced the official negotiations as much as it did bilateral and directional deals.

The push by OPEC that its members should not accept a fossil phase out and, probably, any mention of fossil at all sat well with African negotiators, including Nigeria. With new oil and gas fields opening in many areas—including world heritage areas in

Saloum Delta in Senegal and Okavango in Namibia; with drilling and pipelines trashing protected forests in Uganda; flashpoints in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique—the mantra is that Africa must use its fossil fuels resources. On this, Africa's politicians scored a point when the COP document stated that the transition from fossil fuels must be fast but also fair. This suggests that the transition will move on different gears in different regions. Nevertheless, the point is that the fossil fuels industry has been put on notice. The days of fossil fuels are numbered. Rather than talk of decarbonizing, the world will soon be speaking of depetrolizing. Within the coming decades, the global north will halt the production of internal combustion engines and, sadly, Africa will become the cemetery for such automobiles.

Another point is that over 85% of the infrastructure on the continent is installed for exports, clearly showing that

fossil fuels are not extracted to meet the very needs on the people on the continent.

The need to rein in fossil fuel extraction and burning goes beyond the climate question. The point that must not be missed is that from extraction to processing and burning, fossil fuels cause havoc on people and the Planet. The oil fields in many parts of the world are veritable crime scenes. Millions of old oil wells have been abandoned around the world and remain ticking time bombs that could blow up and cause major spills at any time.

Mining of so-called critical or green minerals is wrecking communities and biodiversity in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere. This has happened irrespective of whether the material is dirty or green. Lack of respect for people living in the territories where these resources are extracted routinely leads to a lack of consultation with the people, a lack of interest in their

consent and a lack of care for the people. It is time to reach a consensus on the Rights of Nature to maintain her regenerative cycles without disruptions by humans. Indeed, the climate crisis is tied to our irresponsible relationship with Mother Earth.

The need to rein in fossil fuel extraction and burning goes beyond the climate question. The point that must not be missed is that from extraction to processing and burning, fossil fuels cause havoc on people and the Planet.



Africa Climate Summit and its Overwhelming Flaws

BY MFONISO ANTIA

Ahead of COP 28 and in the light of the current climate extremities and emergency, the Africa Union in collaboration with Kenyan government, on 4-8 September 2023, hosted the African Climate Summit/Week (ACS). The Summit was meant to serve as a platform to unify African voices and protect the interest of all Africans especially as it relates to climate change. As revealed by its theme 'Driving Green Growth and Climate Finance Solutions for Africa and the World', the Summit was focused on climate finance.

Throughout the Summit, one question that must have rung in the hearts of so many concerned Africans, especially from the civil society space, would have been, 'Was this Summit really meant for Africans?' Beginning from the delays that most people experienced in receiving accreditation, to the non-approval of side events meant to be hosted by several Africans, one would really doubt how the Summit was meant for Africans. An analysis of the approval of side events at the ACS revealed that out of a total of 93 side events approved, only 24 were hosted by African Civil Society Organisation (CSOs), four by African Development Finance



Institutions (DFIs), four by African Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) and three by African governments, making it a total of 35 African-led side events. This is against the five side events hosted by UN bodies, five by global North countries, and a whopping 48 by other global North entities, making it a total of 58 non-African side events, amounting to 62%. This analysis already set the Summit to a biased and bad start.

The concerns however, Africans still turned out en masse in solidarity with the hopes that there would be adjustments in the actual events. It was quite unfortunate that the actual event did not offer anything

better. From the inscriptions on the front seats in the main plenary, one could see exactly who the Summit was organised for. The 'who' included financial entities like Rubicon Carbon Capital, western based consultancy firms like McKinsey and Company, philanthro-capitalists like Rockefeller and the Bezos Earth Fund, multilateral development banks, government agencies like United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US Department of Petroleum. How could the interests, position and voices of Africans be protected and amplified when non-Africans are the ones leading a space meant for Africans?

With entities like Rubicon Carbon Capital, it was not surprising, how from one panel to another, the discussions centered around carbon markets/credits and the blue economy. The need for investments in carbon markets in Africa, for assets management companies, finance bodies and opportunities for investing in these unproven initiatives and technologies were sang all over the different rooms at the Summit, alongside the creation of blue carbon and blue bonds. The 'deception message' was that carbon markets are a "win-win" for investors as well as for African countries. Bogolo Joy Kenewendo, African Director of the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions (HLCs), in support of the drive for carbon markets and credits echoed these words, "capital is looking to invest, and buyers are looking to buy carbon credits".

Sadly, some Africans, including some 'uninformed African CSOs,' celebrated the Summit's focus—Dismantling North-South division and championing investment possibilities in carbon markets—which basically favours neoliberalism. The Africa Carbon Market Initiative, as launched in COP27, unfortunately, was one of the initiatives projected and applauded in most of the rooms at the Summit. The focus of the ACS undermines the fact that the present climate crisis stemmed from the colonial division between the north and the south

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and the burning of fossil fuels by capitalists of the global north. The focus of the Summit shows insensitivity to the fact that Africa contributed little to nothing to the climate crisis for which they have been the worst hit. It also shifts attention away from the demand for the global North to take full responsibility for tackling the climate crisis by cutting emissions at source and opens Africa up to more extraction, despoliation, and recolonization.

Other anti-people events at the ACS were the restrictions in movements within the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), venue for the ACS in Kenya; the heavy presence of the military; and the lack of opportunities for the people to ask questions during the official side events.

One of the highlights of the ACS was the proactiveness of a collective of African CSOs to put together an alternative Peoples Climate Summit to respond to the anticipated hijacking of the ACS. The Peoples Summit started with a people's march from Nyayo Stadium to the Nairobi Green Park where the peoples' demands were read. The march was characterized by placards carrying messages of resistance from the people— from resistance of the hijacking of the ACS by the global North, to the rejection of false climate solutions including carbon markets/credits, carbon dioxide removals, and generally, the rejection of risky technologies like geoengineering. The alternative summit also had a vigil to mark and remember the relentless work done by environmental heroes and climate activists, past and present.

The ACS ended with the African Leaders Nairobi Declaration. The declaration was met with a counter declaration from the Peoples' Summit. The African Leaders Nairobi Declaration was countered for different reasons which included its promotion of the production of green hydrogen and hydrogen derivatives such as green fertilizer and synthetic fuels. The Declaration, however, called for the integration of climate, biodiversity and ocean agendas into national development plans and processes to increase resilience of local communities and national

economies. It also promoted regenerative blue economy and the implementation of the Moroni Declaration for Ocean and Climate Action in Africa, and the Great Blue Wall Initiative, whilst recognizing the circumstances of Africa's Island States. Other issues it supported included access to, and transfer of environmentally sound technologies, including technologies to support Africa's green industrialization and transition; and the acceleration of efforts to decarbonize the transport industrial and electricity sectors through the use of smart, digital and highly efficient technologies such as green hydrogen, synthetic fuels and battery storage.

In response, the Peoples Summit via the Peoples' Declaration, highlighted their position and concerns, calling the African people to reject all the false solutions promoted by the ACS. The Counter Declarations promoted leaving fossil fuels in the ground, demanding immediate stop of all expansion of fossil fuel extraction and rapid, equitable phasing out of production of oil, gas, and coal everywhere. The counter declaration rejected the idea of carbon markets and offsets, which in reality are pollution permits for corporations and wealthy countries to continue business as usual, do nothing to reduce overall emissions or genuinely decarbonize industries. The peoples' declaration also highlighted that green hydrogen for export does

nothing to increase access for the 600 million Africans who are without access to energy. Instead, it turns African renewable energy into an exportable commodity, thus, shipping African energy resources overseas. It is a neo-colonial extraction of African energy and freshwater resources. The counter declaration stressed the need for renewable energy to be prioritized for domestic use, not for foreign markets. It also flags seawater desalination for green hydrogen production as being harmful for Africa's marine ecosystem. Another issue highlighted was that green hydrogen for low value-added manufacturing in Africa reproduces structural economic traps that Africa must free itself from.

The Peoples' Declaration also recognizes that distant and hollow Net zero targets are distractions from the much-needed immediate transformative actions toward Real Zero emissions and real solutions to the climate crisis. It noted that Net-Zero framing promotes business-as-usual through offsets and dangerous assumptions that non-existing, risky technologies

will somehow come to the rescue in the future. Again, the peoples' declaration stated that dangerous new technologies and technofixes that distract from real solutions and consolidate corporate concentration of power, bring destruction on ecosystems and harm people and communities. It emphasized the need for Africans to counter and reject Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), geoengineering-scale carbon dioxide removal technologies such as Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), Direct Air Capture (DAC), ocean fertilization, digitalization of agriculture, gene drives, nuclear power, large-scale hydropower and bioenergy, and other dangerous distractions.

The Peoples Summit birthed renewed hope, solidarity and resolve among the people to work together towards COP28. From the alternative summit, groups were formed to take on different responsibilities towards projecting the voices of the African people as the conference of parties approaches.

The ACS ended with the African Leaders Nairobi Declaration. The declaration was met with a counter declaration from the Peoples' Summit.

Crude Christmases in the Creeks

By Iniruo Wills



On the same day the 26th Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP 26) earnestly kicked off in Glasgow, the first day of November 2021, an abandoned oil well in the bowels of Nembe territory, in Nigeria's Bayelsa State, blasted out like a reservoir of toxic champagne, gushing throughout the duration of the global party in Scotland.

From dual valves on Santa Barbara Well 1, one of many Shell Petroleum legacy wells lately handed over to the domestic operator, Aiteo, a lavish fountain of crude oil flooded the creeks onto the coastline distantly downstream for thirty-eight

days running. By the time the splash stopped on 8th of December 2021, several hundred thousand barrels of oil had been released into the Nembe environment and a crude Christmas was assured for the creek dwellers. Two years and two COPs later—with the second COP slated for 30 November to 12 December 2023, barely two weeks away—not an inch of the terrain has been cleaned up.

Using the Niger Delta and its epicenter, Bayelsa State, as the focal locus for this discussion, and the 1999 return to civilian rule as a

cut-off, it can be safely said that four Nigerian Presidents (Obasanjo, Yar'Adua, Jonathan—an indigene, and Buhari), four Bayelsa Governors (Alamieyeseigha, Jonathan – again, Sylva, and Dickson) and one institution, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), have so far lost the chance to make history on the environment beyond a few PR gimmicks.

President Bola Tinubu and Governor Douye Diri still have the opportunity to be the firsts, by dint of their incumbency in office, to seriously remedy the biggest plague of the region.

From the 2021 blowout at Santa Barbara River to the 2023 discharge at Bendick-kiri in Okpoama domain, both of which are reprises at the exact same spots, this pollution footprint presents many metaphors for social realities in Nigeria's Delta,

Perchance, former President Goodluck Jonathan may still entre that restitutive hall of fame if he would make the small sacrifice of investing his extraordinary post-office goodwill in attracting a solution.

But, first, back to November which is becoming an annual nightmare in the Nembe and Niger Delta Peoples' relations with Big Oil. One November before COP 26, the chiefs of the affected kingdom, Opu Nembe, dressed in all-black regalia, addressed a widely televised national press conference: to demand justice for the oil operator's obsession with dehumanizing the community.

Two Novembers after, another kingdom of the Nembe-Ijaw People, Okpoama, home of Nigeria's immediate past oil minister, is buffeted with oil oozing out from another abandoned, un-decommissioned, wellhead owned by another operator, a subsidiary of the national oil company, NNPC Ltd. The wellhead at Okpoama had been spilling oil for about two weeks before efforts reportedly commenced on the ground to stop the spill.

From the 2021 blowout at Santa Barbara River to the 2023 discharge at Bendick-kiri in Okpoama domain, both of which are reprises at the exact same spots, this pollution footprint presents many metaphors for social realities in Nigeria's Delta, and for as many intersections between the themes that have marked its political-economic relations from pre-colonial times through post-colonial Nigeria.

In December 1998, before climate change became such common parlance, a mass of Ijaw youths converged to resoundingly protest that enough was enough in the Niger Delta. Drawing a line in the sand, they bravely proclaimed an Operation Climate Change with effect from 31st December that year, to reclaim the trampled upon dignity, property and environmental rights, and terminally threatened destiny of the Ijaw People within Nigeria.

