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# INSTIGATOR

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION

## **Economic History of Nigeria, And the Tragedy of Resource Extraction**

**Walking in Peace with the  
Earth**

**Animating a Culture-Based, Just  
Energy Transition**

**Ethical, Religious, and  
Human Rights Concerns  
over GMOs**

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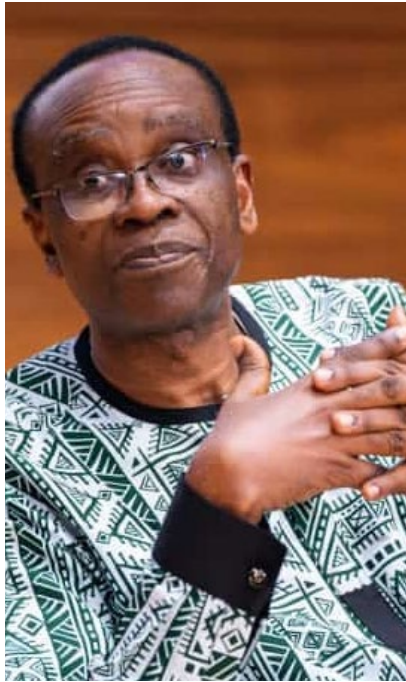
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## HOME RUN

power for action in the Niger Delta through the Niger Delta Alternatives Convergence (NDAC), born out of the hunger and urgent need to address the impacts of the over six decades of natural resource extraction in the resource-rich region.

This edition presents articles showing just how we can build people power and drive the recovery of sacrificed zones not just in the Niger Delta but across Africa. Further addressed in this edition is the need for humanity to return to harmonious living with the Earth, which is the focus of the article on establishing peace with Mother Earth.

While we walk to resist extractivism, rescue our sacrificed zones and maintain peace with Mother Earth, there are tools that we must put to better use. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is one such tool, and an article here explains how it can be best used to support our work and campaign for environmental justice.

Once again, but not for the last time, we must remind ourselves that the time to transition from dirty to clean energy is now! Culture-based, just energy transition is a real solution to the fossil industry-orchestrated environmental despoliation and aggravated climate conditions than the new and emerging technologies like geoengineering, which polluting corporations promote as solutions. Through our School of Ecology (SoE) sessions, the dangers of some of the technologies are exposed, as seen in a report by one of the SoE scholars.

Recombinant technology, of which Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are one of its products, is one of such technologies of concern due to its links to human, environmental and economic malaise. Nigeria has already approved 25 genetically modified (GM) products with the recent approval of the GM TELA Maize—done irrespective of warnings of potential dangers—sparking dissent across the country. We continue to amplify voices against this dangerous technology through activities on our hunger politics work track and articles in different editions of the *eco-Instigator*. Articles in this edition showcase the ethical, religious and human rights implications of GMOs, the role/information needs of the judiciary and real solutions for cracking the food and climate crises we face. In between positively stimulating articles, we have an artfully written poem for your reading pleasure, as well as a book review to help you keep a tab on the state of play in our ever-evolving field. Enjoy reading the articles, reports, poem and review in this brimming edition.

It's always a delight to hear and read from you. We never stop looking forward to receiving your feedback, stories, articles, poems, or photos. Continue to share with us at [editor@homef.org](mailto:editor@homef.org).

Until Victory!  
Nnimmo Bassey  
Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)

We're delighted to bring you reports of activities, events and stories that were of great significance to our work in the third quarter of the year. We hope that reading this edition of *eco-Instigator* will not only enlighten you on key happenings in our space but also spur you into actions that will beneficially contribute to the struggle for environmental justice and food sovereignty.

As highlighted in the first article after this *Home Run*, history has proven to be a unifying force, establishing lessons and shining light on the paths that must be taken to avoid the repetition of unpleasant actions and decisions made in the past. The economic history of Nigeria, as explained in the article, shows our nation's unpleasant journey with resource exploitation, which has made Nigeria a classic case study of the tragedy of the commons.

There's no contention that the Niger Delta is a privatized and sacrificed zone following the obnoxious privatization of the region and the resultant conversion of its ecosystems into waste dumps. We're harnessing people

# Economic History of Nigeria, The Tragedy of **Resource Extraction**

by Chinedum Nwajiuba

Some of us might be familiar with Nigeria's economic history. We do not have to be economists or historians to be familiar with the core historical trends and evolution of the Nigeria economy. We also do not need to be experts on resource extraction to mention the core resources that have played critical roles in Nigeria's economy over time.

Nigeria emerged in 1914 with an economy that was predominantly rural and agricultural. However, the Nigerian economy has evolved over the years, transitioning through phases: starting with the British colonialists, whose core target was to extract raw materials for factories outside Nigeria, especially in the United Kingdom.

The key resources which have been extracted in Nigeria are tin, coal, and crude petroleum. Others include bitumen, gold, natural gas, iron ore, limestone, niobium, lead, and zinc. We may even add sand mining, considering the type of farming we have in Nigeria, which is heavily dependent on the soil, potentially making it a

form of resource extraction.

Organised mining in Nigeria began in 1903 when the Mineral Survey of the Northern Protectorates was created by the British colonial government. A year later, the Mineral Survey of the Southern Protectorates was founded. Tin mining on the plateau began in 1905 and gradually became the backbone of the economic prosperity of Jos city. Coal was first discovered in Nigeria in 1909 at the Udi Ridge in Enugu by a British mines engineer, Albert Kitson, while he was prospecting for silver. By 1914, the year the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated into what is known today as Nigeria, the first consignment of coal made its way to the United Kingdom from the newly created ports at Port Harcourt. By the 1940s, Nigeria was a major producer of tin, columbite, and coal globally. 's economy, with cocoa, oil palm and groundnut dominating the market, despite the existence of several other crops. These were the most important sources of public sector finances until the gradual emergence of crude petroleum exploration, which has had the most important implication for the Nigerian economy. Oloibiri Oilfield was discovered on Sunday, 15 January 1956, by Shell Darcy. It

was the first commercial oil discovery in Nigeria, ending 50 years of unsuccessful oil exploration in the country by various international oil companies and launching Nigeria into the limelight of the Petro-State. The dominance of crude petroleum became overwhelming in the early 1970s, which came to be called the oil boom era. The huge earnings from the oil boom and the pattern of expenditure adopted fundamentally altered the structure, conduct, and performance of the Nigerian economy. With that, it was not just the Nigeria economy that changed, but also the character of the government and people of Nigeria.

**There is a real possibility that no person, Nigerian or non-Nigerian, is sure of the quantity of crude that leaves Nigeria daily. This is a sign of a lack of a sense of ownership.**

The attitude of Nigeria's ruling elite to the emergence of crude petroleum could be seen in at least three examples. The first is evident in the statement: "Money is not our problem; the problem is how to spend it." At the point when this statement was said to have been made in the early 1970s, most Nigerians had no drinking water and no electricity. If Nigeria were a business, one would say, the financial resources available to it, especially from 1973, were beyond its absorptive capacity—a term defined as "the total amount of capital, or the amount of foreign capital, or the amount of foreign aid (capital plus technical assistance) that a developing country can use productively (John H. Adler in his work *Absorptive Capacity: The Concept and Its Determinants*).

Looking at the core tenet of this definition, it could be well argued that Nigeria amassed financial resources that it lacked the capacity to use productively during the oil boom era. Also, arguably, Nigeria has been unable to kill the culture of wasteful public finance management that was imbibed during the oil boom era. The changing global energy regime should have caused Nigeria to see a future where fossils play lesser roles, as happened to horses following the arrival of energy sources for motion at the turn of the 20th century. But

no, we're still being deluded by the continuing flow of oil money.

The second is in the misapplication of the recommendation of the Udoji Commission of 1974. The commission made recommendations, known as the "Udoji Award," which included salary increases, civil servants' training, administrative structure reforms, and the introduction of goal-oriented management. Note the end here: goal-oriented management. In the pretext of implementing the recommendations, the government simply awarded monies in arrears to civil servants, causing many of them to buy expensive foreign goods. That culture of massive consumption of foreign goods is one that Nigeria has not recovered from and is a key factor in the underdevelopment of Nigeria when compared to other countries that benefited from the boom. It has become an abiding national culture. Young people may not know there was a time when Nigerians consumed tinned imported jollof rice.

The above situation was followed quickly by a government in 1975 that altogether altered the civil service in Nigeria. A new culture of civil service in Nigeria emerged, and the primary interest was self-security because of the insecurity felt by civil servants in 1975. Nigeria has not recovered since then. I am not sure that any informed and serious person will contest that the quality of the civil service before 1975 is not what we still have now. A weak civil service anywhere in the world is not consistent with quality public sector management.

There have been ambiguities on the quantity of crude oil taken out of Nigeria. Nigerians seem to be more interested in simply asking to be told what is available to be shared so that all stakeholders will gather to share the "national cake." There is a real possibility that no person, Nigerian or non-Nigerian, is sure of the quantity of crude that leaves Nigeria daily. This is a sign of a lack of a sense of ownership.

Another aspect of oil exploration in Nigeria is the massive despoilation of the environment. Many heroes, like Ken Saro-Wiwa, have lost their lives fighting for the preservation of the environment. Others, such as Nnimmo Bassey, have been fighting so hard for this cause. The

environmental impacts are unimaginable: imagine life in a place where one has a fire burning unendingly for decades, roofs covered with soot, rivers destroyed, fishing destroyed, drinking water contaminated, just to mention but a few. These are a few of the day-to-day realities of life in Nigeria's oil-bearing communities.

While there has been much focus on crude oil exploration, Nigerians must not be blind to the massive unregulated mining of different minerals, including gold, lithium, lead-zinc, barites, limestone, gypsum, clay, phosphate, glass sand, fluorspar, salt, ironstone, uranium, sulphur, graphite, cassiterite, manganese, mica, and other precious stones going on all over the country. Whether in Zamfara, Niger, Nasarawa, Bauchi, Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Borno, Kwara, Kano, Kebbi or Kaduna states, and indeed in almost all parts of Nigeria, unregulated mining is ongoing contrary to the provisions of the Nigerian constitution, and various laws that should govern these activities. These activities are going on with the active connivance of foreigners and our government officers, leading to massive despoilation of farmlands and sometimes the destruction of the lives of innocent children who ought to be in school.

Now, what is the Idea behind the tragedy of the commons? *The goat that is commonly owned often dies in hunger*—a local Nigerian saying. This expression approximates Garrett Hardin's theory of the tragedy of the commons, which was developed around 1968. This theory states that "individuals acting rationally and independently according to their own self-interest will deplete a shared resource, even if it is contrary to the best interest of the group." An Economist publication of 2008 noted Professor Hardin's illustration that in commonly owned grazing fields, herdsman are interested in feeding their flock fat without allowing the grazing field to regenerate and sustain a minimum threshold. In the long run, the grazing field becomes arid.

Nigeria may be a case study in the tragedy of the commons, as the nation transits ecologically and in other ways from one of buoyancy to one of aridity. One question we must ask ourselves as Nigerians is: Why is petroleum extraction not so devastating to

the environment in other major producing countries? This is related to questions I asked the Minister of Environment in 2014 when she was invited to the Committee on Environment at the National Conference. My questions at the 2014 National Conference, which have not yet been answered, to remain very relevant to Nigerian society ten years after. Two of the questions were: "When will gas flaring end?" and "Why are top-of-science methods and international best practices for spills in petroleum-bearing communities and routes not used in Nigeria?"

Except we are in denial, Nigeria has manifested an attitude of "anything goes" in dealing with the oil prospecting companies over the years. Most companies have the option of adopting or not following the rules and checklist [they appear to have opted for the latter]. The international oil companies (IOCs) working in Nigeria already know how things are done down here. They, therefore, do what they cannot do elsewhere in Nigeria. They pay lip service to what is expected of them and even what they may have agreed to do. When they pollute the environment in Nigeria and when they do that elsewhere, their attitudes and approaches are different. In some other countries, oil companies not only speedily clean up polluted waters but where birds are affected, they take the pains to collect the birds and clean them up too.

This attitude towards the extraction of crude oil and other resources in Nigeria has been the same over the years: neglect. For example, decades after the mining of tin stopped in Jos,

**In commonly owned grazing fields, herdsman are interested in feeding their flock fat without allowing the grazing field to regenerate and sustain a minimum threshold. In the long run, the grazing field becomes arid.**

the Plateau State capital known as the Tin City, Indigenous Communities in the state are still reeling from the impacts, especially on farming and farmers. This is the same with





coal mining in Enugu. After many years of coal mining in some communities in Enugu State and the attendant abandonment of those mining sites, dangerous environmental degradation threatens the communities. Earth Journalism and Sahara Reporters have reported on the plights of these communities (in Jos and Enugu), yet not actions have been taken to address them.

An interesting place to see would be the surface coal mining areas in the Ankpa area of Kogi State. Surface coal mining, which went on for many years and deforested a massive area of land, remains under-reported. A study undertaken in the area in 2005 by C. U. Nwajiubashowed that effluents from the coal mines find their way into the local rivulets and into households, which is very harmful to human health.

The realities in Nigeria raise lots of questions, such as: Why is Nigeria's treatment of her environment sub-civilized? Why does Nigeria treat her natural resources as something belonging to an enemy?