Like a first among equals, Oronto Natei Douglas was the face of the struggle's leadership. Reminiscent of the American Declaration of Independence, though not an instrument of secession, the youths under the banner of a newly formed Ijaw Youths Council made the historic Kaiama Declaration. This Declaration asserted the inalienable right of



Ijaw to own and control the natural resources God embowelled in their land, and to manage their delicate environment in a sustainable manner that preserves it for intergenerational equity. The aim was to break the Delta free from the unrelenting ecological destruction of the region by the Nigerian State in joint venture with the multinational oil industry, for which Royal Dutch Shell was poster boy in a fiendish bid to drill all the hydrocarbon in the Delta and leave it terminally perforated and prostrate.

Mostly in their borderline thirties then, Oronto and his comrades such as Felix Tuodolo, Isaac “Sankara” Osuoka, Bubaraye Dakolo (now a 1st Class King and author of the book *The Riddle of the Oil Thief*) and other Delta eggheads, example Nnimmo Bassey and Ike Okonta, went on to emblazon the Ijaw and

Niger Delta identity on global consciousness. They had taken the baton from Ken Saro Wiwa who with his Ogoni compatriots had resumed the freedom relay for the Delta’s ethnic nationalities in the 1990s before he was judicially murdered, one sad November too. They enacted an intellectual ferment and environmentalism movement that took them to capital cities and parliaments across the globe to voice the plight of their people in the feudalistic pretension of federalism and curious brand of republicanism practised by Nigeria. As the country’s military rulers and hurriedly arranged civilian successors failed to heed reason, more hot-blooded youth leaders in the region emerged and launched a brutal militant campaign that pulverized the life blood of the national economy: oil mining.

Fast forward to December 2012. Oronto, now an Adviser

to his fortuitously enthroned kinsman (President Goodluck Jonathan) had lost his dad, and the cream of the country headed to his stupendously oil-endowed hometown, Okoroba in Bayelsa State, for the funeral.

I rode in a boat with some of Nollywood’s faces. As we waltzed through the undulating rivulets and contours in the creeks from Nembe to Okoroba, my co-travellers from Lagos and Abuja oohed and aahed to the pulsating sea waves, bemoaning Nigeria’s indolence in not harnessing our riviera as a tourism haven like the Bahamas or Barbados.

But the Santa Barbara swamplands had an unusual traffic of tourists in the weeks between COP 26 and Christmas 2021. Thanks to the prolonged blowout at Santa Barbara Well 1, there was an equally long flow of pollution tourism to Opu Nembe and its

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eggheads... went on to
emblazon the Ijaw and
Niger Delta identity on
global consciousness.





fishing settlements. A trending drone shot, taken on the day the Bayelsa State Governor, Senator Douye Diri, visited the still-belching site, produced an image that could have been of an erupted volcano, molten magma, and all in luminous golden hues. The disaster is such that a natural setting for ecotourism suddenly attracted visiting dignitaries for its catastrophic spectacle.

Ijawland of which Nembe country is part, and by extension the Niger Delta, was already that part of the planet most bastardized by oil pollution and gas flaring. Soon after its discovery in commercial quantity in then Oloibiri Province of present Bayelsa State, Nigeria's crude oil became a curse to its natural owners, while a bonanza for the rest of the country. This accentuated pre-Independence grievances of the ethnic minorities, whose neglect throughout the colonial period and fears of majority domination in the impending post-colonial polity caused the soon

departing colonial government to institute the Willink Commission of Inquiry.

The Commission was set up to douse their desire to quit or be autonomous in such a Nigeria as they were apprehensive of. One of other national plans to give them a sense of belonging was the Okarki-Nembe-Brass Road proposed around 1946. Seventy-five years later, when the epic Santa Barbara spill occurred, it was still a proposal. The state government, not the federal, awarded a contract for the Nembe-Brass section in 2022.

As the paradox of poverty and pollution from petroleum hit home to compound their existing woes, an Ijaw intellectual firebrand, Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, mobilized a small guerilla army in 1966 to launch the country's first secession attempt, declaring a Niger Delta Republic which was later quelled by military might. Adaka (Ijaw name for tiger) Boro was the biggest Ijaw hero of the 20th Century. He followed the footsteps

of a Nembe-Ijaw forebear, King Frederick William Koko, who led an armada from war canoe houses of Nembe kingdoms in January 1895 to sack a pre-colonial British conglomerate—precursor of the UACs and Royal Dutch Shells—that persisted in breaching Nembe's territorial integrity in international trade. That bloody clash was one of the triggers for Britain's formal colonization of the entities that were eventually merged to form Nigeria.

At the time of the Nembe-British duel, also known as the Akassa Raid or Nembe Youmi (the Nembe War), the British described the area as the Oil Rivers Protectorate, after the export trade in palm oil transacted via its rivers. Since 1956, those waterways could have been renamed the Crude Oil Rivers. Aiteo's well blowout (some experts call it loss of containment) in Nembe country brings back into vivid relief that the waters of Nembe and the Niger Delta are indeed now rivers frothing on the surface with crude oil.



The Aiteo-Santa Barbara blowout of November 2021 was a catastrophe waiting to happen. When earlier warnings by the oil well went unheeded, the blowout became avoidably inevitable. Sometime in September 2019, a whole two years and more earlier, the same Santa Barbara Well 1 burst open, spewing crude oil for a week.

Reports were made to the spill control agency, NOSDRA (National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency) and other regulators. Experts representing affected communities engaged with NOSDRA and Aiteo, demanding cleanup, compensation, and safeguards against recurrence. None of those was enforced. So, an entirely foreseeable and preventable disaster recurred.

Like most regulatory bodies in the sector, NOSDRA is rendered ineffective by a combination of poor funding, possible insensitivity to pollution victims due to its head office location a thousand miles away in Abuja, sheer leadership complacency and a steady supply of lazy excuses. It took a year of constant haranguing for the agency to lead a post-spill assessment of the 2019 spill.

What is more, the Nigerian court system is almost a no-go for environmental justice. Communities are nervous about endless court delays, the heavy cost of hiring experts to conduct forensic studies that will prove pollution and its impacts, and a systemic addiction to technicalities while pollutants

With the help of NGOs and foreign law firms, a small cluster of determined rural dwellers are resorting to foreign courts for justice. Many of them die before succor comes from offshore.

percolate deeper into the communities' ecology. With the help of NGOs and foreign law firms, a small cluster of determined rural dwellers are resorting to foreign courts for justice. Many of them die before succor comes from offshore.

The last decade has seen a series of divestments of oil blocs from international oil companies to Nigerian firms, with zero environmental due diligence. In the double guise of energy transition and Nigerian content enhancement, the IOCs are taking flight from legacies of humongous environmental liabilities. Oilfields, with several rickety facilities that are as safe as landmines or time bombs still un-decommissioned, are auctioned off at windfall prices to domestic moguls, amidst otherwise climate valuable but now oil-battered mangroves and altered ecologies.

Abuja-bound regulators turn a blind eye. A classical case is where Nigeria got its first oil from, in 1956: Otabagi Community of Bayelsa State, within the same OML 29 as the Santa Barbara oilfield, handed by Shell to Aiteo.

Located barely a few minutes' drive from former President Goodluck Jonathan's village, crude oil still steadily seeps out to the surface around oil wells abandoned by Shell decades ago, unattended till date. A forecast of the fate of Jonathan's kinsfolk is unlikely to be pretty.

The domestics are fast proving to be worse than their bad predecessors. They find no compelling incentive in the local regulatory and legal climate to be of good oilfield conduct. Many communities are defeated, divided, and heavily induced into proxy conflicts of mutual destruction. There are tomes of reports and recommendations on what to do to adorn the Delta's millions of ecologically traumatized and livelihood-displaced dwellers with some redress and respect.

A recent one commissioned by the Bayelsa State Government took four years to compile, with covid-19 and paltry executive attention counting amongst the setbacks. With the telltale title of "ENVIRONMENTAL GENOCIDE: The Human and Environmental Cost of Big Oil in Bayelsa, Nigeria", it put

the volume of oil spilled in the last fifty years in the state at 110-165 million gallons, tantamount to 10-15 times the volume of the Exxon Valdez spill disaster (11 million gallons), a per capita spill impact of one and half barrels for the state's population of 2.5 million people, and 16,000 infant mortalities within a month of birth from pre-natal exposure to oil spills. Five months after it was finally released in May 2023, the report has not been put to any use. The earlier UNEP Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland took two years to prepare and four years to stay on the shelf. Afterwards, it has faltered in implementation for eight years and counting.

As this November ends, this year's climate change fest, COP 28, will commence in Dubai. Before COP 28 disperses in December, Ijaw youths will mark the 25th anniversary of their Operation

Climate Change and Kaiama Declaration. Bayelsa State would have had a governor announced for a new four-year term. But Bayelsans and Deltans in their millions will be getting set for another crude Christmas in the creeks, like previous Yuletides, from Worikuma-kiri at the ground zero of the Santa Barbara mega spill to Bendick-kiri to Lasukugbene to Ikarama to Fantuo and back to Nembe Creek. This is because, with scant exceptions, no president, nor minister of oil or environment, nor governor, nor regulator, nor traditional ruler has cared two hoots to roll up their sleeves on the subject.

Going by that sad roll call, it would take a passionate President, an inspired governor, a conscientized international system, or a galvanized community citizenry to bring climate change to Christmas in the

creeks. But any pleasant surprise from regulators and majesties will be welcome; and from Chevron, Shell, Aiteo, Neconde, Eni/Agip, Oando and NNPC too. Let's choose hope but be active in the awareness that equity aids the vigilant, not the indolent, and faith without works is dead. Who knows if Pope Francis, who is billed to attend COP 28 due to his priority on the environment, will plead with President Tinubu and Big Oil this December in Dubai to start a Niger Delta wide cleanup and restitution programme?

*[The article is first published in
THISDAYLIVE.COM]*

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ligation against Aiteo.]*





Ororo Inferno: A Tragic Odyssey of Injustice and Environmental Destruction

On Saturday, 16 May 2020, an explosion causing a fire outburst rocked the Ororo-1 Well located on Oil Mining Lease (OML) 95 in a shallow water in Awoye, Ilaje Local Government Area, Ondo State. According to reports, the explosion resulted from a blow out preventer (BOP) failure and loss of well control while the Grace-1 HWU, a hydraulic workover rig, was working on the well.

The Nigerian government had taken the responsibility of handling the fire since it had revoked the rights of Guarantee Petroleum (operator of the well) to the field by the time of the disaster. An estimate of six weeks was given as length of time required to put out the fire.

But for over three years, the Ororo-1 Well has been burning with no attention from the federal government or the company responsible for it. The burning well has now become a symbol of ecocide and outright neglect by the Nigerian State. The result has been prolonged environmental impact and disruption of the

livelihoods of members of Awoye and nearby communities.

The people of Awoye community have been victims of oil spillage and have suffered destructive coastal erosion and land submergence forcing them to seek resettlement about six times. The community once blessed with an abundance of seafood now has its people, who are basically fishers, struggling for survival.

The people cried out. Both the oil companies and the government have kept a blind eye to the atrocious incident and remain deaf to the cries of the impacted communities. The lack of intervention by the Nigerian government is a failure to address the environmental and social consequences of the Ororo-1 Well inferno.

Environmentalists have raised their voices over decades of destructive extraction of petroleum resources that have continued to disrupt ecosystems, turning a once thriving region, the Niger Delta, into one of the most deadly and

polluted places on Earth. Awoye's tale is a sad example of a healthy community turned into a sacrifice zone by the pursuit of fossil fuels.

A 2021 report by African Oil and Gas Report, stated that "Although the company that engaged the services of the owners of Grace-1 HWU was Guarantee Petroleum, a Nigerian independent oil and gas company, the Nigerian government, having revoked the rights of the company to the field, took ownership of controlling the well fire." The Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), in May 2022, told Africa Oil+ Gas that it would do all it could to extinguish the fire, including possibly drilling a relief well and engaging Boots & Coots Services, a Halliburton-owned firm of well control specialists.

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in a recent documentary titled **Ororo Inferno- A Tragic Odyssey of Injustice and Environmental Destruction** <https://youtu.be/W339bWRkUtl?si=LIKMI1rxr8QtZxLR> showed that the fire still burns viciously day and night, harming the marine ecosystem and disrupting fishing and other economic activities of the nearby communities.

Field data reports show that the reservoir pressure was 8,000 pounds per square inch (psi) and above, and surface pressure was about 4,600 psi as of the time of the incident. It is a widely held view, by a range of technical specialists in the industry, that such a highly

pressured well should not have been re-entered with a workover rig with less than adequate blow out preventer (BOP).

The raging fire at Awoye needs to be extinguished. This tragic incident compounds the climate crisis and harms the communities and ecosystems in multiple ways.

The government must understand that the cost of this unattended disaster is far higher than the cost of drilling relief wells and other actions to put out the flames and save the communities.

We invite you to sign our petition calling on the government to stop this menace with utmost urgency. Sign at <https://www.change.org/p/a-call-to-end-ororo-1-well-fire-at-awoye>

Now is the time to end dependence on fossil fuels and leave the oil on the ground while ramping up investment in renewables.





Ecuador: Can Oil be Kept in the Ground?

By Roberto Bissio

The Ecuadorean people decided by a decisive majority that the Yasuni oil reserves in the Amazon should not be exploited due to the negative impact of fossil fuel extraction over biodiversity, the livelihood of indigenous communities and world climate. But implementation of this groundbreaking decision is facing unexpected resistance internally and abroad.

As soon as the votes were counted, on August 23 the credit rating agency, Moody's, issued a comment stating that stopping oil exploitation in Yasuni and mining activities in Choco, a referendum option that got 59% of the votes, would be a negative factor in credit terms for Ecuador.

Moody's rating for the country is Caaa3, indicating high credit risk, and lowering it a notch would result in a default qualification and further increase the interest rate paid by the country to its creditors.

There are 225 wells in operation in the area that the referendum protects, producing some 55,000 barrels of oil per day. According to the popular decision, Petroecuador (Ecuador state oil company) has one year to close the wells and dismantle a power plant, shipping areas, twelve oil platforms, roads, and pipelines.

Addressing indigenous leaders in a leaked private conversation, outgoing president Guillermo Lasso, announced on September 6

that he will not abide by the referendum decision because it is “inapplicable” and “it is not possible to close an oil well overnight”.

Pedro Borneo, spokesperson of the YASunidos coalition that promoted the referendum, commented that “these statements clearly demonstrate the anti-democratic intentions of the Lasso government to violate the will of the people and further aggravate the institutional crisis”.

General elections were anticipated in Ecuador because of that crisis and Lasso’s term ends next November 25, to be succeeded by the winner of the second round of elections, scheduled for October 15.

Moody’s threat of lowering the risk rating of Ecuador because of the estimated economic impact of the referendum was criticized in a joint statement issued by local and international NGOs, such as the Ecuadorean Centre for Economic and Social Rights, the Latin American Network for Economic and Social Justice, EURODAD and the Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development.

The statement stressed that, “The disproportionate power of private agencies to rate country risk means that government regulatory authority and democratic decision-making is transferred to the private sector. This can create significant problems... (and) make development

finance more expensive at a time when it is needed to address the climate crisis and the international economic crisis”.

The statement also promotes a “debate on the role of risk rating agencies and to what extent their evaluations respond to adequate and objective criteria, given that they can affect sovereign decisions, in ways that limit countries’ energy transition and environmental preservation decisions.”

It calls on the Ecuadorean government to “defend the sovereign decision of its people” and demands from the international community “to explore alternatives, such as an international mechanism to restructure sovereign debt vis-a-vis private creditors” and “the creation of a multilateral credit rating agency that can counter the current monopoly”.

The three main credit rating agencies (Moody’s, Standard & Poor’s and Fitch Ratings) control approximately 95% of credit ratings in the financial markets.

The statement argues that “a reform in the way credit risk is assessed could prevent countries that seek to preserve the environment and contribute to global decarbonisation from being penalised”.

The signatories “demand international cooperation

to finance decarbonization” and condemn the “new form of colonialism” resulting from “the pressure of richer countries and private lenders to repay debts”, which forces them to continue investing in extractive projects, particularly of fossil fuels.

The context in which the government elected in October is mandated to implement the referendum result is a complex one.

The candidate of the National Democratic Action (ADN) alliance, businessman Daniel Noboa Azin, agrees with not exploiting the Yasuni oil because he does not see a real loss in income, considering oil price projections. He argues that “the average (price per barrel) will not be more than \$70, if you subtract the \$8 (of the differential) for being heavy crude, the Ecuadorian is \$62 and the cost of Yasuni is \$58. If it were to make any money, it would be very little, and even so, there is a real possibility, however minimal, of contamination”.

However, the current government quantifies the annual loss of income that would result from not exploiting the area at \$1.2 billion and the candidate of the Citizen Revolution, Luisa Gonzalez, said that the \$1.2 billion is very important for the economy.

Additionally, the unilateral termination of international contracts exposes Ecuador

to investors' demands at arbitration panels for compensation estimated at some \$10 to \$15 billion.

"We don't even have enough to pay for health, education, the El Nino phenomenon; what are we going to do now if we have to pay billions in compensation?" Luisa Gonzalez asked in a radio interview after the referendum results were known.

Gonzalez is the candidate supported by former president Rafael Correa, who proposed a decade ago an ambitious programme to leave the Yasuni oil in the ground if the international community would donate half of the losses that the country would suffer because of this contribution to the global fight against climate change. Since that support never materialized, Correa decided to start the oil extraction in the area to fund health, education, and social protection.

This decision, in turn, made him lose support among indigenous people and environmentalists, dividing the progressive coalition and making space for a neoliberal like the now ousted Lasso.

Meanwhile, Colombian president Gustavo Petro, whose election in 2022 highlighted the new wave of progressive governments in Latin America, has been critical of his predecessors' emphasis on exporting raw materials to pay for social policies, calling those policies "extractivism".

Instead, he argues, Colombia and the region must move "to a productive economy that generates much more work" and "can have increasing and not decreasing returns, like oil and coal, and that it should be linked to the land, necessarily, to water, agriculture and the knowledge industry".

Yet, when the people of Ecuador vote decisively in a referendum to follow such a path, consistent with its climate responsibility and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, they are threatened with investor-to-State dispute claims that may

have international private arbitrators imposing billions in "compensation" including potential future profits and additionally losing their credit rating and having to pay higher interests on their debt.

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[Roberto Bissio is the Executive Director of the Third World Institute based in Uruguay.]

"We don't even have enough to pay for health, education, the El Nino phenomenon; what are we going to do now if we have to pay billions in compensation?"





TRUTHS ABOUT EXTRACTIVISM, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND FOOD CRISES

Extractivism is at the root of the climate and food crises. Its focus is on the use value of resources, hence, the arrogation of natural and human resources in destructive ways that have exacerbated climate change and food crises. These connections instigated conversations at a Health of Mother Earth Foundation two-day School of Ecology (SoE) session themed “Extractivism, Climate Change, and Food Crises”, held March 1-2, 2023. Conversations in the SoE exposed some fundamental truths about extractivism, climate change and food crises, challenging scholars present to take steps towards advocating for an end to extractivism.

Director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, while speaking on “Counting the Ecological Costs of Extractivism” at the SoE, reiterated that

extractivism “is the appropriation of natural and human resource wealth in ways that damage or deplete the source in a potentially irreversible way. It exists and thrives in the context of inequality and promotes accumulation of capital, centralization and monopolization of power and trade.”

The results of extractivism have been numerous ecological harms. Bassey explained that extractivism has colonial origin and is inextricably tied to corruption, militarization of communities/territories, entrenched inequalities, perception of the environment and nature as external factors and systematic neglect. All these would require both political and judicial action to surmount, Bassey explained.

The executive director of We the People, Ken Henshaw, who gave a presentation on “Major Contributors to Climate Change”, listed exploitation of sources of energy such as coal, oil and natural gas, deforestation, transportation, and food production to be among the major contributors to climate change. He stressed that “behind these drivers of climate change, is the thinking that emphasizes the use value of a resource which is what animates extractivism”. He mentioned civilization as another contributor.

Ken Henshaw worried that “Nigeria’s prevailing paradigm overtly ignores what it truly means to be human and what really constitutes wellbeing beyond and above economic indicators and growth patterns. As a result, the Earth is suffering tremendous pressure on account of human-driven alterations that are affecting not just other creatures but human beings as well, in rather negative ways”.

Given that emissions resulting from the exploitation of energy sources are mostly responsible for climate change, the call for “Power and Energy Alternatives in Africa” becomes paramount. Ifeoma Malo made this call in her presentation as she revealed that over 1 billion people in the world are without access to energy and half of this population are Africans. In the same vein, 92 million Nigerians (mostly those in rural areas), amounting to 55% per cent of the total

population, are without access to energy. But while it is vital to increase access to energy, the power supplied must be generated from clean sources such as renewable energy which not only enables efficiency but also reduces carbon emission.

Coming to food production, Dr. Ifeanyi Casmir stated clearly that genetically modified foods are falsely said to address food security, sustainability, and climate change. According to advocates of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), they improve crop yields, conserve biodiversity, provide a better environment in terms of their insect-resistant and herbicide tolerant traits, reduce CO2 emissions and help alleviate poverty through uplifting the economic situation of farmers. During his presentation on “The Falsehood of Genetic Modification as a Solution to Food Insecurity”, Dr. Casmir debunked the claims, explaining that food insecurity is the lack of regular access to enough and safe food—GMOs have been found to

be unsafe. He explained food security, on the other hand, to be a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life”. This is what GMOs cannot provide. Scientifically and otherwise, there is no proof that genetic modifications will solve food insecurity.

The falsehood of genetic modification drives untrue narratives around the food crisis. Debunking the false narratives, Dr. Ifeanyi stressed that the food crisis did not result from low production of food, rather it is caused by lack of equal distribution and access to resources that are vital to food production. He added that “GM crops are conceptualized as products of an extractivist economic order; the advent of genetic engineering has been referred to as launching a new phase in the industrialization of life. GM crops and related technologies are likely to consolidate control

“Nigeria’s prevailing paradigm overtly ignores what it truly means to be human and what really constitutes wellbeing beyond and above economic indicators and growth patterns...”

Africa needs to interrogate what development means to Africans considering the continent's unique landscape, ecology, culture, traditions, and the wellbeing of African people.

over agriculture by large producers and agro-industrial companies, to the detriment of small holder farmers”.

Joyce Brown explained more on the “Way Forward with Agroecology”, stating that agriculture is at the centre of the climate crisis. According to her, the adoption of agroecology will not only ensure food sovereignty but will also address problems associated with climate change. She stated reasons why agroecology should be chosen against market-based options that further destabilize local communities: “Agroecology as a science, movement and practice is a real solution to the climate and food crises. As a science, it promotes the wholesomeness of soil ecosystems and preserves the delicate inter-connectivity of nature. As a movement, it empowers local communities and promotes their traditional ways of life. As a practice, it involves mixed cropping, crop rotation, composting, companion planting, biological pest control, etc. which enhance biodiversity”. She added that the challenges of transiting to agroecology are limited knowledge and capacity, desire for making fast money, weak and bias government support, insecurity in farms, poor narratives for agroecology, and weak food safety messaging.

Vandana Shiva looked at the “Nexus between Extractivism, Climate Change and Food Crises”, relating how commercial agriculture impacts the environment and climate, and condemned the use of chemical fertilizers. According to the healthy food advocate, at least five to six of the bombings in India were done with fertilizer bombs. “Fertilizers and bombs are made of the same material. We don’t need pesticides and fertilizers that destroy our soils and drive our insects into extinction”. She condemned Net Zero schemes, stating that they are ploys tending towards land grabbing. Vandana Shiva equally condemned the planting of crops for biofuels: “Food for cars is becoming more important than food for people. 50 per cent of the problem of climate change is the industrial food system and yet, we have other ways of farming. It is absolutely criminal in my view”. She recommended intensification of agroecology as an alternative to fossil fuel agriculture, and an insurance for climate resilience.

Speaking on the “Development Paradigms and Climate Change”, Akinbode Oluwafemi, the Executive Director of Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA), noted that the paradigm of infrastructural development has failed Africa. Therefore, there is need for a new and real African development paradigm that considers the environment and its well-being. According to Akinbode Oluwafemi, Africa needs to interrogate what development means to Africans considering the continent’s unique landscape, ecology, culture, traditions, and the wellbeing of African people. Africa cannot afford to continue on the path of the colonialists’ approach to development as it is the same approach that triggered climate change and all the attendant impacts which Africa now bears much of the brunt.