Another question in the list of 10 questions I posed to the Minister of Environment at the National Conference of 2014 is: Why is the south of Niger Republic greener than northern Nigeria? Satellite and ground evidence is clear on this difference, and there is no climatic or ecological factor as to why the southern Niger Republic should be greener than northern Nigeria. One answer that has been provided is that deforestation happens on the Nigerian side, while the Niger side is preserved. People in Niger are more conscious of afforestation and the preservation of their forest resources and depend on Nigeria, or indeed move into Nigeria for fuelwood. The same applies to reports of fishing activities in Nigerian waters in the coastal areas. While chemicals may not be applied by fisherfolks in waters west of Nigeria, fisherfolks from across the western borders of Nigeria easily use chemicals to fish in Nigerian waters.

The underlying philosophy engendering the idea of socio-ecology is the call on personal humans to take more responsibility for the management of our environment. This is also consistent with a certain realization that I have come by and been advocating: to encourage ordinary citizens to do even more. We have to protect our own, if there is any such thing as your own environment.

As I end this piece, I may have to rephrase the question which informed the title: Doesn't the

tragedy of the commons explain the lessons derived from the economic history of Nigeria and resource extraction?

We may be able to see our experience with our environment as akin to the tragedy of the commons. Resources are extracted as if no one owns them, leaving us with no future. Nigeria's resources should not be seen as a common commodity that must be recklessly scavenged without thinking of replacement and sustainability. This is the very basis of the tragedy of the commons.

Who will heed this? We, the people, will have to. That is my understanding of socio-ecology. All hands must be on deck to salvage our environment by insisting on the sustainable use of our resources. That is the call.

*[Chinedum Nwajiuba is a professor of agricultural economics, former Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo and current head of the West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL).]*



# **THE NIGER DELTA IS A PRIVATIZED AND SACRIFICED ZONE**

By Nnimmo Bassey

The Niger Delta is a privatized zone for the simple reason that the international oil companies have since appropriated it as a wasteland suited only for dumping toxic wastes, oil spills, gas flares and produced water, accounting for a very large amount of waste from the oil and gas sector. The privatization of the region began in 1956 when the first commercially viable oil well was drilled, and the maiming of the region has continued unabated. The privatization of the region has been so obnoxious and brazen because since the creeks, streams, rivers, and swamps became waste dumps, they have been fit for no other purpose than to serve the private needs of the polluting corporations.

The UNEP report (August 2011) on the assessment of the Ogoni environment and the Bayelsa State Oil and Environment Commission (BSOEC) report (May 2023) attest to the fact that the region has been wholly grabbed.

The disconnection of our peoples from their roots, coupled with the total dispossession of their environment and the despoliation of what is left, is worse than slavery and colonialism. Indeed, the nearest label to describe the situation may be *environmental racism*. Colonialism could plunder and mete inhuman treatment to its subjects, but environmental racism normalizes the treatment of both the people and their environment as non-living, subhuman and fit for nothing but to be trashed.

Kwame Nkrumah spoke of exploitation without redress in his book titled *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965):

*“Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those who served the ruling imperial power could at least look to its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With neo-colonialism neither is the case.”*

This depiction gives an apt explanation of why the Niger Delta has become a sacrificed zone, with ostensible acts of defence actually turning to acts of indignities and degradation. It is clear that we cannot escape or reverse the perverse situation

unless we reboot our imaginaries, recreate our mindsets and reconnect ourselves to our environmental and sociocultural roots. We need to rediscover our indigenous sovereignty as the core plank in the struggle for political as well as socioecological liberation. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) touched on this when he declared, *“Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well.”*

It is hard to find anywhere else in the world that has been so insidiously trampled underfoot, like the Niger Delta and other hotspots of mineral extraction in Nigeria and across Africa. In this regard, we note that the tin mines of Jos have been sacrificed and abandoned. The same can be said of the coal mines of Enugu and other rising zones of plunder now governed by bandits and so-called unknown gunmen. Indeed, neocolonialism would probably not have progressed the way it has without the compromise of our elites in all spheres of human endeavour. These traitors gladly take the place of slave drivers and colonial masters and ensure the privatization of our commonwealth through devious legislation and through pure elite capture of the socioeconomic systems.

The BSOEC report titled “An Environmental Genocide” tells of Bayelsa State as having a per capita hydrocarbon pollution of 1.5 barrels. Pause to think of that. Between 2006 and 2020, Bayelsa State had 3,508 oil spill incidents and 25% of all oil spills in the Niger Delta, according to the data from the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA). The state alone suffers an average of 234 oil spills per year. Figures from NOSDRA are notoriously unreliable as they are often under-reported, even when compared to reports from NNPC.

One bizarre example of a sacrificed zone is the Awoye community of Ondo State, which has Ororo 1 well at Oil Mining Lease (OML) 95 in its immediate offshore. That oil well blew up in a fiery inferno in May 2020 and has been burning and spilling to date. In other words, Ororo 1 oil well has been burning and spilling crude oil non-stop for 4 years, and nothing has been done to halt the crime. The ongoing sacrifice has impoverished the people in the coastal communities by decimating their livelihoods — farming and fishing.

Zones of sacrifice are dotted all over our continent, with all having roots in extractivism incubated by

colonialism. Here we can mention the gold mines of Ghana and South Africa; the diamond, cobalt and lithium mines of Democratic Republic of Congo; the diamond mines of Liberia and Sierra Leone; the oil fields of the Albertine Graben in Uganda, Okavango basin in Namibia and Botswana; the Saloum Delta of Senegal; the Sudd in South Sudan; the coal mines of South Africa; the gas fields of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique; the phosphate fields of Togo and Western Sahara, to mention just a few.

When our territories are sacrificed, it is not just that our land is debased; we are the ones being sacrificed. This becomes clearer to us when we realize that, for a fact, rather than being owners of the land, we are actually the land. To liberate ourselves from this exploitative cul-de-sac, we must know that environmental action is an investment, not a cost. Every action we take today towards ending the sacrifice of our territories is an investment towards reinventing an environment that does not eat us up.

Let us all resolve to halt the spread of sacrifice zones and take all the steps needed to make it happen.

**W**ithout people power which involves the strong will of a people to collectively take action, it is difficult for a people to overthrow oppressive and destructive systems. Leaders, activists, community people and scholars from the Niger Delta came together in 2022 to establish 'The Niger Delta Alternatives Convergence (NDAC)' after a careful examination of the socio-ecological realities of the region. The NDAC was born out of the people's need for concerted regional actions to tackle the impacts of the over six decades of natural resource extraction in the Niger Delta and deepen discussions on how the impacts have shaped the existential realities of the people.

The NDAC was thus established as a Pan-Niger Delta forum for conversation, strategic decision-making, and action. It resolved to commence a campaign to address the key socio-ecological concerns of the region and make a case for restorative justice.

The NDAC has since then become a space for the peoples of the Niger Delta—the leaders of thought, traditional institutions, academics, civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations and community people—to converge and have conversations around the issues in the region, ranging from environmental, ecological, socio-cultural issues, livelihoods, climate change, insecurity and other challenges. Under the auspices of the NDAC, peoples of the Niger Delta synergise to proffer practical recommendations that will restore the despoiled environment and the dignity of the peoples of the region.

The first and the second NDACs were held in Uyo and Port Harcourt in 2022 and 2023, respectively. At the inaugural meeting in 2022, the NDAC adopted a strategy to reposition the Niger Delta and its several social-ecological challenges as a critical national policy demand. This culminated in the adoption of the Niger Delta Manifesto for Socioecological Justice—a document that has since been endorsed by

**ADVANCING**

# **PEOPLE POWER FOR REGIONAL ACTION**

By HOMEF Project Team

thousands of people as a regional advocacy and policy document.

The third Niger Delta Alternative Convergence took place in Abuja on Wednesday, 19 June 2024 and was chaired by His Royal Majesty, King Bubaraye Dakolo, the Ibenanaowei of Ekpetiama Kingdom, Bayelsa. The participants included Oba Oluwambe Ojagbohunmi (JP), the traditional ruler of Ayetoro community in Ilaje LGA of Ondo State, representatives of the Pan Niger Delta Elders Forum (PANDEF), ethnic nationalities from the region, community persons, academics, and CSOs.

Nnimmo Bassey, the director of the ecological think tank, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), which is one of the conveners of the NDAC, emphasized the need to break away from neocolonial extractivism. He stressed this during his welcome remarks, where he noted that the Niger Delta region has been treated as a sacrificial zone since the early 1950s up until now. He further pointed out the extreme negative impacts of oil and gas extraction, as well as the massive deforestation and various kinds of erosion of both the land and coastlines. Other impacts that the region suffers are access

to potable water as a result of pollution of both surface and groundwater, orchestrated organised crimes, and loss of livelihoods.

The crooked and crude divestment moves of the culprits of the ecocide in the Niger Delta, that is, the IOCs [International Oil Companies], their local collaborators and the Nigerian government, were spotlighted. The divestments, according to Bassey, entrench and reinforce the agelong despoliation of the region and are a ploy to evade accountability and responsibility for the harm that has been inflicted on the territory and its peoples. The NDAC calls for a proper divestment framework as well as region-wide environmental, social and health audits, amongst other demands. *“The NDAC does not only highlight the huge challenges of the region, but also proposes clear pathways out of the quagmire. It is a critical space for propelling actions for the region, for transformation, and it creates template for action for other impacted areas in Nigeria and Africa. It is about people and the planet,”* he said.

The Niger Delta is unarguably one of the most polluted places in the universe. In his opening statement, the chairman of the third NDAC, King



Bubaraye Dakolo, remarked: *“This is our reality, and it is our collective duty to raise our voices. The close to 70 years of oil and gas exploitation in this country has changed our very fabric as [a] community people. Earning a living in the region is very difficult. These are realities made possible by extractivism in the region.”*

The Monarch considers the` Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) an anti-people law, as it criminalizes communities rather than protecting them. On the issue of divesting multinational companies, he emphasized that *“we must have our environment restored before anybody takes a step. We owe a duty to hold them to account, and even if, at the end of the day, they have to leave, there must be a clear programme for restoration.”*

The goodwill messages and interventions from participants showed appreciation of the NDAC for its role in engendering justice in the Niger Delta, and amongst other things, affirmed the need for the government to go beyond early warnings for flood and act by resettling impacted people and providing them livelihood support. Goodwill messages were received from Emmanuel Kuyole of the Ford Foundation, Dr Emmanuel Akpanobong of Adaha Ibibio Elders Forum and Assistant National Organising Secretary of PANDEF, Dr Kenneth Robinson.

Prof G. G. Darah, while giving his solidarity message, stated that there cannot be a

Nigeria without the Niger Delta. He noted that *“the wealth of the region has been used to enrich other states of the federation to the impoverishment of the Niger Delta.”* He also decried the economic colonization of the Niger Delta, especially since 1969, when the Petroleum Decree Number 51 apportioned all oil and gas resources to the federal government of Nigeria. This decree still stands to date, even after the change to civilian rule.

The keynote address was titled ‘Almost Seven Decades of Hydrocarbon Extraction: Imperatives for Socio-Ecological Justice in the Niger Delta’ and delivered by Prof. Ibibia Lucky Worika. He posited that the *“lack of proper environmental accountability and integrity on the part of the oil and gas companies operating in this region over the decades has resulted in colossal damage to the environmental and human rights of local inhabitants. On the other hand, the failure of effective regulatory controls of the oil and gas operations has helped worsen the situation.”* Prof. Worika ended his address with a poem by Hygenius Ekwuazi titled *“Pictures I’ve Tucked Away in My Memory.”* The poem depicts the situation of life in the Niger Delta, where people have been dispossessed of their lands and water—a sad tale that has become the lived experience of the people. This was further emphasised in a panel session on ‘Living with Oil - Historical and Contemporary Realities of



entities— culprits, connivers and condoners— that are responsible for the huge ecological damage the Niger Delta suffers. Relevant frameworks and laws were examined together with possible legal actions and alternatives. Some recommendations were made, one of which is the adoption and replication of the Bayelsa State Oil and Environment Commission (BSOEC), UNEP Ogoniland and Bodo Mediation Initiative models across the states. It was also recommended that Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Delta States (BRACED) governors should have a meeting with the presidency for the urgent inauguration of the Niger Delta Environmental Assessment and Remediation Programme; and with CEOs/ beneficial owners of oil and gas companies for urgent action towards a zero-pollution accord. Another recommendation was that the Bayelsa State government should implement the BSOEC/ Sentamu Report. Iniruo Wills also noted the critical need to quantify the losses suffered in economic and non-economic terms.



Hydrocarbon Extraction in the Niger Delta.'

At the end of the 3rd NDAC, resolutions were reached that Nigeria's energy transition must be centred on community consensus for it to be just and sustainable. Another resolution was that Section 257 of the PIA should be expunged because it criminalizes the communities and wrongly passes the responsibility of protecting oil infrastructure to communities that have neither the resources nor the capacity to carry out that function. Also, part of the resolutions was that ecological remediation must be carried out by the polluting companies, and their land use rights should be revoked by the state governments if they fail to do so. Again, there must be impacts (environmental, health, economic and social) assessment of the nearly 70 years of oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the region. Taking a gender dimension, a resolution was reached for the recognition that women are disproportionately affected by oil and gas exploration and exploitation, hence the need for conscious actions that address their peculiar needs.