Presenting on “A Just Transition and Wellbeing Economy”, Professor Fidelis Allen, a senior lecturer at the University of Port Harcourt, decried the emphasis laid on economic growth, with focus on GDP. He stated that on the other side of the divide, away from growth economy, is the wellbeing economy. This wellbeing

economy, he described as: social, economic, and political life processes that give due attention to human and non-human welfare. This is what is needed for a just transition which according to the Professor “involves ensuring that the transition to a sustainable economy is fair and equitable for all stakeholders, including workers, communities, and the non-human members of the planet. This means considering the impacts of climate policies on employment, income, and social welfare.” He, however, noted that there is no one-size-fit-all when it comes to the just transition: “Every society has its peculiar nuances and contexts that may set it apart from others with respect to the manner of the transition”.

Extractivism is the source of ecological harms and driver of climate change and the food crises. It does not pay attention to wellbeing but thrives on false narratives and is sustained by false solutions. Extractivism can be successfully smothered through a just energy transition, considering the existing unjust power relations between richer and poorer countries and the urgent need to redistribute power in a new world powered by renewable energy.

Sharing more on how to tackle extractivism, Babawale Obayanju, during his presentation on “Road to Recovery:

Citizens’ Responsibilities”, encouraged Africans to take responsibility by being informed and engaging. This would mean that Africans must participate in decision-making processes; educate themselves and others on impacts of extractive industries; hold corporations and governments accountable through petitions, protests, and other forms of activism; support local alternatives, nature and people centered efforts to protect the land, water and resources; and engage in responsible consumption.



Right or Wrong?

BY HUGO VICTOR BARINE

If I'm wrong
And you are right
For taking my rights
You've wronged
My rights
You said my rights
Were wrong
Then why write
My wrongs
With your right
And not left?
If you wrong
My rights
And left me
Wronged
Then
Write my wrongs rightly
And right my wrongs
You left my wrongs
For my rights
Is it right or wrong
To fight for my rights?



[Mr. Hugo Victor Barine, popularly known as the Preacher Poet. He is writer of several poems including 'Corona of the Sun and Moon']



Pollutants and Biodiversity Concerns in Nigeria

By Franklin Ochuko Obazu



The presence of emerging pollutants in the Nigerian environment has significant implications for biodiversity. These include pollution from various sources such as industries (especially in the extractive sector); agriculture (mostly industrial agriculture); and improper waste disposal practices.

One of the major concerns regarding emerging pollutants in Nigeria is the pollution of water bodies. Incidences of oil spills, inadequate wastewater treatment systems and other industrial malfunctions release a variety of pollutants

into rivers, streams, and groundwater sources. These pollutants have direct toxic effects on aquatic organisms, leading to reduced biodiversity in freshwater ecosystems. The contamination of water bodies disrupts the balance of ecosystems and leads to the loss of species.

Another issue is the use of inorganic pesticides and other agrochemicals in agricultural practices. These chemicals contaminate soil and water, posing risks to both terrestrial and aquatic organisms. They have toxic effects on plants,

animals, and microorganisms, leading to reduced biodiversity in agricultural areas and surrounding ecosystems. An example is the loss of pollinators and beneficial insects due to pesticide use. This has implications for crop productivity and ecosystem health.

Electronic waste (e-waste) is another emerging pollutant that poses risks to biodiversity in Nigeria. E-waste contains various toxic substances, such as heavy metals and hazardous chemicals, which can leach

into the soil and water. These pollutants can accumulate in organisms and disrupt their physiological processes, leading to population declines and reduced biodiversity in affected areas.

Furthermore, air pollution from industrial emissions, vehicle exhaust, and biomass burning also impact biodiversity in Nigeria. Pollutants that are released into the atmosphere settle on vegetation and soil, leading to reduced plant growth and biodiversity. Other pollutants are pharmaceuticals, personal care products, and several industrial chemicals which have been found to have detrimental effects on various ecosystems and species.

The combined effects of these emerging pollutants on biodiversity in Nigeria have far-reaching consequences.

To address the impact of emerging pollutants on biodiversity in Nigeria, there is a need for improved environmental regulations, enforcement, and public awareness.

They can accumulate in organisms, affect reproduction and development, disrupt hormonal systems, lead to population declines and extinctions of species. Reductions in species diversity can disrupt ecosystem functioning, stability, and resilience. Biodiversity loss can also have cascading effects on other ecosystem services, such as pollination, nutrient cycling, and carbon sequestration.

Urgent actions are required to mitigate the impact of emerging pollutants on biodiversity and protect the precious ecosystems and species in the country.

To address the impact of emerging pollutants on biodiversity in Nigeria, there is a need for improved environmental regulations, enforcement, and public awareness. Strict monitoring and control of industrial activities, adoption of agricultural practices that preserve the soil ecosystem and biodiversity, proper waste management, and promotion of tested and proven cleaner technologies are essential steps to mitigate the negative consequences of emerging pollutants on biodiversity. More so, a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders and actions is necessary.

Concerned agencies must make sure to implement and enforce stricter environmental regulations to control the release of emerging pollutants into the environment. This would involve setting limits on pollutant discharge, ensuring adoption of adequate wastewater treatment systems, and enforcing proper waste management practices at both industrial levels especially. This necessitates continuous calls for industries to adopt cleaner production methods, use truly environment-friendly technologies, and implement pollution prevention measures to minimize the generation and release of pollutants. Industries need to begin prioritizing biodiversity conservation and preservation of the environment.

It is also crucial to establish a robust monitoring and surveillance system to regularly assess the levels of emerging pollutants in the air, water, and soil. This will help identify pollution hotspots and enable effective mitigation measures to be implemented. Again, it has become more urgent than ever to implement proper waste management practices at all levels. This includes establishing recycling and e-waste management systems to reduce the release of hazardous substances into the environment and promote the safe disposal and recycling of electronic waste.

Another important measure is the adoption of agricultural practices that minimize or are void of the use of inorganic



pesticides and other agrochemicals. Such practices include biological pest management techniques, organic farming methods, and other agroecological approaches. These practices prioritize ecosystem health and biological diversity conservation.

In all, the role of increased public awareness and education can never be downplayed. There is need for intensified public awareness campaigns to educate individuals, communities, and industries about the impacts of emerging pollutants on biodiversity and the environment. Such campaigns need to promote responsible consumer behaviour, encourage recycling and proper waste disposal practices, agroecological approaches to agriculture and raise awareness about the importance of protecting biodiversity.

There is an equally great need for research and development. Scientific research and development is vital for better understanding of the specific impacts of emerging pollutants on biodiversity in Nigerian ecosystems and development of tailored conservation strategies. This could involve studying the effects of pollutants on different species, developing innovative and safe pollution control techniques, and exploring solutions for pollution remediation to replenish and sustain Mother Earth.

Collaboration with international organisations, governments, and research institutions is important for the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and best practices in addressing emerging pollutants and biodiversity loss. Collaboration can help provide access to funding, technical expertise, and capacity-building opportunities to effectively manage and mitigate the impact of emerging pollutants on biodiversity.

By implementing these remedies, Nigeria can mitigate the impact of emerging pollutants on biodiversity and work towards a healthier environment for current and future generations.

[Dr. Franklin Ochuko Obazu is a biological scientist and head, Department of Biological Sciences in Edwin Clark University. His writings centre on renewable energy, waste-to-energy and bioremediation]

Farmers Receive Training on Agroecological Farming



Farmers in Uyo Afaha Nkan community in Akwa Ibom State and K-Dere in Rivers State, on 21 and 23 November 2023 respectively, received hands-on training on agroecological farming. The practical training was organised by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in collaboration with the GMO-Free Nigeria Alliance and in partnership with Be the Help Foundation and Peace Point Development Foundation (PPDF).

The target of the training was to build the capacity of farmers to independently produce, at least, one organic pesticide and bio-fertilizer, and to gain increased knowledge of agroforestry and how to promote biodiversity, soil and plant health on their farm.

The farmers were reminded of practices of the old that are part of agroecological farming. Examples are the bush fallow system/shifting cultivation where farmers plant crops on their farmland only after every three years. Before planting on such farms, the farmers recalled that rather than burning the grown bush, they gather their family members to cut the bush. They leave the cut down grasses on their farmland to add more nutrients to the soil. According to Barrizaa G. Nag, a farmer and

photographer in K-Dere, this system is no longer practiced due to increase in population, leading to limited farmland.

At the opening of the training, the farmers shared challenges they faced in their community as farmers and what the government could do to help them tackle the challenges. The how-to sessions addressed many of the challenges shared.

Farmers in Uyo Afaha Nkan community complained of their soil not being fertile anymore due to erosion caused by road construction that washes off nutrients in the soil. They cried out that currently, without fertilizers, any maize planted becomes stunted. They needed the government to step in and provide them support, specifically farming machinery. The farmers also shared the problem of white fly and pest infestation on their maize plants which has forced them to apply chemicals as a solution.

Farmers in K-Dere, who mostly farm cassava, also face challenges of stunted growth and the rotting of plants before maturity. This made it difficult for the farmers to wait till the due time for harvesting their cassava. This challenge,

according to Tombari Keragbon, a tradomedical practitioner and farmer, has led them to depend heavily on inorganic fertilisers which they claim they are unaware of the extent of harm they cause. The farmers also stated that they were comfortable using the fertilisers because they saw that they were approved by NAFDAC.

The K-Dere famers lamented that their cassava stems no longer grow due to ant infestation, as a result, they apply inorganic chemicals to fight the ants and are also forced to use inorganic fertilisers. They complained about the presence of other unknown insects, in addition to the ants, in their soil. These pests prevent their plants from growing well. They collapsed their challenges into soil contamination, lamenting that their soil is now like dust, showing loss of nutrients. The farmers called on the government to treat their soil. They also complained of the loss of food crops such as cocoyam which they had as a rich source of energy but which no longer grows on their land. Another complaint was about the limited land for farming which has forced them to continuously farm on a particular farmland without allowing the soil to replenish itself after each harvest.

Following the farmers' expression of their challenges, the practical training session kicked off to illustrate how some of the challenges shared

can be tackled from within the community or immediate environment while they await the government to provide them needed support.

The trainers, Chukwu Agozirim Ifegwu, farm manager operations and Iwan Barnabas Andover, general Supervisor, from Be the Help Foundation began by showcasing photos of an infertile land with unfavourable soil structure in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, before and after cultivation. The purpose was to share with the farmers the results of application of the training they were about to receive.

The once infertile land in the FCT is the now thriving agroecological SCL Farms located in Damakusa village,

Kwali Area Council, Abuja and managed by the trainers. According to the trainers, the land was cultivated with no inorganic chemical input, be it fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides. Every input was purely the organic "Jeevumruth" which the farmers were going to be taught how to prepare and apply on their farmlands. According to the trainers, "All grasses cleared by the one-time use of tractor were neither removed from the farm nor burnt. Rather, the grasses were left on the farmland to help retain water in the soil and add nutrients back into the soil as they decayed."

Chukwu discouraged the overuse of heavy machinery, such as the tractor, to clear their farmlands or till the soil as such machinery can



compact the soil, making water absorption into the soil difficult and the area prone to erosion.

The training highlighted the importance of agroforestry, a practice in agroecological farming, which is basically about mixed cropping. It, thus, involves the planting of several crops—beans, yam, cassava, etc. or egusi, maize, rice, some grasses and other food plants—which are known as companion crops together with trees. This, according to the trainer, creates diversity such that pests become unable to focus on one plant. Trainer Chukwu explained that mixed cropping reduces insect attack on plants like maize. This would be a remedy to the farmers' complaints concerning insect attacks on their maize plants.

According to the trainer, there are certain pests that affect particular crops, when such crops are planted together with other crops or certain grasses, the rate of pest infestation reduces. This is because the attention of the pests will no longer be on one plant. But where the practice is monocropping, pests around will feast on the single crop

massively. Referring the farmers back to the thriving agroecological farm in the FCT Abuja, the trainers informed them that they planted 32 crops in one hectare of farmland. They narrated that people had fears that the plants would die because they thought the crops were too many but three months after, the plants were seen thriving.

Explaining the benefits of having trees on the farm, trainer Chukwu stated that trees have roots that help control soil erosion. They also maintain soil fertility and a healthy soil helps fight diseases that affect plants.

According to the trainers, the reference farm was cultivated without any application of inorganic chemicals but only with the organic "Jeevumruth", a name given to the bio-fertilizer which they had come to teach the farmers to prepare in addition to bio-pesticide. The ingredients they used to prepare the Jeevumruth included cow urine, cow dung, water, banana, and cowpea. The farmers were taught how to prepare the bio-fertiliser as well as its application procedure.

For the bio-pesticides, ingredients needed include at least four organic substances, each of which should be peppery, have a smell, have a bitter taste and be oily. These substances included pepper, garlic, neem (dogoyaro) leaves/oil. Pepper is added to burn off the pests, neem leaves to produce bitter taste to put off the pests, garlic to give the smell that attracts microorganisms and cow urine to serve as the oily substance that would hold in the pests until they die off.

For the challenge of white fly which the farmers complained about, they were informed that cow urine, pepper and water can be used to eradicate them.

Agroecological farming methods improve biodiversity in the soil. According to trainer Iwan Barnabas, "When you begin to see microorganisms such as millipedes, earthworms, etc. in the soil, it shows that the soil is coming back fertile." These microorganisms are what help plants to grow. They produce micronutrients in the soil and help plants develop resistance against pests.

Trainer Iwan stressed that inorganic chemicals, such as NPK 20:20:20 and the likes, are not needed in agroecological farming as they contribute to degrading the soil. According to him, the soil and other organic materials like chicken manure have the nitrogen which farmers seek from the inorganic chemicals they purchase at high cost. A farmer in Akwa Ibom

Knowledge of agroecological farming becomes essential for farmers given the increased hunger, loss of biodiversity, health challenges and economic loss experienced especially in Nigerian and other communities across Africa

had shared that pig's urine increases yam yield.

Knowledge of agroecological farming becomes essential for farmers given the increased hunger, loss of biodiversity, health challenges and economic loss experienced especially in Nigerian and other communities across Africa where smallholder farmers that nourish the world reside. This is an indication that something is amiss with the current farming and food production processes in Nigeria. Bee Success, a farmer and health worker from K-Dere community noted the challenge of the changing pattern of farming.

The farmers confirmed that there are striking differences in the way farming was done in the past and in the way that it is done presently. These changes are happening concurrently with observed changes in the environment, in farmlands and in crop yields. The vital question becomes, what was wrong with the way Nigeria was producing food before the current trend of chemical-induced agriculture? This question was posed at the opening of the training, by Joyce Brown, HOMEF's Director of Programme and Lead for the Hunger Politics work track. Reactions from the farmers showed agreement that the former methods of farming and food production were better.

Today's farming and food production processes have seen the introduction of



Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and heavy use of inorganic chemicals—fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides—which are linked to different sicknesses and diseases, and environmental and livelihood challenges. Genetically modified seeds have been promoted while local seeds are demonized and condemned to be lacking in some essential nutrients. An example is the ploy to introduce another variety of cassava with more Vitamin A to avoid a fast breakdown of its starch. This would lead to the neglect of the local cassava variety which promoters of the alien variety claim that its starch is lacking in vitamin A. Such foreign variety is not needed as communities have other rich sources of Vitamin A, like potatoes and carrots. According to Joyce, “one carrot gives the needed daily dietary requirement of vitamin A.”

The farmers were encouraged to appreciate their local

varieties and not fall for false narratives that their local varieties are lacking in certain nutrients. They were also urged to practicalise their independence as people from an independent nation by producing their own fertilizers using ingredients found in their immediate environment instead of being dependent on fertilizers from foreign producers using ingredients unknown to them. To achieve the desired yield using the agroecological methods, the farmers were advised to imbibe the value of patience.

Feedback from the farmers was evidence that the training was timely as it came before their next planting season which starts between January and March next year. The farmers appealed for opportunities for more training to enable them to adjust in cases where they make mistakes while trying to apply the knowledge and skills acquired from the training.

Farmers Ready to Grapple with the Hunger and Climate Crises

As farmers get set to grapple with the hunger and climate crises, equipping them with necessary and adequate knowledge and skills becomes imperative. Industrial agriculture and the practices it promotes have failed to nourish the world by treating food as a mere commodity, exacerbating hunger and biodiversity loss. The ball remains in the court of smallholder farmers, who have ironically been the deprived, to provide food and nourishment to communities at local and global levels.

It is against this backdrop that Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in collaboration with the GMO-Free Nigeria Alliance organised a practical agroecological farming training session for farmers in two communities – Uyo Afaha Nkan in Akwa Ibom State and K-Dere in Rivers State on 21 and 23 November 2023 respectively.

The training is part of strategies to facilitate the transition to agroecology which has been found to be a better approach to agriculture. Unlike industrial agriculture,

agroecology cools the planet and helps farmers and communities across the world adapt to the climate crisis. It strengthens local economies and enforces the right to food and the rights of food producers, thereby ensuring food sovereignty. Farmers would need to gain adequate knowledge about agroecology to tackle hunger and climate crises.

The training session exposed the farmers to: Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and dangers linked to their use; the dangers of inorganic pesticides; benefits of organic materials to soil health and reproduction as well as

biodiversity; advantages of agroforestry; and the practical steps and processes in producing organic pesticides and bio-fertilisers.

To set the background for the training, Ogechi Okanya Cookey, HOMEF's Research and Publications Lead introduced the organisation to the farmers to make clear the connection between what HOMEF stands for and the training they are about to get. According to her, "HOMEF's work centres around protecting the environment, thus, involves advocacies against practices that bring destruction to the environment which includes the community's vegetation, soil, waterbodies, air, wildlife and other microorganisms."

Joyce Brown, HOMEF's Director of Programme and Lead for the Hunger Politics work track opened discussion on the *Implications of GMOs and Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs)* in



Nigeria. “The taste of food is changing from what it used to be due to the different kinds of chemicals, including fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, used during cultivation of crops and for storage of farm produce.” Joyce stated, informing that “Part of these chemicals are GMOs which have been introduced to farmers.” So far, no experiments have been carried out by the Nigerian government to show that GMOs are safe for consumption.

According to Joyce, “We talk about GMOs to instigate farmers to begin to ask questions, so that if the government brings seeds to the community, farmers will be able to inquire about the origin of the seeds.” The farmers confirmed that prior to the training, they had never heard of GMOs. They were informed that these GMOs are very much in Nigeria, as a matter of fact, in all 36 states of the federation. For example, herbicide tolerant cotton has been distributed to some

parts of Nigeria, as well as GM cassava and maize.

The farmers initially showed a likelihood of being deceived by false claims concerning the benefits of GMOs. However, they were quickly made to understand the impact of the modifications on seeds. Joyce explained that, “GMOs have negative implications for health, the environment and income of farmers. Many illnesses have been connected to GMOs which have also been found to destroy microorganisms that keep the soil fertile, thus, resulting to poor crop yield and economic losses for farmers.” Joyce disabused the minds of the farmers from the popular believe that cooking or the application of heat kills germs that might be in food, stating the this does not apply to GMOs.

The genetically modified (GM) seeds are said to be engineered to kill both weeds and pests suggesting that farmers using these seeds will not need to buy chemicals for

weeds and pests. But farmers still use large quantities of chemicals—hazardous herbicides and pesticide—even when they plant the GM seeds.

It was also claimed by GMO promoters that these modified crops would feed the world, suggesting that food as it was previously known cannot feed the world. But when asked the question why are people hungry? The farmers agreed that the main reason for hunger is their lack of money to purchase the food they need, not because of the unavailability of food. When farmers are unable to produce enough food due to infertile soil (which the farmers had complained bitterly about) and lack of money to purchase food from others, the result is hunger. The cost of food is rising tremendously and roads to transport food to markets are bad; all these add up to increase hunger in Nigeria.

The farmers worried about how they could identify GM seeds and foods. They were informed that they do not look and may not taste different from the normal crops or food but the seeds have been modified such that farmers cannot save them for use in the next planting season. It was also made clear to the farmers that hybrid crops are not the same as GM crops. The farmers came to understand that GMOs should be rejected and considered unfit for consumption.

Concerning the impact of inorganic chemicals such as

“The taste of food is changing from what it used to be due to the different kinds of chemicals, including fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, used during cultivation of crops and for storage of farm produce.”

NPK, 20:20:20, 20:10:10, and 10:10:10, etc., the farmers agreed that they pose certain harm to their soil. This is based on their observation that after using these chemicals on their farmlands for a while, the fertility of the soil reduces. This is because the chemicals, for example, the herbicides do not just kill weeds but also other beneficial organisms that keep the soil fertile. There are also health issues connected to the chemicals.

About 385 million people across the globe are said to die from pesticide poisoning yearly. In the year 2020, about 270 people in Benue State, Nigeria were reported to have died from pesticides washed off by rain into the river from which they drank. About 25 of women farmers surveyed in recent research in Nigeria linked difficulty experienced in breathing as well as diarrhea to inorganic pesticides. It has also been reported that 48 out of 100 pesticides in Nigeria have ingredients that cause cancer and the rate at which people are coming down with cancer is increasing in Nigeria.

NAFDAC has identified some of these pesticides and banned them but failed to remove them from the market even after discovering their harmful components which many farmers are unaware of. A survey showed that 90 out of 100 farmers are unaware of the components in the inorganic chemicals they apply on their farms. Some do not read the labels/

instructions to know how to apply the chemicals and do not wear the required personal protective equipment while applying them. Some farmers have been found to use the empty containers of some of the chemicals as water bottles. Many of these farmers live in communities with no hospital or health centre to cater to illnesses that may be associated to the use of these chemicals.

What is more, it was discovered that the chemical residue in Nigeria's food exports, for example, beans, was very high. This has led to rejection of 70% of Nigeria's food exports by European countries which are also suppliers of these chemicals to countries like Nigeria. This is a clear indication of the adverse economic impact of the use of these chemicals.

GMOs and inorganic chemicals including fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides have detrimental effects on human and soil health, and on local farmers', communities' and the national economy, the climate and food sovereignty. Farmers need to be equipped with knowledge of the dangers of GMOs and inorganic pesticides; advantages of agroforestry; and the practical steps and processes in producing organic pesticides and bio-fertilisers. This knowledge would help them sustain their livelihood while continuously meeting the responsibility of producing safe, nutritious, and culturally adapted food and by so doing confront the hunger and climate crises.



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS INCREASE CAPACITY TO TACKLE OCEAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES

On Monday, 11 December 2023, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) engaged human rights defenders in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State in a training on ocean and human rights protection. These human rights defenders consisted of community fishers including fish processors, maritime workers like boat operators, representatives of concerned government agencies, civil society organisations and the media.

The participants came from different communities in Bayelsa including Ikarama, Tamogbene, Egbebiri, Biseni, Otuokpoti, Onopa, Odioama Kingdom, Bilabiri, Ogbia, and Akaraba. Their expectations from the training were to acquire more knowledge about how to protect and improve the state of their environment and share knowledge gained with other community members. They shared these expectations during the preliminary session of the training which had participants introduce themselves.

During the introductory session, Comrade Stephen Oduware, HOMEF's Programme Manager and Lead on the fossil politics

work track, emphasized that community people are custodians of the environment. This is because they depend directly on the environment for their livelihood. As such, they find themselves defending their environment which is their source of livelihood and life. This makes community people human rights defenders.

The main training sessions were centred on seven modules in the 'Toolkit for Ocean and Human Rights Defenders' designed by HOMEF. The sessions were facilitated by different civil society experts. The seven modules covered the following: Identifying an Issue, Gathering Needed Information, Setting Goals and Objectives, Knowing Your Rights, Preparing Message and Strategy, Determining Alliances, Targets and Opponents and Action Time (Evaluating the Process).

Before the training proper, the community fishers, maritime workers and CBOs had the time to share their common challenges around fishing and livelihoods in one of the preliminary sessions facilitated by Ogechi Okanya Cookey, HOMEF's Research and Publications Lead. The section

witnessed engagements from various community persons, raising different challenges, both the old and new including those that are gender specific.

Among the challenges shared was that of crude oil spillage and sheen on water bodies and land in different communities including Ikarama. These spills, according to Chief Warder, a farmer and Washington Odoyibo, a fisher, have led to the poisoning of fish to the extent that fishes caught by

The oil spills destroy fishing nets and gears, resulting in the fishers having to buy new nets almost every year in an era where there is immense hike in the cost of things, Comrade Chris Debunsha complained.

fishers have the smell of crude. The oil spill incidents have drastically reduced fish catch as well as the availability and fertility of farmlands in the community. Also reported, was the case of leaking crude oil pipes in Ogbia community, leading to air pollution causing severe coughing by children. The oil spills destroy fishing nets and gears, resulting in the fishers having to buy new nets almost every year in an era where there is immense hike in the cost of things, Comrade Chris Debunsha complained. According to Forcebray Iniegha, CDC secretary, Odioama Kingdom, there has been no compensation for pollution of rivers and other waterbodies by the oil companies responsible.