Iniruo Wills Esq had a presentation on 'Legal Alternatives for Socio-Ecological Justice in the Niger Delta: Options for Divestment and the Petroleum Industry Act.' The presentation identified three broad categories of people or

**Photo credit:**  
Christmas tree in Ogoni ,  
Rivers State  
- ERA/FoEN





# DRIVING THE RECOVERY OF SACRIFICE ZONES

By HOMEF Project Team

**E**xtractivism has converted resource-rich and once-pristine areas across Africa into sacrifice zones. The land, soil, vegetation, waters and air in these zones suffer from massive despoliation and pollution, leaving the peoples of these zones in desolation and lack. Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) held another session of its School of Ecology (SoE) in collaboration with the Niger Delta University (NDU) on 1-2 August 2024.

The SoE, themed ‘Recovering Oil Sacrifice Zones,’ aimed to build, expand and strengthen communities’ eco-defenders’ network, which serves as a vanguard in the push for the clean-up of the polluted Niger Delta and in advocating for a just, equitable and inclusive energy transition in Nigeria. To achieve its aim, the SoE dealt with four major topics, namely the Origins of Sacrifice zones — Colonial Extraction, Capitalism; The spreading Cancer — Extractivism and Dependency; Templates for action — Voices from the Front Lines; Monitoring and Resistance; and Building the Movement.

Prior to the presentations, the SoE participants—including academic/

non-academic staff and students of NDU, representatives from some impacted communities in the Niger Delta (e.g. Otuabagi, Ikarama, and some communities in Ogoni and Akwa Ibom state, etc.), and civil society organisations—shared their expectations for the August 2024 edition of the SoE.

The key expectations included increased knowledge of oil sacrifice zones within the Niger Delta, possible processes of recovering the zones, and ways to make long-lasting positive impacts in the communities constituting these sacrifice zones. The participants also hoped that the School would provide them with answers to their wide-ranging questions, such as who will bear the ecological debts when resources are no longer available in the sacrifice zones.

The SoE session was born out of the need to stop the expansion of sacrifice zones and hold the culprits responsible for the ecological debt owed to these zones.

While giving his opening talk, the director of HOMEF, Nnimmo Bassey, pointed out that the sacrificed zones exist not only in the Niger Delta area but also in other regions of Nigeria, as well as in other countries in

**Extractivism has converted resource-rich and once-pristine areas across Africa into sacrifice zones.**

Africa, including South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, South Sudan, Liberia, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Togo, Mozambique, Namibia and Botswana.

Mr Bassey referred to the Niger Delta as a privatized and sacrificed zone as common goods have been taken over by private interests, so much so that these goods—the natural resources—can no longer be utilized by the owners to develop their communities. Above all, the 68 years of commercial oil extraction in the Niger Delta, which has left the region polluted, shows how much of a sacrifice zone the Niger Delta has become.

*“One evidence that the Niger Delta is a polluted and sacrificed zone lies in the August 2011 UNEP report of the degradation in Ogoni. The May 2023 Bayelsa State Oil and Environment Commission (BSOEC) report titled ‘An Environmental Genocide’ is another evidence,”*

Bassey stated while regretting that the federal government was yet to acknowledge the existence of the Bayelsa report. According to the report, every individual living in the state has been contaminated by at least one and half barrels of crude oil. *“This [level of pollution] has happened nowhere else in the world,”* Bassey asserted. According to the report, carbon contamination of the water bodies in Bayelsa is a million times over the allowed quantity according to global standards.

Why are these zones being sacrificed? What are the root causes? Tijah Bolton Akpan, a

development practitioner and director of Policy Alert, offered some explanations while presenting on the topic ‘Global Economic Model Flaws, a Precursor of Climate Change.’

According to Mr Bolton, Africa’s economy is driven by wrong models: *“Profit has been prioritized over people and planet,”* he stated. This, according to him, is why there are sacrifice zones in regions like the Niger Delta.

Political and economic ideologies guide key actions in a society. Where a country sits in the ideological spectrum determines how it acts or whether it acts at all when it comes to issues of sacrificed zones, which happen to be areas in need of real climate actions.

Mr Bolton stated that the *“Neoliberal economic approach [which is visible across Africa] believes that the market is [both] a problem and solution.”* So, issues such as the climate crisis are the result of market failure, and the solution will lie in market-driven solutions. The neoliberal economic approach considers the market to be supreme and, hence, blocks interference from the state. According to Mr Bolton, how negotiations play out in global spaces is also linked to the economic ideology in focus. The ideology at play will determine what results are targeted—whether equality (placing all on the same level), equity (considering the disadvantaged) or justice (going beyond equality and equity to prioritise removing impediments).

While neoliberalism presents a

flat platform, what is needed to help recover oil sacrifice zones is a justice-based approach. A justice-based approach dismantles the structures that created the problem in the first place. This approach believes that the market should be the driver of society.

Tijah Bolton also called for the need to embrace ‘eco-socialism’ as an economic model that avails the global South of the opportunity to grow by investing in their adaptation rather than continuing in fossil extraction. Such a model, he believes, can help tackle greenhouse gas emissions and spur investment in the building of climate justice movements that counter false solutions, redistribute power to the people and strengthen works towards a just transition while considering gender dimensions and inter-generational justice.

When Ikal Angelei, Director of Friends of Lake Turkana, spoke on the ‘Commodification of Nature: Land and Sea Grabs (from Black Carbon to Blue Carbon),’ she iterated the fact that everything that the daily lives of Africans depended on has been price-tagged: “Our

**“ Africa’s economy is driven by wrong models: “Profit has been prioritized over people and planet ”**

**“Without solidarity and harmonizing, Africa cannot achieve much. Solidarity is the highest form of love and care that we can show to each other. We are each other’s business”**



ecosystem is priced. Carbon markets allow the polluters to continue polluting.” Her presentation brought to the front burner the question of who calculates the carbon emissions.

This question is also based on recent reports from the Federal Government of Nigeria that the biggest contributor to climate change is the agricultural sector due to the release of methane, which is more harmful than carbon. This report shows how unwilling the government of Nigeria is when it comes to cutting emissions from the oil and gas industry and the possibility of externalizing the cost of emissions to smallholder farmers.

Ikal Angelei also spoke of how corporations are now moving towards capturing parts of Africa, including the mangrove forests in Nigeria, for blue carbon.

Ruth Nyambura, Kenyan feminist and convener of Ramani Collective, spoke on ‘Growth, Capitalism, Sacrifice Zones and Climate Debt: The Cost of Growth.’ In her electrifying talk, she avowed that all the 54 independent countries on the African continent do not have economic sovereignty, which she said is one of the key reasons why most laws and policies in Africa do not reflect the day-to-day struggles of the African people.

Ms Nyambura raised several issues, including expanding sacrifice zones and the real growth deficit across Africa. She reminded participants that the so-called global

organisations like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) protect and prioritize the interests of transnational corporations from the global North. The adoption of public-private partnerships at the national level, where private companies continue to benefit from the resources of the people to the detriment of the citizens, has become the order of the day. Africa faces the complexities of false solutions. This is exemplified in places like Tanzania, where the needs of the people are sacrificed at the altar of tourism. Corporations are pushing for so-called nature-based solutions that are leading further into the commodification of nature and peoples.

Ruth Nyambura believes that the solution to the myriad problems facing Africa(ns) lies in the ability of Africans to focus on liberation. This is what Africans need in order to organise against capitalism and change the status quo.

She called on the peoples of Africa to synergise and join forces in order to focus on the same issues. This is because the struggle in one community at one end of Africa means something for the struggle of others at another end of Africa. Africans must rise together to contest and expose the hegemonic narratives.

*“Without solidarity and harmonizing, Africa cannot achieve much. Solidarity is the highest form of love and care that we can show to each other. We are each other’s business,”* Ruth Nyambura concluded.

In another presentation, Babawale Obayanju, climate justice campaigner with Friends of the Earth Nigeria, spoke on 'Communities on the Front Lines: Mined, Dispossessed and Abandoned.' He began with Thomas Sankara's saying, which illustrated the need for a people to work towards understanding the situations that they are in, as this is the only way to have the needed conviction to fight justly and effectively.

He challenged SoE participants to state their understanding of key concepts like 'frontline communities.' Participants' responses indicated that people understood frontline communities as a) the impacted, oil-bearing or resource-rich communities facing immediate or disproportionate impacts of climate change, b) communities whose voices are often neglected in policy formulations despite the role that they can play, and c) communities experiencing the worst impacts of climate change felt directly on their economy, social life, health and otherwise.

Some other SoE scholars mentioned that they consider their communities as frontline states. Some of the communities they mentioned include Otuabagi (host to Oloibiri oil fields), Ikarama and Goi (severely impacted communities), and Joinkrama (impacted by flood).

The frontline communities were, thus, identified as communities that have served and continue to serve as sacrificial lambs to nation-states like Nigeria, who profit therefrom. They are communities that are polluted, with no social amenities, communities dislocated and not respected, with no protection at all for economic growth and development.

The causes of the sufferings of frontline communities were identified to include capitalism, market-driven policies and colonialism, which are the factors creating sacrifice zones. According to Mr Babawale, colonialism

has continued with international policies that subjugate nations so that they can be controlled by other nations. Putting an end to these issues requires Africans to build courage like the Kenyans, globalize struggles and solidarity, connect to the grassroots and frontline struggles, and put people in control of energy.

Speaking on the topic 'Hidden Tears, Divestment and Sacrifice in Frontier Zones,' Nnimmo Bassey decried the fact that oil wells in the Oloibiri oil field in Otuabagi were never decommissioned. Oil seepage from the Christmas trees of these oil wells has continued even after oil exploration stopped in the Oloibiri field since the 1970s. Also worrisome is the nature of the oil multinationals' divestment. Aside from divesting without taking responsibility for reparation and cleanup of ecosystems damaged by their activities, the oil multinationals are selling off their assets to companies with much less capacity for responsible and clean operations.

Shell, for example, was found to be divesting to a company that lacked the financial capacity to buy its divested onshore assets and had to loan the buying company, Renaissance, \$1.2 billion to buy the assets. Another troubling issue highlighted is that the Nigerian government does not know how much oil is extracted from Nigeria. Again, the federal government stated that 30% of NNPC's profit goes to frontier zones—Bauchi, Gombe, Lagos, and offshore—despite reports that the NNPC is not making any profit. If the government succeeds, these frontier zones will become sacrifice zones.

After these presentations on Day 1 of the School, SoE scholars engaged in a group exercise tagged 'Mapping the Hotspots.' There, four clusters of scholars dotted inside the map of the Niger Delta to attempt to identify the

**“Africans  
...build courage  
...globalize  
struggles and  
solidarity,  
connect to the  
grassroots  
and frontline  
struggles, and  
put people  
in control of  
energy.”**

sacrifice zones in their various states.

On Day 2, African senior advisor at Oil Change International, Thuli Makama, opened the day with his discussion on the topic 'Halting the Ecological Blight on African Deltas and Heritage Zones (from Niger Delta to Okavango, Saloum Delta, Albertine Rift Valley and others).' In her talk, she strongly condemned the power and influence of the fossil fuel industry, which sees the industry enjoying supremacy over other forms of life.

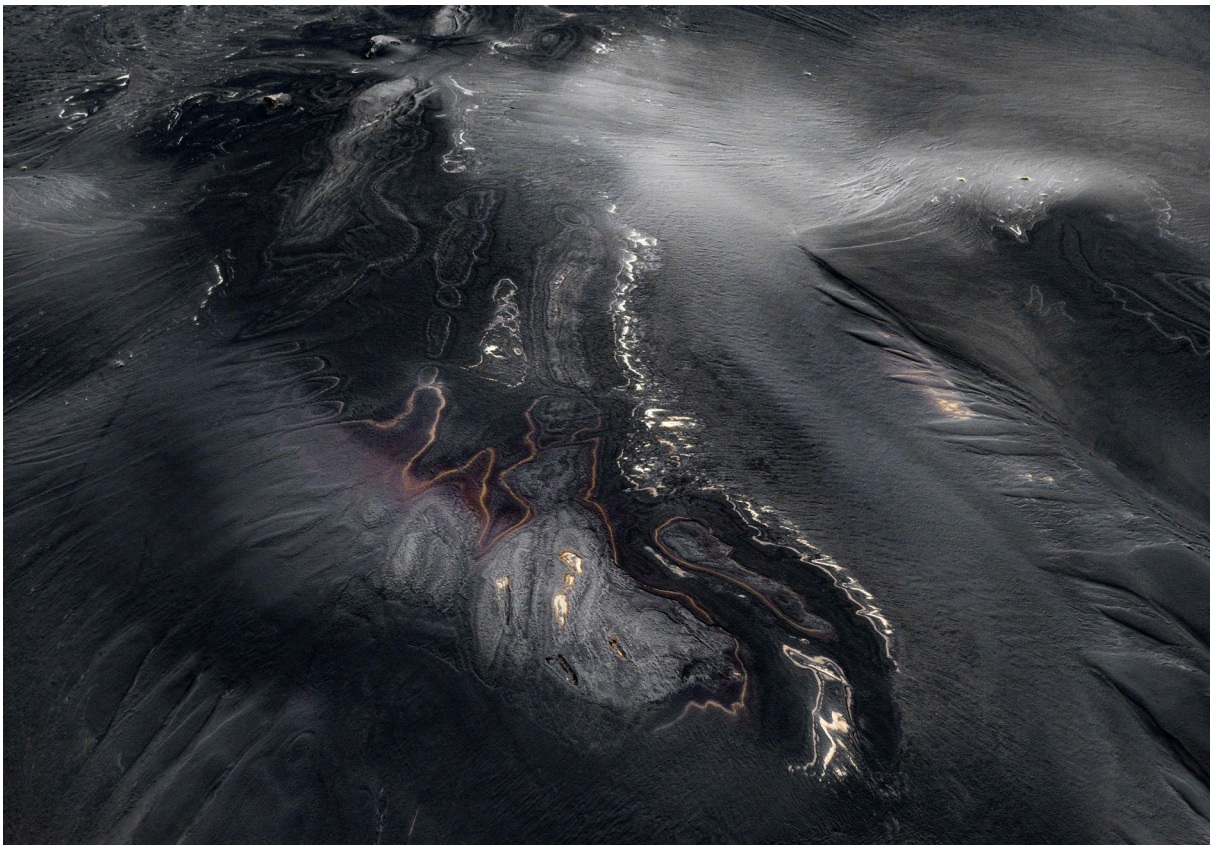
According to Thuli Makama, nothing seems to be able to stop the extractive companies when they want to go into areas in Africa that have been protected for decades by communities and Indigenous Peoples. Despite the decades of destruction in the Niger Delta and the resistance from communities in the Okavango basin in Namibia and Botswana, the fossil industry found its way into the Okavango Delta.

Ms Makama explained the unfortunate situation where the conservation sector now uses force to protect biodiversity-rich spaces from the original owners, but these

areas are becoming hotspots for the fossil and mineral industry. The spaces hold what the industry calls critical minerals for industrial production. While nothing has been done to lift the people of the Niger Delta and other African deltas out of energy poverty, resources from the deltas are moved through pipelines and tankers to economies and people of the global North.

Africans need to come together and turn the tide, knowing that the struggles in Namibia, Botswana, Senegal, Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa are not isolated. Thuli Makama encouraged the scholars to use the knowledge they gained from spaces like the SoE to think critically about issues like what the energy transition means for Africans. What are Africans transitioning from? Do most Africans have access to energy?

Ms Makama believes that "Basic energy access is what the African continent needs." The campaign should, hence, be for just access to clean energy and locally generated energy sources. She implored the scholars to go for narratives that are



helpful to the development of the African continent, not narratives for further exploitation of the continent.

Presenting on 'Eti-Uwem: Measures of wellbeing, Re-source democracy and Conflict Resolution (Environmental Justice and Right to Life and Dignity),'

Nnimmo Bassey attempted to connect the desire for having 'the good life' to the need for recovering and stopping the expansion of sacrifice zones.

*Eti-Uwem* means 'the good life' in the Ibibio language. Some scholars mentioned words in their local languages that mean the good life: *Aka-nju* in Eleme, *Enughoman* in Obebaror-Ogbia and *Ebi-akpo* in central Ijaw (spoken in Ekeremor). Nnimmo Bassey talked about re-sourcing democracy and conflict resolution as indicators of the good life.

He explained that re-sourcing means going back to the source and the consciousness that natural resources are gifts from nature. He considers remediation, restoration, regeneration and reparation to be key to conflict resolution.

To buttress the legal path to securing sacrifice zones, Iniruo Wills, a lawyer and former commissioner for the environment in Bayelsa State, spoke on 'EIA: Tool for Resisting Destructive Extractives and Demanding Accountability, and Reparations.'

According to Mr Wills, instruments of law are used to bring about transition (from the undesired to the desired). One such instrument is the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). He further stated that "*Vacuum in awareness and action is part of the factors leading to the desire for physical protests.*"

*We must use resources and tools available to us to take action.*" He made a case for the Otuabagi people, stating that research found out that 80 women in Otuabagi had traces of crude oil in their blood. People suffer from

badly designed projects for the rest of their lives.

The absence of EIA can be directly linked to rig explosions and other disasters in the fossil fuel industry. Mr Wills noted that EIA is usually misapplied in Nigeria and warned that the EIA is not perfunctory but a planning and decision-making tool that becomes a legal document once approved and, thus, can be used for litigation.

Further, Stephen Oduware, programme manager at HOMEF, spoke on the role of monitoring in recovering sacrifice zones in his presentation titled 'Standing for the Earth: Ecological monitoring (Forests, Mines, Desertification).'

According to Mr Oduware, monitoring and reporting must go hand in hand. Again, whatever is monitored must be measured against certain baselines through habitat mapping and documentation.

He showed the scholars maps portraying dead zones (marine environments with no oxygen content) scattered across the planet. The maps identified over 500 dead zones, more than 75% degraded land and the biggest miners in the world (China, US, Russia, Australia, India, etc.).

While presenting on another topic, 'NDAC Manifesto and NSAC Charter: Brakes on Sacrifice and Transformation Acceleration in Nigeria,' Mr Oduware explained that the Niger Delta Alternatives Convergence (NDAC) manifesto was drawn up because the Niger Delta region was recognized as a sacrifice zone needing collective action to take it out of the hands of its polluters.

He stated that the Niger Delta is a region sick from crude oil and impacted by climate change, with increasing death rates, decreasing life expectancy, episodic floods, etc. The NSAC was later created to escalate

the conversation to the national level, as extractivism cuts across different regions in Nigeria.

The SoE session ended with the scholars presenting the result of their sacrifice zone mapping done on Day 1.

The mapping showed 77 sacrifice zones across states in the Niger Delta. The aim of the mapping exercise was to create a community of practice. At the close of the SoE session, certificates of participation were issued to the scholars.



# Mäkətäfia as the Tree of Life

by Tekle Belachew

the Mäkətäfia,  
the chopping board  
the chopped pieces of the board  
had been eaten,  
unknowingly.  
without reckoning,  
regularly consumed.  
years and years of indebtedness,  
untold.  
bloody vivid sacrifices,  
invisible.  
eating mixed nourishment,  
bereft of gratitude.

everyday gifts received,  
yet unacknowledged.  
everyday heroines,  
unnoticed,  
barely celebrated.

tree of Life,  
descended,  
lodged among us,  
into our humble kitchens,  
in our smokehouses,  
the Sun of righteousness,

shone for us,  
oh, love motherly,  
oh, love divine.

fleetingly celebrated,  
habitually  
and severely persecuted.  
touched and kissed,  
only to be handed over.

repeatedly  
slapped,  
beaten and mocked.  
scar markedly,  
scratched, flogged,  
and knifed.  
life on the tree hanged,  
and lynched.

on the cross, the tree of life  
cursed.  
willingly,  
laid oneself as a sacrifice.

the Good Shepherd,



hungered – but feeds the hungry multitude.  
silently – as sheep, offered.  
divine-self-donation,  
to all creatures.

shouldering the guilt-burden,  
like a scapegoat,  
vanished into the wilderness.

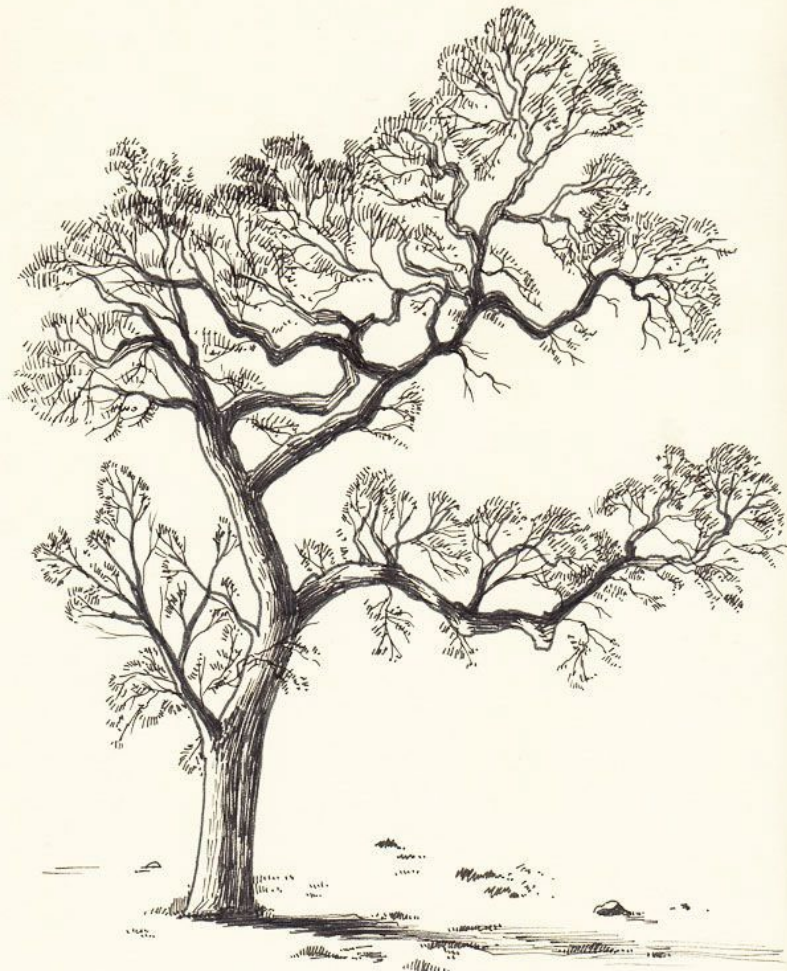
as a mother hen,  
gathered her young chicks  
under her wings  
often refused.

on the wood,  
the wounded healer,  
pierced.  
the rain-maker,  
thirsted.  
sustainer-of-the-universe,  
hanged.  
the tree of life,  
cursed.  
heavenly manna,  
presented.

the bread of life,

feast of the fruit,  
from the tree of life,  
overflows nourishment,  
of the giver, extended as the gift.  
being the priest,  
offered,  
becoming the ultimate sacrifice.

[*Tekle Belachew's inspiration for the poem came from Tamerat Siltan's artworks on Mākētāfia or Mākētāfwa*  
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# Walking in Peace with the Earth

By Alberto Acosta and Enrique Viale

*“There is no path to peace; peace  
is the path.”*

**Gandhi**

**Let us accept, without  
beating about the  
bush, that humanity is  
at a crossroads. If we  
continue on the same  
path, at best, only a  
fraction of its members  
will be able to survive  
the impending ecological  
apocalypse. Accepting  
this fate is intolerable.**

We need a change of direction, with transitions that simultaneously allow us to alleviate the impacts of the collapse that overwhelms us while shoring up, building, and rebuilding other forms of life limited to ecological cycles in terms of social justice and radical democracy.

To achieve this, let us build alternatives to escape the current civilization of

merchandise and waste, as Picasso would do when he painted his great works. The artist from Malaga used to superimpose several different perspectives of the same image until he created a painting that masterfully unites the beautiful and the abstract. Recognizing the complexity of the task, let us use his method to propose multiple options - overlapping, temporal and successive - in the face of the nonsense created by the civilization of capital.

Therefore, today, more than ever, it is necessary to multiply efforts to walk in Peace with Nature in Our America, which is pulled by opposing forces, some encouraging more and more destruction and others defending it. In Argentina, the government reinforces extractivism and threatens to dismantle



Photo by Ryan Arnst on unsplash.com

environmental laws, proposing a hunt for environmentalists and exacerbating inequality and social conflict under an authoritarian regime that prioritizes corporate interests. In Ecuador, a transitional government celebrates agreements with large mining corporations while unleashing violent actions against communities defending their territories, further deepening the exploitation of natural resources. In other countries, even with progressive governments, such as Brazil

and Colombia, the expansion of extractivism of all kinds continues. Meanwhile, resistance to efforts to protect territories as spaces of life is on the increase globally.

Against this conflictive scenario, we welcome the Colombian government's commitment to prioritize *Peace with Nature* as a central theme at the United Nations Conference on Biodiversity - COP 16, to be held at the end of the year in Cali, Colombia.

Human Rights and the Rights of Nature are best described as a life duo.

The defence and protection of territories are fundamental for living together in peace. The destruction of Nature affects the very foundations of existence and exacerbates social conflicts. To overcome this path towards self-destruction, we must promote the combined enforcement of Human Rights and the Rights of Nature: a sum of existential rights to guarantee the dignified life of

human and non-human beings.

As a starting point, let us accept that there can be no right that permits or encourages the merciless exploitation of Mother Earth, let alone its destruction, but only a right to ecologically sustainable coexistence. Human laws and actions must harmonize and agree with the laws of Nature. From this perspective, the validity of these existential rights responds to the material conditions that allow their crystallization and not to a mere formal recognition in the legal field. Their projection, therefore, must overcome the approaches that understand rights as watertight compartments since their incidence must be multiple, diverse, and transdisciplinary.

The task seems simple, but it is complex. We know that law is a disputed terrain. The challenge is to overcome the divorce between Nature and Humanity. It is necessary to bring about a reunion, something like retying *the Gordian knot of life* broken by the force of a predatory and unsustainable civilizing conception. In other words, we need to overcome the ideological division between Nature and culture. By splicing the two, even politics takes on a renewed relevance.

This recognition leads us to see how humans, especially when organized around capital accumulation, are exercising multiple forms of violence, that is, wars against the Earth. It is up to us, then, to overcome this anathema.

It is urgent to stop wars of

all kinds, wars against the Earth and all its inhabitants. Wars that cause damage gradually or violently, often with deep and irreversible impacts on Nature. These are warlike actions derived from socio-environmental relations that emanate from the greed of capital, as well as from asymmetrical, oppressive, and hierarchical structures, such as patriarchy.

In this environment of war, the loss of biodiversity is certain. The fragmentation, degradation, and even disappearance of jungles, forests, rivers, moors, wetlands, mangroves, salt marshes, and other ecosystems, which affect their ecosystemic functions, are still commonplace. As a result, species are also disappearing at an accelerated rate. Devastating fires, gigantic floods caused by climate change, land desertification by monocultures, agrochemical spraying, oil extraction, and mega-mining devastate entire territories.