Another challenge mentioned was that of the alien free flowing aquatic weed—water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)—that prevent easy navigation of fishing boats and deplete fish population in Ikarama and other communities in the state.

There was also the problem of a strange and unwelcoming fishing method involving the use of “Ngusu”, local name for a mixture of raffia palm tree seeds and chemicals (including those used for preserving dead bodies). When poured into the rivers, this mixture was said to cause the death of many fish that later float on the rivers, making it easy for the fisher to have good quantity of fish catch. According to Comrade Chris Debunsha Solomon, a fisher and environmentalist from Tamogbene Community who shared the experience, this

act, carried out by local fishers, was protested by community women.

Another strange challenge shared was the presence of sticks and wood logs inside the river, destroying fishing nets and reducing fish presence and catch in the river in Otuokpoti and Onopa Communities, according to College Egber and Ovie Ogointa who are fishers from the communities. The participants also complained about barricades of about three years placed by AGIP in fishing areas on their rivers.

The challenge of fishing trawlers coming close to community shores, invading local fishing areas was a major issue that troubled the participants in addition to killings of fishers by suspected pirates and unknown persons.

Also mentioned as a challenge was the consumption of dead

fish by children, leading to different illnesses.

Several gender specific challenges were also expressed. For the females, there was observed rise in the number of miscarriages of pregnancy. This was linked to oil pollution of the aquatic habitat and food chain. Another observation was the increase in cases of asthma among women and children. Again, this was believed to be connected to hydrocarbon pollution. Dr. (Mrs) Azibasuum Adioni-Arogo, a social worker and Executive Director of Ziba’s Touch Outreach, from Otuokpoti Community spoke of the discovery of lead in the breast milk of mothers in the communities, endangering infants. This was linked to the contaminated waters and land as well as the food from the polluted waters and lands consumed by the women. She also mentioned the challenge of violence, such as rape,



meted on women fishers in the communities. There was also the issue of non-inclusion of women in community decision making processes around environmental issues, according to Comrade Chris Debunsha Solomon.

Men specific challenges included the continuous sea disturbances and waves caused by maritime workers, who in the course of their traversing the waters, drive fish away and sometimes cause the capsizing of local canoes used by local fishers. The male fishers also complained of the destruction of their fishing equipment due to constant navigation of the waters by fishing vessels. There was also the challenge linked to the dumping of waste feared to contain radioactive substances. This waste, reported to be dumped into the water bodies by pharmaceutical companies, was feared to be connected to failures in the reproductive system of many men, causing infertility, especially low sperm count discovered to be on the rise. This issue was raised by Dr. (Mrs) Azibasua Adioni-Arogo and Comrade Chris Debunsha Solomon.

The male fishers also mentioned the challenge of encountering people suspected to be of Fulani origin in their creeks. According to them, these persons use unknown technologies to sweep off fishes in their waters. The men shared their fears about confronting these persons as such confrontations have often led to violent conflict. Thus, the issue is feared to have the

potential of translating into the experiences of the herdsmen and farmers.

The training session commenced with Akpotu Ziworiton of Environmental Rights Action (ERA) facilitating the first two modules which exposed the participants to processes involved in identifying an issue in their environment and in gathering needed information respectively.

Akpotu Ziworiton used the water hyacinth challenge previously raised to illustrate the identification of an issue. According to him, it is a recent issue as the free-floating weed used to just pass through the water without building up in different areas and disturbing fishing activities. He also gave examples of coastal pollution and erosion as issues to be identified, reminding the fishers that even terrestrial animals suffer the impact of the chemicals polluting the waters. This is because just like the fishes, these animals drink from the same waters.

To gather needed information, the participants were taught to ask certain questions for better insight into the issues. Examples are questions about institutional frameworks that support their advocacy around the issues. Such frameworks could include the climate change laws, PIA, NOSDRA regulations, etc. which could help in the gathering of evidence.

Morris Alagoa, an environmentalist with ERA and Bayelsa State Governor's technical adviser

Several gender specific challenges were also expressed. For the females, there was observed rise in the number of miscarriages of pregnancy. This was linked to oil pollution of the aquatic habitat and food chain.

on environment, took the session covering Modules 3 and 4 which are about setting goals and objectives, and knowledge of rights respectively. Comrade Alagoa stated that the gathering of evidence could be for research purposes, for documentation purposes, advocacy, etc. He began by throwing more light on an aspect of the previous session which was on tools needed for gathering needed information. According to him, there is great need for energy resources such as fluid to sustain persons in the field. This is because evidence gathering for evidence-based advocacy is energy sapping.

He stated that evidence is very important in the environmental struggle as it gives no room for lies that could destroy a good case. According to him, "a good case had been lost because the representative of the plaintiffs was not a fisher,

yet, was representing fishers, thus, assuming to be one.”

He encouraged the participants to always attend to researchers to promote the documentation of whatever is happening in the environment.

The training on rights reminded the participants of their basic human rights including traditional fishing rights which they were urged to hold on to in their struggle to protect their environment. Comrade Alagoa referenced the November 2005 case which Iwherokan Community in Delta State had against the Nigeria government and Shell, stating that it was based on Article 24 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights of 1981 (ACHPR). “The community must come up with and abide by laws that protect their environment and also support other local, state, national and international laws that protect the environment.” He advised the participants while recognising that “Traditions and culture in some local communities pose challenges to involving women in decision making structures like the community council of chiefs.”

Stephen Oduware took the last three Modules 5, 6 and 7 covering, Preparing Message and Strategy, Determining Alliances, Targets and Opponents, and Action Time (Evaluating the Process) respectively.

He enjoined the human rights defenders to build relationships with media people including those met in training of the type they

were in. This is to enable timely sharing and drafting of messages around occurrences in the environment. The participants were also encouraged to visit sites of pollution, ministries, etc. and draft letters with demands to be sent to the state government. Examples could be demands for EIA which reveals the positive and negative impacts of a project on the environment. The participants were also taught the importance of examining and exploring the different layers of government, including representatives at the House of Assembly and the Senate to be able to craft and send out messages that draw attention to the issues identified using different communication media including social media.

Comrade Stephen enjoined communities to “Keep talking until you are heard.” According to him, “Community people need to step up as defenders of their communities and environment because if they don’t, no one will.” He reminded the defenders that environmental degradation and pollution can displace a people to the point that their community exists only geographically without the presence of the community members.

He also spoke on litigation as another strategy which can be employed by community human rights defenders but must be evidence based. This is because the court does not give justice based on the number of tears shed by the plaintiffs but on the evidence presented before them.

The session also exposed participants to the vital role that networking plays in environmental struggle. Speaking on how to get more people involved in communities’ environmental struggle, Comrade Stephen enjoined the defenders to identify community-based organisations, CSOs, professionals such as chemical engineers, lawyers, faith-based organisations like churches or mosques, to leverage on each other’s strengths. He observed that in Nigeria, communities are yet to explore networking with faith-based organisations, referencing the Catholic mission in Canada that looks into environmental issues.

Talking on the issue of taking action, Comrade Stephen mentioned that before taking action, communities must take note of the challenges on the ground. An example might be the militarized condition in the area as is obtainable in the Niger Delta, leading to human rights abuses.

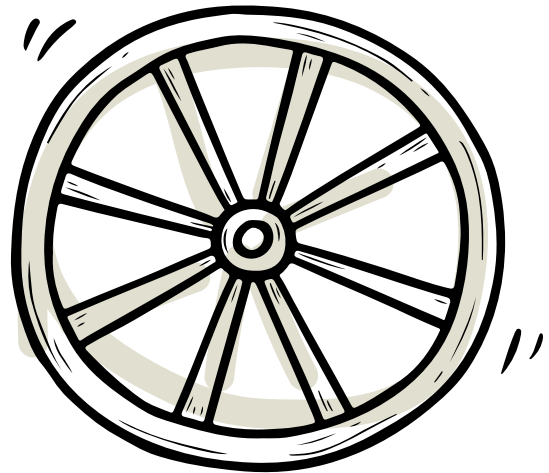
As a final note on the training, the participants were taught the need to always go back to the beginning to evaluate the process. This is because evaluation helps human rights defenders maintain success and make amendments to tackle failure, allows for re-strategising and re-engagement until the people’s voices are heard.

Repairing the Wheel

BY IBRAHIMA THIAM

Like a wheel
History has moved
Ran and displaced
On an unstopping movement
Humanity has boarded
A moving rhythm no matter what happen
A moving rhythm no matter who drove it
The same process all over the world
Rhythms with an unending ongoing

Are we going forward or backwards?
There is still the same movement
Habits, cultures and civilizations have let a legacy



When the wheel moves on a sand
It leaves traces behind
When the wind blows after
It delete some traces
However, the remembrance never ends

The indelible traces became a pain
Pains from an illegitimate attitude of human
Pain from an ignorant and arrogant behaviour
Pain from a well organised crime
Pain that shocked the late generations
Generations that ask for reparation
However, the wheel is damaged
The wheel is broken

The recent world shows lot of disparities
Welfare defeating the poverty
A new model is sold
A new order is built
A non-questioned, unanalyzed system based
on capital

Civilized versus uncivilized world
Development versus underdevelopment
Wealth versus poverty
Ruling world versus dominated
Arrogant versus humiliated

400 years of legitimization of crimes
400 years of elimination of heroes
400 years of deportation and extermination
400 years of dispossession and humiliation
400 years of a systemic destruction of cultures,
territories and identities

The wheel goes slower on a rocky road

The Negro became a Black
The Savage became Native
There come the church
There come the school

Emancipation is accepted but segregated
Identities are tolerated without territories
The whip was buried and the rifle was hided

A new state is built
Built with the blood of the suffering past
And an amnesic illness
A new state with limited ambitions
A call for reparation
Repairing the suffering of the past

Reparation without recognition is a lack of
sincerity
Reparation without paying is fooling
Reparation without empathy is hypocrisy
Reparation without commitment has no
guarantee
Who can repair the wheel?

*[Ibrahima Thiam is the Programme Manager for
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Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) West Africa office]*



African Women Share Worrisome Experiences, Call for Action on the Climate Crisis

BY ESELE OJEANELO



“Women are now working to build a better world where the love of peace can rest on every shore, where men lay down their weapons and learn to love and share, and people work to bring an end to war.” This is the last line of the African Women’s Climate Assembly Anthem.

One hundred and fifty (150) fearless women, drawn from seventeen (17) countries across Africa, assembled in Lagos, Nigeria for the second climate assembly held

24 - 28 September 2023. These daring women come from communities rich with resources that are being plundered daily with the backing of the state. They gathered in Lagos to raise their voices — shared stories of exploitative power relations and the destructive impacts of natural resource exploitation on their lives and environment whilst calling for action.

The opening ceremony of the Assembly had women from various countries – Kenya,

Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin Republic, Guinea–Conakry, Mozambique, South Africa, Liberia, Senegal, Cote d’voire, Mali, Niger, Zimbabwe, and Democratic Republic of Congo in a procession, accompanied with songs, chants, and dance depicting their countries and cultures.

One of the songs presented raised awareness on climate change mitigating actions – “Women, do you know the way to handle climate

change, don't block gutters, recycle waste and let your voice be heard." More songs of solidarity and call to action resounded in the hall all through the Assembly.

The women's stories and experiences as shared in their political addresses, reverberated similar struggles for life and freedom from various forms of imbalanced power relations. These women have found themselves at the frontline of the ongoing environmental and climate crises. This is attributed to the fact that every society is built on family units, where women multiply, nurture, care and manage these units, and whatever affects the units is a hard hit on women. This is why the women are taking the bold step of speaking up, sharing their stories, and calling for action.

A woman from Saloum Delta, Senegal while delivering her address lamented: "our key activities are affected by climate change. Our farming, fishing, hunting, are severely declining. The government brought in oil exploration activities into the communities which have destroyed our livelihoods. Our fishing nets are destroyed, and women are being taken, molested, and abused. We no longer have farms to farm, there are no roads, no hospitals, no schools and no employment for our children and our husbands. We are currently experiencing increased suffering because we are being taken away from how we knew to survive."

The government brought in oil exploration activities into the communities which have destroyed our livelihoods. Our fishing nets are destroyed, and women are being taken, molested, and abused.

The demands of the women of Solum Delta were simple: "What we want, is for the government to put women forward. We want our fishers to continue to fish and our farmers to continue farming. We don't want the destruction of our environment. We Say No to exploitation and marginalization. Long live Delta!!!"