The ecological footprint of the human species—which is unequally distributed—exceeds the Earth's biological capacity. Poverty, as well as growing social inequality and the destruction of communities, are also worsening as a result of these suicidal wars unleashed by the greed of capitalism.

With good reason, at the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, held in 2021, the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, stated that *"making peace with Nature requires understanding that we are*

*facing a triple crisis that intertwines climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss; it is a suicidal war against Nature, for without it, Humanity could not exist on the planet."*

To promote the peace called for by Guterres, we must begin by understanding that *"the capitalist way of life exists by suffocating life and the world of life; this process has been taken to such an extreme that the reproduction of capital can only occur to the extent that it destroys both human beings and Nature"* in the words of the Ecuadorian philosopher Bolivar Echeverria.

Let's face it: the disconnection of human beings from nature has provoked a fierce war against it. We have not yet understood that Nature has its own cycles, which cannot be affected by humans without it reacting and rebelling. Let us understand that the growing commodification of life in all its aspects is a mined path that leads inexorably to *terracide*.

**"As a starting point, let us accept that there can be no right that permits or encourages the merciless exploitation of Mother Earth, let alone its destruction, but only a right to ecologically sustainable coexistence."**

It's time for us to intensify actions towards overcoming life-stifling civilisation. To make peace with the Earth implies, then, to have agendas agreed upon by the peoples for action to overcome the prevailing devices of death. To achieve this, we need to identify all the wars that attack the Earth in their multiple fronts and forms.

Our civilisational axis is an economic system that systematically overexploits and contaminates our basis of existence. Productivism and consumerism mercilessly bombard Mother Earth. Extractivisms represent brutal invasions of multiple territories. Monocultures and false solutions, such as carbon markets or transgenic seeds, brutally undermine biodiversity. The homogenisation of consumption accelerates the rhythms of destruction with enormous environmental impacts due to the distant transportation of food, to mention just one critical point.

In addition to all this, there are conflagrations between peoples or against peoples, such as the genocide unleashed by the Zionist State in Palestine, which devastates not only humans but also Nature itself.

At the same time, we must confront those covert wars. We are referring to the ways of perceiving, interpreting, and experiencing Nature, which is based, in particular, on that civilizing assumption that considers humans to be outside and even above it to dominate it. This positioning

implies a warlike impulse immersed in epistemic and ontological violence that ends up encouraging climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, as well as all kinds of depredations of Nature, always in the name of "progress" and "development". And all of this with a perverse reverence for the potential of science and technology, which on many occasions also act as weapons of environmental destruction.

These visions lead to the maintenance of a cultural universe, which, in essence, imposes on us the idea that there is only one way of being in the world. By denying the *pluriverse*, biological diversities are made invisible, scorned, violated, or even eliminated, as well as existing cultural diversities. From this arises the standardization of the concept of Nature, closing the door to other visions, many of them carrying powerful transforming elements. For this reason, it is better to speak of Earth in a cosmic key rather than simply of Nature, a concept that can hold different interpretations.

In other words, we must take on all these challenges without falling into the trap of simply negotiating limits or patches to continue tolerating pollution and the destruction of the basis of life itself, as has been done in all the COPs so far. This nonsense could be repeated in Cali, no matter how well-intentioned the Colombian government may be, because we know that in the framework of the United Nations, the will of governments and corporations is imposed, and

**“There is a plurality of ways of being with Nature and of being Nature since we humans are Nature.”**

not necessarily that of the peoples.

Walking with Peace while recognising that pluriverse is the key is the way to go. From the perspective of Peace with the Earth, we must accept and respect diversity in all aspects: lives, cultures, thoughts, and, of course, biodiversity. That is to say, there is a plurality of ways of being with Nature and of being Nature since we humans are Nature. This acceptance opens the door to understanding the different ways of assuming it as Pacha Mama or Mother Earth, as well as many other ways of relating to Nature coming from the *Indigeneity*: as our friend Aníbal Quijano understood it. Here, there is room for some readings that could be understood as derived from Modernity itself but which, in essence, also point to its overcoming.

All these are not approaches that close horizons to partial visions. On the contrary, they open them by promoting other worldviews, encouraging the *pluriverse*, that is, “a world where many worlds fit together,” a world in which all human and non-human beings



Photo by Humphrey Muleba on unsplash.com

can coexist and prosper in dignity and mutual respect. No more “one developed world” living at the expense of other worlds, as is currently the case in our world.

Having said this, Peace on Earth does not only imply the silencing of weapons. It also demands the halting of all the processes that cause irreversible damage to the environment of which we are a part, damage that affects local communities and humanity, and damage that often constitutes *ecocide*. This task requires building worlds based on reciprocity, relationality, complementarity, correspondence, resonance, and solidarity.

While actions that destroy our environment are being stopped, we need to encourage the construction

and reconstruction of other forms of socially and ecologically sustainable life. All this demands a *Copernican turn* in all orders to leave behind the current civilisation, which must be structurally overcome. “*The world must be turned upside down*” because the Earth “*could be healed only with the reversal of established values and the revolution of economic priorities,*” concludes the ecofeminist philosopher Carolyn Merchant.

At present, alternative actions are multiplying in different areas and from different territories. If we pay close attention and—figuratively speaking—silence the noises around us, we might be able to hear the breathing of the future. There are countless processes attuned to the pluriverse, as well

as proposals for structural changes. At this point, visions, values, principles, experiences, and practices such as those of the *Buen Vivir* coming from the native cultures, without idealizing them to the useless level of models or essentializing them ignoring their limitations, represent opportunities to promote profound changes.

Making Peace with the Earth also entails recognizing its agency and the network of socio-cultural relations that are immersed in it. It is a matter of repairing polluted territories and dismantling destructive infrastructures, as well as changing unsustainable production systems and predatory consumption practices. This invites us to appeal to imagination and audacity. We need to move,



in the words of the great theologian Leonardo Boff, *“from being lords and masters to being brothers and sisters among ourselves and with all creatures. This new perspective implies a new ethic of shared responsibility, care, and synergy with the Earth.”*

In this context, the Rights of Nature—ecological justice—walking hand in hand with Human Rights—social justice—give us clues to face ecosocial collapse, as well as to promote and build all the alternatives that guarantee a dignified life for all beings on Earth. In other words, these existential rights serve to repair, restore the environment and prevent degradation while laying the foundations for building global existential justice.

Land is a basic condition for life, equity and freedom. If we accept that a new ethic is necessary to reorganise life on the planet, we must accept that all living beings have the same ontological value, which does not imply that they are all identical. This approach articulates the notion of *“biocentric equality”*, in which, according to Eduardo Gudynas, all living species have the same importance and, therefore, deserve to be protected. In this endeavour, we need to create conditions that guarantee respect for the people and communities that protect their territories, which, in reality, is a form of self-defence of the Earth itself.

It is time to understand that

Nature is the basic condition of our existence; therefore, it is also the basis of collective and individual rights of freedom. Just as individual freedom can only be exercised within the framework of the rights of other humans, individual and collective freedom can only be exercised within the framework of the Rights of Nature. If we think of our grandsons and granddaughters, i.e. future generations, we may as well conclude that their existence and freedom depend on our respect for Nature. The German jurist Klaus Bosselmann rightly notes that *“without the Rights of Nature, freedom is an illusion.”*

It is equally urgent to dismantle the patriarchal and colonial structures that provoke and reproduce multiple forms of violence. It will be necessary to crystallize the collection of colonial and ecological debts, in which the nations enriched by the exploitation of other peoples and territories are the debtors. It will also be necessary to dismantle the current world economic system, with all its tools of domination, such as the foreign debt, which forms a predatory machinery of life.

In this journey, there will be advances and setbacks. But, to the extent that a broad and diverse participation of peoples, collectives, organisations, and individuals is achieved, at no time can we lose hope, which we do not assume simply as the belief that something will inevitably turn out well, but rather as the certainty that what we do has meaning, regardless of the outcome.

If we humans do not reestablish peace with the Earth, there will be no possibility of peace for us on Earth, which is understandably rebelling against the destruction that we are causing.

We are certain that in this harmonious and loving reunion with Mother Earth, we will be able to count on her enormous capacity for resilience and recovery because she is a true Mother and is on our side when we act rightly.

*[Alberto Acosta is an Ecuadorian economist, and Enrique Viale is an Argentine environmental lawyer. They are co-authors of a forthcoming book on the issues addressed in this article. Both of them are judges of the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature and members of the Ecosocial, Intercultural Pact of the South.]*

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# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT, A TOOL FOR RESISTING DESTRUCTIVE EXTRACTIVES

By Iniruo Wills

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The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) can be described as a living, ongoing document guiding the entire lifecycle of a project, for example, up to the time when an installation is meant to be dismantled (maybe after 20 years) to return the project environment to its original look.

**“ It is crucial to note that the EIA is not a perfunctory rite, but a planning and decision-making tool meant to be on the ground prior to the commencement of projects, that is, before even a contract (for the project) is awarded (especially for government projects) or even before budgeting.”**

Generally, the EIA is a process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project, factoring in the interrelated physical, socio-economic, cultural and health impacts of the project.

This evaluation is carried out in order to weigh the overall benefits of a planned project against likely adverse effects and decide whether or not to approve the implementation of the project and, if approved, how to mitigate or ameliorate adverse impacts.

It is crucial to note that the EIA is not a perfunctory rite, but a planning and decision-making tool meant to be on the ground prior to the commencement of projects, that is, before even a contract (for the project) is awarded (especially for government projects) or even before budgeting. As such, the

pronouncement “We’re in a hurry to develop” is not an excuse to ignore undertaking an EIA.

This is not exactly the practice in Nigeria at the moment, where the EIA process is either completely disregarded or the process begins when the contractor is already at work in the field.

The EIA process is governed by the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, No. 86 of 1992, listed under the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN 2004).

The law prohibits the commencement of projects and activities without prior consideration of environmental effects, with exemptions to be issued only by the “President or the Council,” and for projects during national emergencies or in the interest of public health or safety. Examples of projects for which EIA is mandatory



**“Nigeria was, in fact, created for the extraction of resources and handed over to this small group, who continue to enslave the people.”**

are agricultural production activities covering an area of 500 hectares or more, construction of airports with an airstrip of 2,500 metres upwards, and forestry activities involving the conversion of mangrove swamps covering an area of 50 hectares for industrial, housing and agricultural purposes.

Some other projects for mandatory EIA include the construction of petrochemicals of all sizes, mining activities (including sand dredging involving an area of 50 hectares and above), petroleum activities involving the development of oil and gas fields, the construction of ports, oil refineries, off-shore pipeline exceeding a length of 50 kilometres and petrol, gas or diesel storage depots (not including service stations) with 60,000 and above storage capacity, located within 3 kilometres of residential, commercial or industrial areas.

There are many disasters that compliance with EIA could have saved Nigeria from. NOSDRA records 16,263 oil spills in 17 years (2006 – 2023) across the country; this is over 4,000 tankers or 130 million litres equivalence

of oil spilt into communities and their rivers. However, the agency has a limited record of oil spills in the Niger Delta, as it has only existed for 17 years.

There is, therefore, no official record of 50 years of oil spills, counting from 1956 – 2006, before NOSDRA was created. This does not cover the 68 years of discharge of toxic effluent, without proper treatment, into the rivers. An area of concern with regard to toxic effluent discharge is the Brass Canal, where Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) was found to have been discharging 150,000 barrels of toxic waste (untreated produce water and sludge) daily. Other areas of concern are the Eleme-Okrika axis, where Indorama Eleme Petrochemicals Company Limited is situated, and Onne seaport, where Notore Chemical Industries Limited (Notore), a fertiliser and agro-allied company, has its plant.

There is the issue of non-stop gas flaring in Niger Delta communities, notably in some of the gas-flaring capitals in Bayelsa State, such as Gbarain, Idu, Obagi, etc. International oil companies (IOCs) have for 68 years been the vehicle for extracting

resources for the benefit of a small class of people.

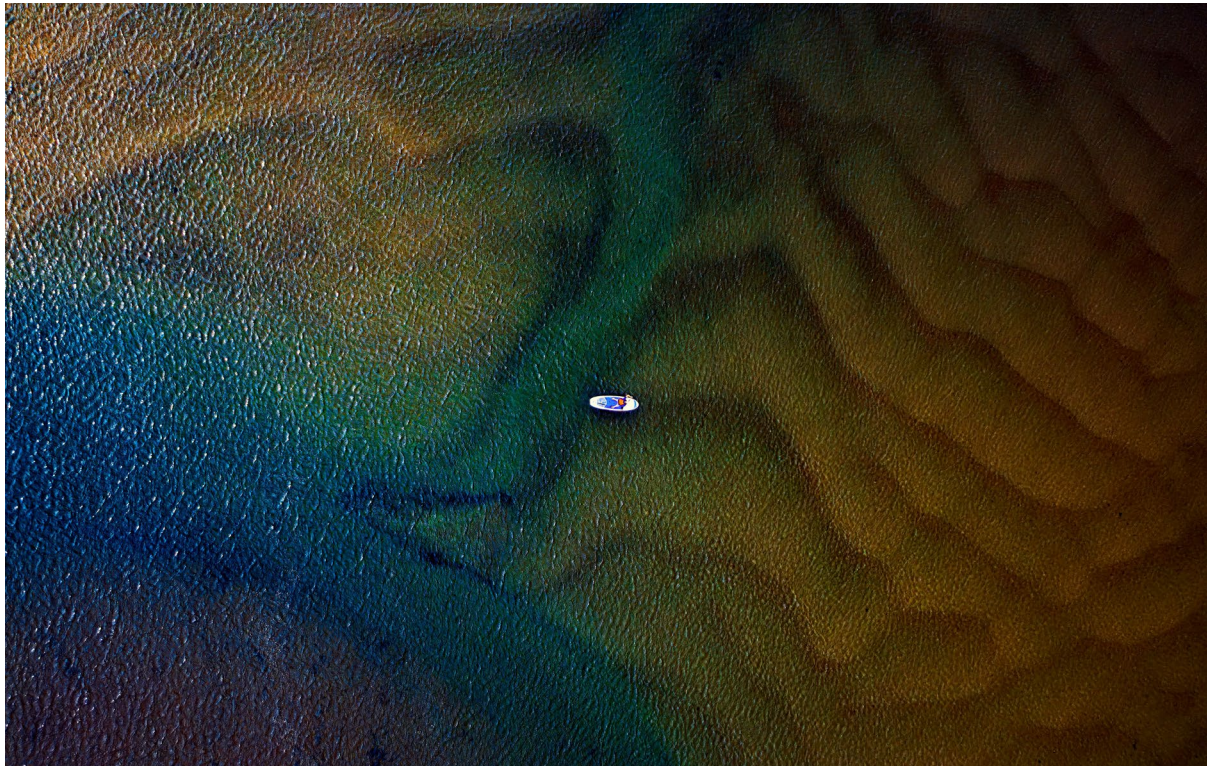
Nigeria was, in fact, created for the extraction of resources and handed over to this small group, who continue to enslave the people. Now, there are new dimensions of the petro-slavery that the Niger Delta suffers: ocean-going oil tankers are now plying Nembe-Brass inland rivers in Bayelsa, posing threats and disrupting community life, economies and ecosystems.

Recently, a major oil spill happened during the loading of crude oil onto one of such ships. New dimensions of petro-pollution are also ongoing in communities like Rumuekpe in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, where it was reported that an oil spill which occurred some years back, polluting the river and farmlands in the Omovire area, suddenly resurfaced.

In Otuabagi, oil well facilities abandoned for over 40 years without being decommissioned have been found spewing oil into the community where oil was first discovered in commercial quantity in Nigeria. In the same community, a sample of 80 women was found to have traces of crude oil in their bloodstream.

There is a report from Ikarama that a person digging a fishpond found crude oil instead in the absence of any known recent oil spill. Could this be a case of osmosis or the land being saturated with oil? The Otuabagi case shows the likelihood of crude oil being in the blood of most people in the Niger Delta.

The Port Harcourt Soot experience is a signal of the shocking result that a chest X-ray of residents in the area will reveal. Polobubo community, formerly known as



**“Where the goal is to stop destruction and get accountability and reparations, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) becomes an authentic instrument to achieve it.”**

Tsekelewu, situated in Egbema Kingdom in Warri North Local Government Area of Delta State, has become a poster community for pollution, experiencing full-scale ecological alteration due to the operations of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Chevron Nigeria Limited and other oil and gas companies in the area.

The legacy of the oil and gas industry has been choking the Niger Delta since 1956! Many of the destructive incidents can be linked to aberrations in the EIA process in Nigeria.

The environment, people, and other beings that constitute the ecosystem will suffer from badly designed projects for the rest of their lives. Some projects that stick out like sore thumbs with regard to the EIA process in Nigeria include the K S Endeavor Rig (Panama) in Koluama, in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, where a gas blowout occurred in 2012 and flamed for over a month.

The Bayelsa Airport is another example, as well as the Coastal Road - constructing such a road when communities around it are below the East-West Road leads to ecological challenges such as flooding.

Where the goal is to stop destruction and get accountability and reparations, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) becomes an authentic instrument to achieve it. This process has to be followed in accordance with what is stated in the EIA Act.

The general EIA process flow begins with an application made to the Federal Ministry of Environment (FMEnv). That is the submission of a project proposal or feasibility study and terms of reference for an EIA study to identify environmental issues and commence the EIA process, except where exempted.

The receiving/responsible “Agency” is NESREA, by virtue of the NESREA Act, or FMEnv. The FMEnv website says that its EIA Division is in charge of implementing the EIA Act.

The second stage is ‘Screening,’ which is the initial environmental evaluation, including site verification. The next is ‘Scoping,’ where the FMEnv reviews and approves the scope of terms of reference. Then, there is the stage for the ‘Execution of EIA’ to be done by a registered consultant.

This is followed by the

'Submission of draft EIA report.' The next stage, 'Review of draft EIA report,' involves an in-house review by the FMEnv, as well as a review by the public, as the draft is put in the public space for 21 days, followed by a panel review. The FMEnv then provides a 'Report of the Review' and gives 'Provisional Approval' to the proponent, who begins preparatory work on the project site while preparing the final EIA report. While the proponent is on-site, the 'Follow-up Programme Assessment Verification/ Impact Mitigation) Monitoring is initiated by the Federal and State Ministries of Environment and responsible groups/persons in the Local Government Area.

This is done to ensure compliance with mitigation measures on the project site. The next stage is the proponent's 'Submission of the final EIA Report to the FMEnv and the Approval of the final EIA report by the FMEnv who, upon approval, issues the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)—outlining the impact of the project on its surrounding environment—and the EIA certificate to the proponent. It is vital to note that from the screening or scoping stage, informed community representatives or independent experts should be inserted into the EIA process.

The minimum content of EIA should include a description of the project and potential affected areas, a description of the practical activities, and an assessment of potential environmental impacts of the project/activity and alternatives. The content must also include the identification and assessment of available

mitigation measures, an indication of gaps in knowledge and uncertainty in computing required information, and a brief and non-technical summary of the EIA.

The issue of public access and participation is critical in the EIA process; hence, it should be promoted early in the EIA process. Sections 7 and 21(3) of the EIA Act mandate the "agency" to allow for and take into consideration comments by government agencies, the public, experts and interested groups before giving a decision on the EIA.

Thus, the EIA report is to be made available to any interested person or group and published in a manner that ensures that the public and interested persons shall be notified (s. 9). A public notice is to be issued upon the submission of a mandatory study report/EIA, for comments (s. 24). Reports of mediators and review panels are to be made public too (s. 38).

The 'Public Registry of EIAs' is to be maintained from the start of EIA (s.55) and contains all EIA records of all approved projects. There is also the 'Annual Statistical Summary of EIAs' to be prepared by the agency (s. 56), including, by implication, a summary of the compliance status of follow-up programmes. This is a lever to tap! It is implied here that the statistical summary of EIAs is part of the registry [s.55(3) & (4)(b)]. But this is not explicit enough.

Now, there is the quasi-judicial flavour that EIA review panels have. The review panels have powers to compel the

attendance of witnesses and the production of evidence, similar to powers vested in the Federal High Court or High Courts of States (s. 37)! Do EIA review panellists know that they have such powers? Do they use them? These are actionable questions that, if answered, can provide actionable assertions with regard to applying the EIA as a tool for resisting destructive extractives and demanding accountability and reparations.

Since there are aberrations in the EIA process in Nigeria, a reform of the process is therefore urgently needed in order to re-institute the EIA as the powerful tool that it is for salvaging our environment.

The following short paragraphs will dwell on some EIA reform proposals. There is a need for role delineation, that is, clarity concerning what agency serves as EIA regulator—National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) for non-extractives while the FMEnv is confined to the policy aspect. It is vital to create an environmental regulator for the extractives sector, including oil and gas, separate from the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), which serves as licensor and the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), which is the spill responder, not regulator.

A reduction of administrative bottlenecks is also vital, especially with regard to the role of the "Council" in routine decisions, for example, referrals to review panels (ss. 25-30). There is also a need for an adequate timeline for the

display of draft EIAs for public review. The display timeline should reach at least 30 days rather than 21. Again, affected communities and concerned stakeholders should get notifications within a specified time upon EIA application to allow early and wide opportunities for making inputs.

Also, in line with the need to create opportunities for wider public access, there is also the need for online hosting of the public registry of EIAs alongside the physical registry.

Another important step to take is to accord court order status to follow-up plans in final EIA reports, especially mitigation plans (just as review panels can summon witnesses). Bold judges would animate the spirit of such plans. Non-compliance with mitigation plans in previous EIAs, even in other projects, should be grounds for instant rejection of an EIA and proposed project/activities.

This necessitates the introduction of serious penalties on proponents and responsible officials for non-compliance with EIA procedures, especially mitigation plans. The current ₦100,000 maximum penalty for corporations is a joke. There is also the need to refine the drafting of the EIA Act for clarity, coherent interpretation and efficacy of implementation, using clear sequencing, syntax and unambiguous phrasing. Concerning advocacy, accountability and action, there is a need for cross-sectional community-level awareness of what EIAs are and how and why communities can be involved in the process—first and foremost! A critical study of issues pertaining to EIA

may reveal a shocking apathy for environmental concerns amongst communities. This brings us to the question:

Are our communities and environment ORPHANS? Why have our leaders refused to be fathers and mothers of our communities? Why don't custodians of our environment care? Where is the difference between Amanyanabos, Governors, Senators, etc. and the polluter companies? Communities can no longer afford to be saboteurs and connivers; our traditional rulers should stand up and defend their communities and the environment.

We need to begin to think and deliberate on how to convert or tame local SABOTEURS, no matter how rich, royal or politically powerful they might be.

As a matter of urgency, we must begin crowdfunding in Nigeria for EIA enforcement and environmental causes. It is time to increase efforts towards building strong intra- and inter-communal networks, engage (and pay) experts, whistleblowers to expose polluters and local saboteurs, go to court, and demand leaders to take the necessary actions.

We must all rise up to defend, reclaim and restore our communities, environment, jobs, prosperity, livelihoods and FREEDOM FROM NEO-SLAVERY. The people have a right to lawful social enforcement. And if local and political leaders do not care to act, the people need to go ahead and lawfully ORGANIZE, STRATEGIZE, ACT!

*[Iniruo Wills is a lawyer with a background in commercial law practice, environmental redress, public governance and development consulting. He is a former commissioner for environment in Bayelsa State and is currently the managing partner of the law firm Ntephe, Smith and Wills.]*



# ANIMATING A CULTURE-BASED, JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

By HOMEF Project Team



Animating a just energy transition in Nigeria has become a critical action that needs to be taken urgently, given the unending environmental degradation and socio-economic challenges wrought by the extractive industry. Much more vital is the need for a just transition that is rooted in the culture of community people who have been custodians of their environment and natural resources for ages, surviving through generations through the sustainable use of their resources.

Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) organised a two-day community dialogue from 22 – 23 July 2024 in Opolo Community, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, to promote a shift to clean energy and sustainable practices that respect the cultural and environmental integrity of local communities. The purpose of the dialogue was, in part, to establish an environmental and climate justice movement from a community and culture-based perspective and to promote local knowledge of climate

change adaptation and mitigation methods.

The dialogue involved 70 community people drawn from community leadership, women groups, Civil Society/Community Based Organisations, and the media. The two-day dialogue featured renditions of songs, artworks, poems, and drama as cultural tools for resisting extractive activities in communities.

At the opening of the dialogue, Cadmus Atake-Enade, HOMEF's Programme Manager, spoke briefly on the urgency of the need for a people-centred approach to energy transition and environmental/climate justice rooted in community traditions and sustainable resource use.

While giving his welcome message, Alagoa Morris, a respectable environmental monitor and activist based in Yenagoa, stressed the importance of unity and shared purpose in achieving community goals. He used the broom parable, "a single broom can be broken easily, but a full bunch of brooms cannot be broken," to illustrate the power of collective action against the destructive impacts of oil extraction. He cited the unique culture of the Ijaw people, where whatever affects one affects all and encouraged the community people to organise and unite. He warned against communities' complete reliance on their leaders, campaigning instead for the people's active participation in decision-making processes.

In the open mic session of the dialogue, the community members shared stories of real-life impacts of the

environmental challenges they face. Chief Mrs Ebikine Nelson, a participant from the Onopa Community, spoke about land grabbing by the government, youth unemployment despite educational qualifications, river pollution, and flood issues. She expressed the community's disappointment with the lack of benefits from infrastructural projects that were initially expected to create jobs for the youth.

Comrade Don Koris Omonivo, another participant, highlighted the persistent problem of oil spills, which have destroyed farmlands and fishing settlements. He criticized the companies for failing to fulfil their corporate social responsibilities and expressed frustration over the peaceful demonstrations that have so far yielded no results. "Our demonstrations have been peaceful so far, but for how long, I can't tell," he lamented.

Chief Jende Zion from the Lasukugbene Community described the oppressive actions of security forces employed to protect crude oil facilities. These forces often burn down fishing settlements and seize fishing gear, further impoverishing the community. Chief Ogidi Egbo, the former paramount ruler of the Opolo Community, lamented the high cost of living and the lack of benefits from their oil resources. He called for job creation and youth training centres to address these issues.