Women from Burkina Faso gave a heart wrenching summary of what happens in their community: "Burkina Faso is a country of culture, surrounded with natural resources and joyful people. As the country advances with industrial activities, our waterways are polluted, big trees are cut down, livelihoods are heavily impacted. We currently experience a severe case of migration of our citizens to other countries. The state is deaf and blind to our predicaments and pleas."

The demands of women from Burkina Faso were not different from those of their counterparts from the other African countries represented

at the Assembly. "Women need freedom. We ask government to put women in the decision-making processes in the nation especially decisions that concerns climate change. We are at the frontline of climate change issues and are at the centre of the struggle. We are food producers of the world, so we want to continue to produce our food locally instead of relying on imported foods."

The stories of struggles were a clear indication that women across Africa are facing same issues but in different contexts. This calls for solidarity across the African continent. The women's shared experiences showed that the epicenter of war, violence against women, conflicts and climate crisis was extractive industries. Fathers and husbands are either killed or recruited into terrorist organisations because their livelihoods have been lost to the destruction of the land by extractivism. Sons are also sold to these organisations for economic purposes. Mothers and daughters are raped,

abused, and turned into baby making machines. Hunger and pain are now a woman's daily bread in these hotspots of conflicts where the power struggles never end.

Africa bears the brunt of the global north's capitalist ventures responsible for extractivism and the lifestyle of over consumption, as well as their inactions and false actions to the climate crisis. African women are owed huge debts, some of which can never be paid, for example, the lives of their husbands and children lost to the violence and wars. Climate debt is one among many debts that the global north owes Africa. Others include debts arising from the failed policies of the global north, colonial debts, debt of tranquility, environmental restoration and reparation. The Green Climate Fund is an example

of the inactions of the global north who have not been contributing up to the amount required of them. There have also been issues with Africa accessing the fund which has been made accessible to only big corporations to run climate projects.

A consensus was reached by the Women Assembly that no help is coming from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or gatherings such as the COP. It was noted that no real solutions will be delivered and implemented in these gatherings to free African from the destructive hands of the global north. Looking back, the African Peoples Counter COP is the way forward. The African Women's Climate Assembly is an initiative born out of the African Peoples

Counter COP and it first held in 2022 in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

It became crystal that to navigate through the key power players in the struggle for climate and environmental justice, there is the need to employ not just the strategy of solidarity among the affected women, but also recruit the wives of key players into struggle, use religious houses, workers of corporations, reliable media, and strong networks of women especially at community levels. Some of the key power players include the state/government, financial institutions, the court, traditional rulers, sea pirates, rebels, women who use power to gain more power, and security agents.





Fannie Lou Hamer once said, “When I liberate myself, I liberate others, if you don’t speak out, no one is going to speak out for you.” Some of the challenges encountered when these women go for rallies and speak out against the State can be overwhelming. They face key security issues; their messages are countered by the state. These threats are compounded by their lack of access to information, and constant confrontation with unfriendly policies. However, the women are not deterred. They continue to fight for the vision of Africa that they have.

Final declarations from the Assembly crystallized the demands of the women. They collectively say NO to the exclusion of women, particularly those in the frontline communities heavily impacted by the impacts

of climate change, from decision making on climate change, and loss and damage governance. They say NO to the grabbing of land and resources belonging to their communities; to development projects that do not serve African women and communities; and to genetically modified seeds and fertilisers.

The women also collectively say YES to the sharing, cultivation, promotion, and preservation of indigenous seeds as well as the cultural practices of agroecology and organic farming. They say YES to clean energy solutions such as environmentally friendly stoves and bio-fertilisers; and to the enforcement of the “let the polluters pay” principle for all companies in their country of origin.

Some of the challenges encountered when these women go for rallies and speak out against the State can be overwhelming... However, the women are not deterred. They continue to fight for the vision of Africa that they have.

Broadening Understanding of Climate Change through Arts, Culture and Wellness



Art, the application of human creative skill and imagination, has always been a way of making sense of the physical and unseen world. It has been a tool for mirroring and exposing changes in society by making meaning beyond the use of words and time. Art is seen to be central in the creation of culture, and in the deep expression of philosophies, thoughts, and ideas on wellbeing according to different cultures. The fineness of art makes it striking to the shared humanity of peoples of the earth and allows it to connect the experiences of people of both similar and different communities.

Poetry, music, and drama have proven over time to awaken consciousness, deliberately picking on issues ranging from environmental to social, political, and economic. And because the genres appeal to all ages and classes of people, they hold the potential of being instrumental tools for justice. Employing art to share meanings and experiences around climate change becomes vital as frontline communities contend with the devastating impacts.

Climate change is wreaking havoc on communities in Nigeria and Africa at large. And now, more than ever, is the time for all talents and skills to be employed in broadening understanding of issues relating to climate change. For this cause, artists, poets, writers, dramatists, cartoonists, and musicians, came together at a Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) School of Ecology (SoE) session on the theme

Employing art to share meanings and experiences around climate change becomes vital as frontline communities contend with the devastating impacts.

Climate Change, Arts and Wellness: Broadening Communities' Understanding of Causes of Climate Change

held at HOMEF's International Headquarters in Benin City, Edo State on 5 June 2023. The session doubled as the commemoration of the 2023 World Environment Day themed: Beat Plastic Pollution.

The SoE was specifically designed to use music, arts, poetry, and drama to create awareness and address issues of climate change. Hence, different talents were deployed in rendering visionary education on climate change to increase people's consciousness on the root causes. The aim was to enhance consciousness of the rights of Mother Earth among participants including community people, civil society, women, youth, students, academics, artists, volunteers, representatives of government agencies and policy makers. The session also targeted enhancing societal and individual wellbeing and wellness, building pathways to hold polluters accountable for emissions responsible for climate change and promoting the rights of Mother Earth through art.

According to Cadmus Atake-Enade, HOMEF's programme Lead for Community and Culture "We are here to use our art, music and culture for the protection of our environment." This was in line with HOMEF's theme for 2023—Healing Territories—

which entails enhancing the state of wellness in communities.

Comrade Cadmus shared insights on how art, over time, has proven to be a good instrument and tool for awakening consciousness in the pursuit of peace and harmony, fight for justice and promotion of social, political, and economic wellbeing of a people. According to him, "It has been observed over time that art, poetry, music, and drama have been mediums with which communities express themselves be it in good times or bad times." In the words of the executive director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, "Art makes you laugh, angry, and empowers one to seek change."

Linking the focus of the SoE and the theme of 2023 World Environment Day, Nnimmo Bassey iterated, "We are in a plastic generation and art is a powerful tool that can be used to pressure government regarding their inaction on climate change." He asserted that "Climate change is driven by greed and convenience," explaining that "there is a conspiracy with oil companies

to keep us hooked on fossil fuels such that even when you don't need it for energy, you will need it for plastics."

It is disturbing how polluting oil companies continue to promote their product with impunity while people across Africa suffer the deadly effects of climate change, Nnimmo Bassey stated. To further drive his message home, he recited a poem titled *Choked by Convenience*.

Mike Asukwo, a Nigerian cartoonist and chief editorial artist at Business Day Media, who spoke on the *Danger of Poor Waste Management* using cartoons for illustration, explained that the pervasive threat to our ecosystems, that is, poor waste management, can be changed by simple human choice—the choice to manage our waste responsibly. He stressed that irresponsible waste management has caused serious problems, ranging from the death of marine mammals such as seals and dolphins, to the creation of huge garbage patches such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. He explained

"We are in a plastic generation and art is a powerful tool that can be used to pressure government regarding their inaction on climate change."



that dumped waste is a breeding ground for diseases. Mosquitoes breed in cans and tires that collect water and can carry diseases such as malaria and dengue (break-bone fever). Rats find food and shelter in landfills and sewage and are capable of carrying diseases such as leptospirosis and salmonellosis.

As a sculpture and cartoonist, Mike Asukwo took it upon himself to speak to the dire condition of the environment, using his cartoon to capture social and political issues and as a tool for advocacy. He stated that art is communication, as such, artists must be conscious about what their art is telling their audience. Mr. Mike, through his art, tries to communicate that the earth is sick, and it is in our hands to save the planet from plastic pollution and lifestyles that are harmful to the environment and society at large.

Mr. Ndume Green, founder/ CEO Capital TV and Ogoni TV, during a panel session at the SoE, spoke of the critical role that content on the different media platforms plays in creating environmental awareness. He referred to how Ken Saro Wiwa used content including poems and other pieces of writing and forms of activism to raise concern about the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. He also spoke of the need for artists to localize content to serve the needs of the people with regards to climate change.

Babawale Obayanju, climate storyteller and photographer at Tell That Story stated that research and a good understanding of issues surrounding climate change are very important in telling climate stories. He expressed his worry over plastics being seen as fashionable instead of as a problem, explaining that plastic comes from crude and the continuous addiction

to plastics creates more difficulties as the world tries to do away with crude.

Featured in the SoE session were music on climate struggles by the Climate Man and Ambassador, Wille Workman, drama presentation by Mere Production, reading of Akamba Mfina (a HOMEF publication) by Onome Etisioro, comedy by Kingsley de comedian and Subsidy, and poetry recitation by Stanley Egholo, Sarah Iferia and Hugo Victor. The poems captured historical practices of environmental and cultural preservation, the present state of the environment, and way forward. The Gelelele community people of Edo State performed a dance drama reflecting the struggles of their people who are faced with oil and air pollution caused by gas flares and accompanying loss of major sources of livelihood which are fishing and farming.

Also featured was 'a walk through the Gallery' where artists showcased their

drawings and paintings. The art works captured the dangers of climate change, environmental implications of deforestation, the African culture, nature, and rich biodiversity. The paintings displayed came in different titles: Heal the World, Masked Spaces, Masked Fertility, Masked Hope, Strength of A Mother (Queen Idia), Combating Melody, Celebrating Drummers of Ede Masquerade, Biodiversity, Liberation, etc.

Two songs, one titled *the Black Tide* and another on Real Zero not Net Zero, were rendered by Klub J (Jeru Ubrei-Joe). The audience were later led to sing the famous Michael Jackson song *Heal the World*, as the SoE session wrapped up.



Climate change impacts on communities are taking unprecedented dimensions in ways that further heighten the vulnerabilities of these communities, posing challenges to their responses to the impacts and recovery. This is made worse by the operations of the extractive industry, notorious for its major contribution to climate change and for pollution that has left communities and the environment in terrible conditions. Art, culture, and traditional beliefs on wellness are veritable tools for communicating both the problems and their solutions.

Tanker Explosion Terror

Date of Incidence: Sunday, 1 October 2023.

Time of incidence: 12am

Location: Warri-Sapele Road, Ugbenu, near Ologbo bridge (boundary community between Edo and Delta States)

Date of report: 4 October 2023.

Reported by: Cadmus Atake-Enade

In the early hours of 1st October 2023, while Nigeria was getting set to celebrate its 63 years of independence, commuters, community people and transporters plying the Warri-Sapele Road were in mourning. This was due to the loss of fellow commuters, drivers and community people who were victims of a petroleum tanker explosion that occurred at about 12am on 1st October 2023 along the Ologbo-Ugbenu axis of the Warri-Sapele Road, the boundary between Edo and Delta States.

An eyewitness, Okada rider Mr. Michael Emmanuel, narrated that while he was picking up passengers at the Ugbenu axis of the Ologbo express road, he heard people shouting that a tanker carrying petroleum products has fallen into a ditch by the side of the road. He was meandering through the bad road when he heard an explosion. The fire engulfed vehicles that were held up in traffic at that

time of the morning, caused by the deplorable state of the road. Mr. Michael narrated that he abandoned his bike and jump into the Ologbo river for safety. According to him “When I came back later that morning to carry my bike, we counted over 5 dead bodies and as we speak, we are still carrying dead bodies from the river.”

Another victim, Mrs. Grace Okorefe, a trader, from Oghara town, narrated how her husband’s bus conveying market women was burnt to ashes, all their goods and wares were all burnt. Although no life was lost, according to Mrs Grace, her husband is currently at home receiving treatment for burns he sustained while escaping the inferno. “This burnt bus is our family’s main source of income and now it is burnt. We are calling on the government to come and help us—the pain and suffering is too much on this road.”