Buolaye George, a community woman working with Kebetkache Women Development and Resource Centre, emphasized the need for unity among communities

and CSOs to amplify their voices and build resistance capacity. "There's a need to build capacity for resistance, to better understand the issues and know how best to go about fighting," she said. Further, Ambassador Comrade Princess Ekpe discussed the devastating impacts of crude oil production on livelihoods, calling for health and environmental audits and the restoration of fishing activities. "These oil companies are not even empowering our people by training them to be self-sufficient," she noted, stressing the need for accountability and remediation.

Ken Henshaw, an award-winning environmental campaigner, outlined the historical progression of energy sources—from biomass to coal, crude oil, and renewable energy—while talking about the energy transition and the pivotal role of communities in the process. He highlighted the importance of transitioning away from fossil fuels due to their destructive environmental and economic impacts.

"Fossils are no longer a viable source of energy. The richest men are those transiting to renewables," he stated, citing Elon Musk and his Tesla products as examples.

Mr. Henshaw also emphasized that a just transition must include environmental and health impact assessments, clean-up and restoration, adequate compensation for affected communities, and be all-inclusive and gender sensitive. This comprehensive approach aims to ensure that the transition benefits all community members and addresses the socio-economic

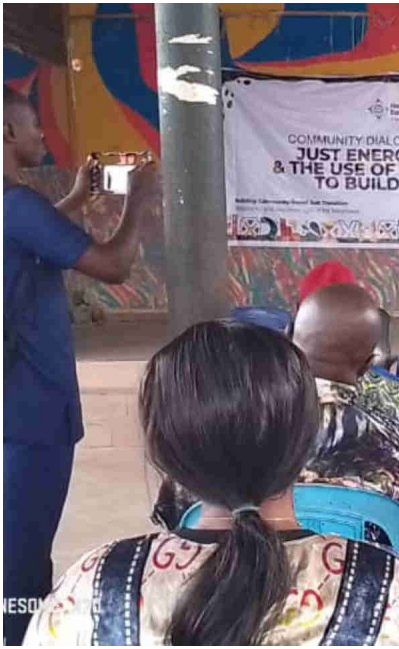
and environmental damages caused by extractive industries.

There were group discussions on three critical topics: identifying the main challenges in the Just Energy Transition process within communities, defining the roles of community leadership in this transition, and developing strategies and implementation plans for a community-centred, Just Energy transition framework.

The participants noted several key challenges within their communities that could hamper the energy transition process. These included the lack of information, infrastructure and alternative renewable energy sources, economic interests of oil and gas stakeholders, internal community resistance, unemployment, and environmental degradation

**"A just transition must include environmental and health impact assessments, clean-up and restoration, adequate compensation for affected communities, and be all-inclusive and gender sensitive."**

in the form of pollution and damage to farmlands and water bodies. Community leaders were recognized as



playing crucial roles in the transition process, with roles encompassing mobilization of community members, sharing of information, continuous advocacy through campaigns, the media, and protests, and organising awareness programmes, as well as fostering unity, ensuring transparency, and promoting gender equality in decision-making.

The participants were also in agreement that community members play crucial roles in sensitization and awareness campaigns, promoting unity in community leadership, ensuring transparency, and encouraging gender-based and equal participation in the decision-making processes. It was also highlighted that leaders are instrumental in developing clean energy strategies and implementation plans that are community-centred and inclusive.

The discussions emphasized the need for community training programmes on solar

installation and other renewable energy technologies, as well as advanced consultation and the involvement of communities in planning and implementing energy transition policies. Community demands, as presented by the participants, included a total clean-up of their water bodies and the payment of compensations for land damages, affordable and environmentally friendly new forms of energy, and regular health audits with improvements in community health services. Additionally, there was a strong desire for knowledge building and opportunities for community members to participate in the new energy transition process to ensure that it accommodates the interests of the environment, including lands, water bodies, and humans.

Day two of the dialogue focused on using cultural tools for resistance against extractive activities. In this regard, Cadmus Atake-Enade emphasized the importance of solidarity, integration, and networking in building a united

resistance. He encouraged community members to stand together and defend each other even when the issues of concern do not affect them directly.

Alagoa Morris recounted the struggles of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the ongoing environmental destruction in the Niger Delta. The fight led by Ken Saro-Wiwa against the environmental destruction by international oil companies in the Niger Delta remains a powerful example of the need for environmental justice. The region's food systems have been devastated by pollution, and significant funds are being spent on protecting oil facilities instead of developing the area to address insecurity and other outcomes of environmental degradation. Unity is essential, as divisive strategies employed by exploiters have caused disunity. According to Comrade Alagoa, music and cultural promotion have played crucial roles in uniting and strengthening resistance movements. He stressed that promoting indigenous languages

and cultural practices among children is vital for preserving cultural integrity and fostering a strong sense of identity. He urged community members to expose wrongdoings, including environmental issues like oil spills and military oppression, and hold leaders accountable.

According to Comrade Alagoa, sharing stories of influential figures, such as Oronto Douglas and Ken Saro-Wiwa, who brought positive changes to their communities, can inspire and guide current and future resistance efforts, ensuring the community remains vigilant and resilient in the face of challenges.

Following Comrade Alagoa's charge, community members shared cultural stories on traditional marriage patterns, burial ceremonies, and cultural festivals while reflecting on how extractive activities and modern sociocultural trends have disrupted these traditions. A participant, Chief Anthony, while discussing the disruptions caused by extractive activities and modern sociocultural trends, mentioned that oil companies have blocked water hyacinth passages, negatively impacting fishing activities and communal life. He reminisced about the traditional communal farming and fishing practices which ensured large-scale cultivation and sustainable fishing, contrasting them with today's overfishing and diminishing community participation. He also noted the fading practice of using town criers for information dissemination, which was once a cornerstone of community communication.

Another participant, Chief

Ebikini from Onopa, shared insights into some traditional practices and their evolution. She spoke about the old practice of forced marriages, where girls often had no say in choosing their partners, and how this has changed to mutual consent today. Regarding burial ceremonies, she explained that the community used to observe a four-day mourning period, but this tradition has been shortened to accommodate daily business and personal activities. She also highlighted the *Adugu Festival*, held annually on 25 July, which pulls together all communities of the Atisa Clan. The festival, which was traditionally centralized, is now spread across different communities to make it easier for people to participate. The 2024 celebration is to be hosted by the Yeni-Epie community.

Storytelling, poetry, and traditional activities were highlighted as essential for preserving cultural heritage and fostering unity. Traditional wrestling, once common among the Ijaw people, has become rare, and the use of machetes and other weapons by young people during cultural events was criticized. The *Ogele drum beat and dance*, which preceded going to war, were cited as examples of cultural practices that have been lost. There was a call to revive these traditions to strengthen community bonds and resist negative external influence.

Ambassador Princess Egbe, another participant, emphasized the importance of self-representation and the restoration of traditional games like *akpolo* and *lip jump*. She

lamented the impact of oil exploration and urbanization on biodiversity, recalling how the Igbogene community once played a crucial role in elephant preservation. She highlighted how the Niger Delta's natural farming systems once supported the building of mansions without oil and gas exploitation. She stressed the need to preserve the environment and cultural practices, noting that the current situation that breeds militancy stems from exploitation, destruction of livelihoods, and the divide-and-rule tactics of the government and oil companies. She condemned the greed and self-centredness of some community leaders, urging a return to values that promote communal well-being.

As the dialogue drew to a close, Cadmus Atake-Enade emphasized that solidarity, integration, and networking are the keys to resistance building. According to Mr. Cadmus, solidarity involves standing with others during their difficult times, even when it does not directly affect a person. It is key in strengthening collective resistance against oppression. Integration ensures that all community members, regardless of age, gender, or physical ability, are included in every process, fostering unity and strengthening the resistance movement. Networking involves forming alliances with individuals and groups facing similar issues, creating a strong, united front capable of resisting oppressors more effectively.





# Insights on New/Emerging Technologies and Geoengineering

By Dennis Chinenyeoke Njoku

I embarked on a two-day adventure to gain insights into new and emerging technologies and geoengineering. It was a mind-opening School of Ecology (SoE) session, and little did I know that this experience would not only expand my knowledge but also change my perspective on the pressing environmental issues we face today.

As the meeting began, I found myself surrounded by passionate individuals from diverse backgrounds, all united by a common goal: to explore sustainable solutions to address the climate crises facing our planet. The air buzzed with curiosity, and expectations heightened as we delved into the intricacies of geoengineering, the impact of fossil fuels and climate change on our environment.

The first day was a whirlwind of information and discussions. Experts shared their insights on the potential dangers of using geoengineering

technologies to mitigate climate change, highlighting the ethical and social implications that come with manipulating the Earth's systems. I was fascinated by the possibilities that these technologies appeared to offer but puzzled by the risks they pose.

The speakers in the SoE session emphasized climate change and nature colonialism, technofixes, eco-colonialism and persistent colonialism, and stressed the need to understand the new and emerging technologies as tools for assessment.

Amidst the presentations and lectures, I found myself absorbed in deep conversations with fellow scholars at the SoE, exchanging ideas and perspectives that better shaped my own views. I realized that true learning goes beyond acquiring knowledge; it requires an open mind and a willingness to question our own assumptions.

Some of the key takeaways from the meeting, for me, were that colonialism still exists in our time but modified in such a way that makes it look like it is not, as natural resource exploitation is linked to colonialism. Again, the use of new and emerging technologies in agriculture is contributing to climate change and environmental degradation because of the use of overly mechanized systems and approaches. Other takeaways include a) the understanding that technology can solve everything leads to the rise of technofixes; b) the fact that the environment can thrive with or without human involvement or support, but humans cannot; c) that geoengineering has been observed to be an attempt by powerful actors to uphold the status quo and divert attention from actions aiming at reducing carbon emissions and other real solutions to climate change.

At the climax of the meeting, we were provided with some guidelines for assessing new and emerging technologies.

As the second day unfolded, we delved more into the world of geoengineering, which industries have presented as a way of engineering our way out of the climate crisis, which is not feasible because these technologies have not been tested and proven to be efficient in the long run. By careful analysis, curbing and eliminating the use of fossil fuels and geoengineering technologies is imperative in shaping our energy landscape locally and at a global landscape. Over time, transitioning to renewable sources and the need for innovative solutions to reduce humans' reliance on carbon-intensive resources have been at the front

burner, and the challenges have been key points in the discourse. But the urgency of the climate crisis has become even more apparent, driving home the importance of taking action now.

Another subject matter at the SoE was Africa's Future with AI, Robotics and Machines, and how these developments impact human existence in this part of the world.

In the closing moments of the meeting, I felt a sense of empowerment and inspiration. I had not only learned about geoengineering but had also connected with a community of changemakers dedicated to making a difference. I left the meeting with a renewed sense of purpose, eager to apply what I had learned to contribute to a more sustainable future.

As I reflect on my experience at the School of Ecology, I am reminded of the power of knowledge and collaboration in shaping a better world. The journey may be long and challenging, but with determination and unity, we can overcome the obstacles ahead and create a brighter tomorrow for our generations to come.

And so, my story of discovery at the learning meeting comes to an end, but the lessons learned and connections made will continue to guide me on my path towards contributing to a more sustainable future.

*[Dennis Chinenyeoke is an environmental advocacy campaigner at Environmental Rights Action (ERA). He volunteers with the Rights Advocacy and Development Center (RADEC).]*



# Can You See the Invisible?

By Kufre Friesenhan

*I See the Invisible* is an evocative and inspiring collection of poems with abundant poems designed for varying tastes and interests. Nature lovers will drink richly from this fountain.

In the Niger Delta literature space, Nnimmo Bassey is known as a poet and an activist with an uncompromising voice in the criticism of the unsafe practices of oil extraction in the region. Bassey is also known for taking a polemical stance in his works—leaving the oil in the ground—which problematizes neocapitalist schemes of petro-dollars, oil fantasy, hyper-extraction, and consumerism. As an activist, Bassey once chaired Friends of the Earth International and served as the Executive Director of Environmental Rights Action for two decades. As a poet, Bassey has written six poetry anthologies: *Patriots and Cockroaches* (1992), *Poems on the Run* (1995), *Intercepted* (1998), *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* (2002), *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011) and the one under review here, *I See the Invisible* (2023). The poet's latest collection follows his poetic tradition of thematising the injustice of extractivism,

environmental degradation, pollution, unsafe agricultural practices, and the loss of biodiversity in the era so appropriately named the Capitalocene.

Written in six sections titled Our Soul, Our Inspiration, Our Sight, Our Fight, Our Time and Our Mind, *I See the Invisible* holds a mirror to us and asks that we interrogate our complicity in the ongoing global ecocide. The poet's emphatic deployment of the 'collective pronoun' "Our" highlights our shared belonging and connection with nature as well as our shared responsibility towards the earth. Bassey's poetic lines are not soaked in esotericism but are accessible, yet they embody rich metaphors, imagery, and allusions. After all, obfuscation in a time of climate emergency might appear contradictory and unsuccessful in attaining a crucial objective. Bassey utilizes free verse with poetic elements like repetition, alliteration, rhythm, enjambments, and anaphora to elevate the flow of the reading experience, arouse the reader's curiosity and sustain attention. The stanzas and lines of the poems are diversified to represent the chaos and uncertainty of our contemporary time. The preponderance of imagery and symbolism in the collection reflects the author's desire to evoke emotions and hold the reader's attention.