Shamson Ismai, a truck driver, recounted that while he was stuck in traffic, he saw people running towards a tanker carrying petrol and was wondering what had happened and the next thing he heard was an explosion and huge fire behind his truck. He and his driver assistant (conductor) had to run for their lives. By the time he returned after the fire had gone off, he met three dead bodies by the side of

his burnt truck. His bus was totally burnt with 133,000 gallons of palm oil that he was transporting from Warri to Abuja. He was grateful to God that his life was spared though he had lost his only source of livelihood—his truck. At the time of this report, Mr. Ismai was unable to reach the owner of the goods he was transporting because he was stranded in Ologbo having no money to get to his destination.

While on field investigation, on the site of the explosion, we spotted a corpse stuck in swamp grasses by the side of the road and drew the attention of some community persons and bike riders to it. While they were trying to retrieve the body, a man among the community people who was in search of the wife identified the dead as his wife. All effort to speak to the man at that point proved abortive as he was in shock. His daughter, Miss Victory Enebeli, soon arrived the scene and also identified the corpse as her mother's. She identified the body as Mrs. Divine Enebeli who resided in Ologbo village and works with Presco.

According to Miss Victory, sometimes when there is no task for her mother to carry out at Presco, she goes out to do some roadside petty trading to help the family keep up. She recounted that on the day of the explosion, the family was unaware that their mother had left the house to do her petty trading on the roadside. The had

been worried concerning her whereabouts that Sunday, 1st October, only to find out that she was part of the dead victims of the tanker explosion.

The husband of the deceased, Mr. Abraham Oworo, narrated that he was not in town when the tanker explosion incidence occurred. He had travelled to Warri, and while there, received a call from his in-law that his wife has been missing since Sunday, 1st October, the day of the explosion. Upon arrival on 4 October 2023, the day of the field visit, he began searching for his wife. He later (on the same day) identified her corpse in the swamp grass by the roadside. "She left our three-year-old daughter in the house and went out that night when the explosion happened," he cried out.

At the time of the field report, the state government had neither visited the site of the disaster nor instituted emergency response to move the corpses to the mortuary and put out a call for people to come and identify the bodies of their loved ones.

The Warri-Sapele Road has been in a deplorable state for too long, causing a lot of harm to commuters, community people and businesses. Investments have been destroyed and the lives and livelihoods of surrounding communities impacted tremendously. The Ologbo petroleum tanker explosion incident is the result of both the neglect of government

functions which includes attending to the infrastructural needs of the people and continued tight hold on a fossil powered economy.

It was observed that there were no gallons or jerricans on the site of the incident to justify some media reports that victims of the explosion attempted to scoop spilled petrol from the fallen tanker. Again, contrary to police reports that about five lives were lost to the fire, information gathered from some eyewitnesses and community people put the number of lives lost at over 20 persons. During the field investigation, three dead bodies were found lying by the side of the road. As at the time of the field visit, more bodies were being discovered while about 10 persons were reported to have been buried by the side of the road in unmarked graves.

The tragedy could have been avoided had the government done its duties. It is expected that the government would take immediate steps in ensuring the rehabilitation of the Benin City – Warri Highway. This is long overdue. A railway as well as an alternate route for tankers and heavy-duty vehicles should also be constructed to avoid accidents of the type under review. To help the people that have suffered losses to heal from this terror, compensations are vital.

Building Resilient Movements, People Power, and Challenging Systems

BY NNIMMO BASSEY

Our demand for building resilience and people power is not for the sake of strengthening our communities to take a beating but for halting and overturning abusive systems. In other words, we are seeking to build people power to challenge current exploitative systems where capital and brute force reign. While the system rapaciously inflicts violence on humans, other beings, and the ecosystems, it is clear to us that sustainable resistance must be non-violent. As we reflect on this, it is expedient that we know that building resilience requires a clear objective and should not be focused merely on erecting means of adaptation and mitigation that clams frayed nerves while the exploitation and abuse continue unchecked.

There are key universal organising anchors of the struggle to build resilient movements, people power, and challenge exploitative systems. The anchors are as follows:

Right to life. This is all encompassing although the major thoughts around this may sometimes be tied to the issues of conflicts, wars, and capital punishment. Although this right is often taken as something that is beyond debate, it can be infringed upon flagrantly and with

impunity. Other safeguards have been erected to ensure this right is respected, including the laws in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court - **genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes** and the **crime of aggression**. A strong campaign is ongoing for the inclusion of the crime of ecocide as a fifth crime that was omitted from the list. Sadly, the laws against war crimes and collective punishment of civilians are not deterring belligerent nations from these unlawful activities.

Right to a safe environment. Having a safe environment is prerequisite for enjoyment of the right to life because survival of humans is intertwined with the survival of other species. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights at its Article 24 stipulates that all Africans shall have a right to a safe and satisfactory environment in which to develop. This Charter has been domesticated by Nigeria and helps to close the lacuna left by the current Constitution with regards to environmental rights. The crime of ecocide once adopted will provide a platform for holding polluters accountable in the Niger Delta and other regions.

Right to dignity. Dignity refers to a person's right to be valued and treated with due respect for their own sake and to be treated ethically. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".

Right to food. The right to food intersects that of dignity, requiring that humans enjoy this right in dignity. It demands the regular availability of food in sufficient quantities. Starving a prisoner is considered an assault on his dignity. Without the right to food, there can be no enjoyment of the right to health.

Right to Water. The human right to water and sanitation was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2010 with a yes vote from 122 countries and 41

abstaining. As with all rights, their enforcement is uneven as is evident around us. With gross pollution from oil spills, industrial effluent, and other contaminants, the right to water and sanitation is merely on paper.

Universal rights are excellent tools for building movements; some of these rights have just been cited.

Besides the anchors on which movements may be built, there are some general considerations that help people to coalesce into a formidable force.

One of the major organising ideas is that there must be core or inalienable principles around which to build. Once the core principle is identified, all other things become tactics driven to suit circumstances. This is how to build critical mass for change. We have the example of a broad coming

together of social forces in the Niger Delta Alternatives Convergence (NDAC). Rigidity over tactics can disperse rather than bring people together. According to Jay Naidoo in his book, *Change – Organising Tomorrow*, Today, we must "Navigate the minefield of vested interests and build an agenda of shared interests."

A movement that will successfully challenge the system must bring about situations where corrupt and inept leaders lose credibility while the people lose their fear of the corrupt system. Change is not offered on a platter but requires a fight. This fight is propelled by political education which must be seen as a process, not an event. Proponents must be ready to be in the trenches over time. Progress itself is a process and could have several milestones along the journey. Activities such as the

One of the major organising ideas is that there must be core or inalienable principles around which to build. Once the core principle is identified, all other things become tactics driven to suit circumstances.





School of Ecology (SoE) must be seen as a process, not an event that ends when we shut the doors. Our communities are universities of struggle.

We must never forget that politicians fight for power and are adept at the struggle to keep that power. This gives them focussed short-term vision which must be challenged with clearly delineated peoples' long-term visions. Success depends on how well the fight for basic rights are articulated and popularised. One of the key anchors for such an educated fight is on how the people can secure and hold on to their sovereignty.

Movements must have clear plans for the transition. A lack of plan was the error of the pro-democracy movement in Nigeria. That error has built a fractured nation bound in unfreedom, lack of peace and in disunity — contrary to the words of our National Anthem.

Resource nationalism/control can be an attractive but narrow platform for agitation

for access to resources. The field needs to be broadened to popularise re-source democracy which exposes poverty as an unnatural social construct built to subjugate peoples. Re-source democracy speaks of the African philosophies of living in harmony with Nature and interacting with what is often termed Natural resources as Nature's gifts to her children. This is best propagated along the lines of Ubuntu, Harambe, Eti Uwem, Ebindu, and others.

Anything that works against Mother Earth is crass, blind exploitation and must be overturned. Our organising position must be to terminate the barbaric exploitation of Mother Earth and peoples by showing that to engage in such exploitation is to eat the fingers that feed us.

A people in a movement must have a clear picture of what success may look like. This picture would help moderate expectations and clarify that the struggles will make multiple demands on them, and these could include mental, physical,

and emotional distress even while they are resilient. The people should also understand that they may have to pay inordinate individual sacrifices such as Ogoni leaders paid in the mid-1990s. Individual strengths must blend into collaborative strength that ensures a cracking of the system.

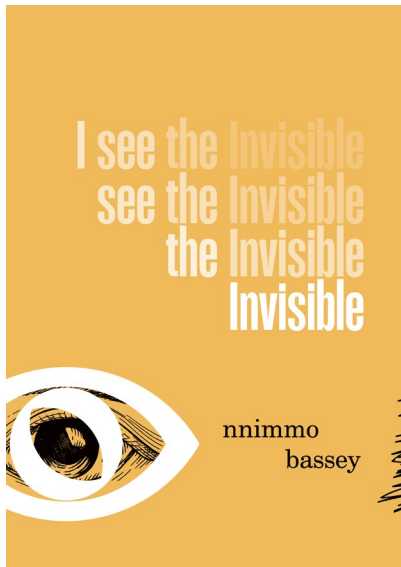
We must always bear in mind that for a movement to be successful, it must have a clear target and be built as an agent of change. It must not be inflexible in terms of tactics and certainly not monolithic. Diversity and inclusion are the keys to resilience and strength.

We must also bear in mind that movements are learning spaces where struggles, successes, failures, and lessons are shared. Here, we learn what worked elsewhere and what did not work. Movements require discipline and participants must avoid rash decisions bearing in mind the implications such decisions would have on the collective.

We must be students of History with the understanding that history is always contested. That is why streets and nations sometimes get renamed. And if you are watchful, there are many things to rename in our country.

Most importantly, we must decolonize our mindset. We must also never forget that the battle is never easy. Indeed, we should stick to the saying of Amilcar Cabral, "Claim no easy victories".

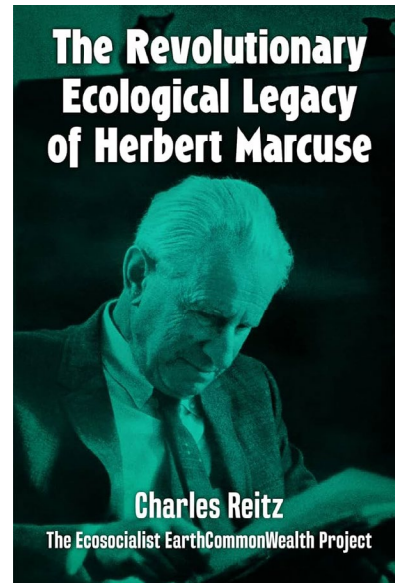
Books You Should Read



I See the Invisible

by Nnimmo Bassey

I See the Invisible calls for mankind to see the invisible and hear the inaudible. It is a compilation of poems coming from moments of reflection on the colonial and neoliberal foundations that permit a willful disconnection from nature and the resultant destructive extractivism. Though written over a wide span of time, the poems fall into identifiable themes. Some of the poems came through conversations and poetry writing sessions with Peter Molnar, Maryam al-Khawaja — Rafto Human Rights laureates and Salil Tripathi, a member of the board of PEN International, in August 2017. The sessions held at a beautifully rustic location in Celleno, Italy, were documented on celluloid by the duo of Maria Galliana Dyrvik and Anita Jonsterhaug Vedå of SMAU, a multimedia firm in Norway. A number of the poems speak to the criminalization of environmental defenders and the burdening of victims with survival struggles with no life boughs.



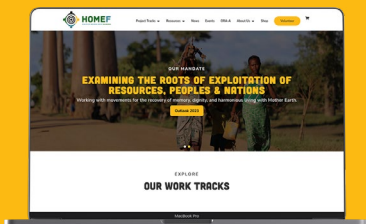
The Revolutionary Ecological Legacy of Herbert Marcuse (2nd Edition)

by Charles Reitz, Nnimmo Bassey

This new edition includes an Afterword by Nnimmo Bassey: *System Change Will Not Be Negotiated*. As the dialectical counterpart of Marcuse's *Great Refusal*, the book, which culminates with the 'EarthCommonWealth Project' is keyed to what we are struggling for, not just what we are struggling against. The author argues that regressive political forces must be countered today, and this is best accomplished through radical collaboration around an agenda recognising the basic economic and political needs of diverse subaltern communities. System negation must become a new general interest. The author discusses core ethical insights from African philosophical sources, indigenous American philosophy, and radical feminist philosophy.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- Omega Resilience Award - Africa (ORA-A) Fellows' in-person Meeting
- Team Building
- Oilwatch General Assembly
- National Agroecology Conference
- Niger Delta Alternative Convergence (NDAC)
- Rally Against GMOs



Always visit www.homef.org for upcoming events and how to participate.