The first section, "Our Soul," interrogates the entanglement of the land with neo-capitalist greed, consumerism, and hyper-extraction. With the Niger Delta petroleum scape as its primary focus, Bassey condemns the broken connection of the human and the nonhuman, oil extraction infrastructures, plastics, and the loss of biodiversity. In the next section, titled "Our Inspiration," the poet's focus shifts to our nonhuman kins and "sundry relatives" (13) in poetic lines that beckon the reader to stop, observe and listen. Nonhuman kins like trees, sunbirds, "of flocks/of owls of bats" (27), "community of fishes" (30) and "astonished earthworms" (31) are poeticized in celebration of their inspiration and multispecies connection. "Our Sight," the slimmest section in the collection, contains the eponymous poem which condemns ecocide and injustice.

In the section "Our Fight," Bassey rejects extraction and calls for change. The fight referenced in the title is the struggle against the forces of petro-capitalism towards a sustainable future. The poet uses the lines "the Niger Delta isn't a ticking ecological time bomb / the bomb

has already exploded / shrapnel fly everywhere" (60) to depict the deplorable condition of the Delta and the human and nonhuman kin who are caught in the crossfire. Bassey envisions an end to capitalism in "A Dirge for Fossil Capitalism" (64), in which the speaker offers an account of capitalism's numerous atrocities. For Bassey, fossil capitalism—a system of violence, dispossession, oppression, and accumulation—is on its last leg. In the sections "Our Time" and "Our Mind," the poet engages with the mundane and everyday occurrences in the tradition of seeing the invisible.

A timely intervention, the collection is a testament to Bassey's eco-consciousness, eco-activism, and commitment to the stewardship of Mother Earth. With the looming threat of environmental apocalypse, Bassey offers a moving and distressing inventory of our world, the scourge of neo-capitalism and accumulation, our complicity and strive towards a sustainable future. One unique aspect of Bassey's writing is that he offers hope – some of the poems show us what to do to rescue our world from polluters.

A comprehensive poetic collection, *I See the Invisible* can be read as a love song to the earth, a reaffirmation of multispecies kinship or as the celebration of the unconquerable human spirit. The poet hopes we will surmount the environmental crisis if we take the necessary steps towards a sustainable future. Can we?

Genre – Poetry  
Author: Nnimmo Bassey  
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# UNCOVERING THE TRUTH ABOUT GMOS

By HOMEF Project Team

**G**enetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are products of recombinant technology or genetic engineering, which is basically about DNA (genetic material) manipulation for the purpose of actualizing predetermined goals.

The recombinant technology makes possible the cutting out (from an organism), alteration and insertion (into another organism) of bits of DNA carrying certain gene(s) of interest to the manipulator. Hence, GMOs have had their DNAs altered mostly with DNAs from

other organisms, ranging from viruses, plants, and animals to bacteria, thus exposing humans and the environment to wide-ranging potential threats. One such threat is the extermination of natural species, possibly with the inbreeding of GMOs with their natural counterparts.

Since the setup of the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) Act in 2015 in Nigeria, more than 20 different genetically modified crop varieties have been approved by the Agency for various purposes, including commercial release/market placement. As of 28 June 2024, according to information available on the Biosafety Clearing House (BCH)—where countries that are signatories to the Biological Convention on Biodiversity are required to

upload information regarding decisions on GMOs—Nigeria has approved 25 genetically modified (GM) products—11 for field trials, 4 for commercial release, and 10 for food or feed and/or processing.

The last updated information on the BCH website as of 28 June 2024 is from the decision made in April 2023, which was uploaded on 31 December 2023. However, information regarding these decisions/approvals is not available on the NBMA website. These approvals were given without regard for objections and petitions (based on scientific evidence) submitted by the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) and other organisations representing millions of Nigerians.

There are key concerns with the deployment of GMOs in Nigeria, including the faulty regulatory architecture, lack of evidence of unbiased risk assessment conducted, poor/no access to information, health and environmental hazards, and economic implications threatening food security.

Since the most recent approval of the TELA maize, which is genetically modified to be pest-resistant and drought-tolerant, there has been an uproar in the country as many Nigerians have begun raising concerns about GMOs. The National Committee on Naming, Registration and Release of Crop Varieties, Livestock Breeds/Fisheries (NCRRCVLF) granted the approval of TELA maize at its 33rd meeting held on 11 January 2024 at the National Centre for Genetic Resources and Biotechnology (NACGRAB) in Ibadan.

Major concerns expressed by the public include the secrecy with which these GMOs are deployed, the implication of corporate control of seeds in Nigeria, the contamination of the country's local genetic resources, environmental degradation, health implications and many more. In May 2024, the House of Representatives adopted a motion to probe the introduction of GMOs in Nigeria, urging the Federal Government to suspend the introduction of new GMO crops in the country. This is a laudable decision, one that must be followed up to ensure that the investigation process is unbiased and that the concerned agencies have all the relevant information to inform their recommendations.

HOMEF, in collaboration with GMO-Free Nigeria Alliance, organised a multi-stakeholder National Conference to collectively address the various concerns regarding biosafety (particularly GMOs), review the experience so far and come up with clear resolutions regarding their release and use as well as solutions for food sovereignty and security in Nigeria. The conference was attended by farmers, researchers, civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), academia, women and youth.

Among the many issues raised during the conference, it was highlighted that in almost 30 years since the introduction of GMOs globally, they have not solved the problem of hunger in countries where they have been deployed or anywhere else in the world. There is no evidence that a country has eradicated food insecurity by using GMOs. Rather, it has been discovered that GMOs are mostly driven by greed and profit maximisation and not by the need to address hunger or food insecurity. Currently, the GM technology is dominated by a small number of corporations. For instance, only four companies control 60 per cent of the global seed supply: Bayer (merged with Monsanto), Corteva, ChemChina and Limagrain. These companies engage in the development and patenting of genetically modified seeds.

It has been found that there is a significant link between the consumption and use of GMOs and several health and environmental diseases, including cancers, mental health disorders, immune disorders, as well as loss of nutritional and biological diversity. The BT crops, for example, have been linked to soil degradation through the

**“the introduction of GMOs globally, they have not solved the problem of hunger in countries where they have been deployed or anywhere else in the world.”**

destruction of soil microbiota, which has led to reduced productivity/yields. It has also been found that GMOs can be used as biological weapons due to their ability to alter the genetic material of species and to drive extinction.

The issue of GMOs cannot be divorced from the failure of industrial agriculture, which has led to the treatment of food as a mere commodity and to the corporate control of seeds. From the point of production and sales, food packaging, and agricultural machinery to agrochemicals, industrial agriculture maintains disturbing control globally.

Coming back to Nigeria, the question of the safety of GMOs in the country remains unanswered. The idea of labelling to ensure the people's right to choose is supported by Nigeria's law, but it has not been implemented due to the country's peculiar socio-economic context and the attitudes of policymakers who have consistently failed to protect the interests of the people they serve.

The promoters of GMOs, including the regulator, NBMA, have not bothered to label foods sold in open markets in bowls and by the roadside. Worse still, there is so far no evidence of independent, long-term risk assessment conducted by the NBMA, which is saddled with this responsibility. While Nigerians await the assessment report, there is a need to critically consider the underlying causes of food insecurity in the country, some of which include bad governance, insecurity, climate change, poor extension service, and lack of storage/processing infrastructure to soil degradation, poverty, inequalities, etc., which directly affect agricultural productivity. GMOs are, therefore, not the solution to these challenges.

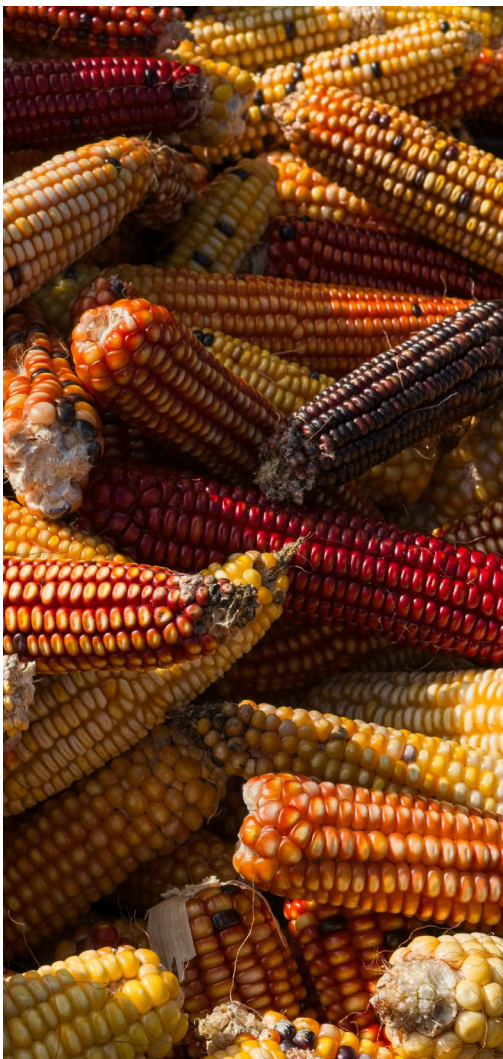
A number of key demands emerged from the conference. The first demand was for the outright ban on GMOs and the preservation of Nigeria's indigenous seeds and food systems. The National Conference also demanded that NBMA be urgently reviewed to address existing loopholes, including the conflictive composition of the NBMA Board, the absence of a provision on strict liability, poor attention to the precautionary principle, the discretionary provision on risk assessment,

power to receive gifts, etc. The NBMA was also demanded to produce results of risk assessments conducted prior to the approval and commercial release of GMOs in Nigeria for peer review. Another demand was for the Nigerian Government to ensure improved support for smallholder farmers, who are the actual food providers. This should include a) reviving the extension service system across all local governments, increasing the provision of infrastructure (to reduce post-harvest losses), b) addressing insecurity (to allow farmers to return to farms), c) ensuring better access to credit and to land, and d) properly remediating oil-polluted soils (in the Niger Delta and other mining-impacted communities). Also, the House of Representatives Committees on Agriculture and Services, as well as those on Health and the Environment, were requested to commission independent and long-term research on GMOs and biosafety, which was announced in May 2024.

The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security was also requested to invest in and promote the adoption of an agroecological system of farming, which is proven to assure increased food productivity, diversify income for farmers, recover degraded soils, increase biological and nutritional diversity, mitigate climate change and its impact and ensure food sovereignty for Nigeria. It was also demanded that the ministry promote the setting up of markets for organic/agroecological food products in Nigeria.

# ETHICAL RELIGIOUS AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS OVER GMOs

by Aniedi Okure



I will begin by stating the obvious fact: the world we live in is sustained only by biodiversity. Without biodiversity, the world as we know it would come to an end in a short period. We—humans, other animals, plants, insects, and aquatic life—are all interrelated in an integral, wholesome ecology. Any attempt to disrupt the wholesome ecology is not only foolhardy but a malicious agenda.

Human beings are naturally constituted in the order of creation, interconnected naturally in an integral ecological system. Thus, creation designed humans to nourish themselves with natural food, not processed food, which has become prevalent and is dominating the food chain in several countries. Many diseases have been linked to processed food. Food artificially produced in the laboratory and engineered to alter its genes is even worse. We are seeing a rise in cancer among people hooked on processed foods.

A troubling issue inextricably tied to the promotion of processed and genetically altered food is the ownership and control of seeds by corporations. This has implications for a country's food sovereignty and local farmers' seed rights. Between 1997 and 2010, Monsanto (a leading producer of agricultural, chemical and biochemical products acquired by Bayer, a chemical and pharmaceutical company, in 2018) filed 144 patent-infringement lawsuits against farmers. Monsanto filed these lawsuits based on the allegation that the farmers in question used its genetically modified (GM) seeds without paying



royalties, and Monsanto won all the lawsuits. Being one of the largest producers of GM seeds and owning patents on these seeds, Monsanto acquired the exclusive right to sell the seeds. Hunger and the need to have an adequate food supply in the world have been one of the main justifications for the promotion of GM seeds. However, we must not be deceived that advocates for GMOs are benevolent agents eager to feed the hungry.

The number one reason for the GMO agenda is money. The statement “No food shall be grown that we don’t own” is attributed to Monsanto [and shows the corporation’s aim to control nations’ food production and distribution chain through their seed ownership and patenting.]

This takeover plot of corporations is evident in history—the Berlin Conference of 1884-1855, where European countries—with Great Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal as major players—gathered for a takeover of Africa. [Other European countries in the conference included Italy, Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Sweden-Norway, Turkey, and the Netherlands. The United States was also in attendance].

The Berlin Conference, which officially kicked off the partitioning of Africa, was disguised as a project to “help” Africa civilize and develop. The result was the partition and colonization of Africa. The continent has not recovered from the impacts of this conference 140 years later. Now, we battle the ploy of GMOs as an effort to feed (help) Africa.

One disturbing fact about the GMO proponents is their promotion of GMOs as a programme to feed Africa, a claim that smacks of ignorance or intentional mortgaging of one’s soul for monetary gains, and neither does it speak well of the proponents.

It is difficult to accept that the proponents are not aware of what is happening elsewhere with GMO products, prompting the FDA (US Food and Drug Administration), the equivalent of the National Biosafety Management Agency, to require that GMO producers label their products.

There is the issue of contamination of non-GMO crops by the GMOs. In March 2011, a group of about 50 organic farmers and seed dealers sued Monsanto to prohibit Monsanto from

suing them if their seeds and crops became contaminated by GMO products. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit ruled in favour of Monsanto, saying Monsanto “pledged” not to sue if biotechnology crops accidentally mix in

**“ One disturbing fact about the GMO proponents is their promotion of GMOs as a programme to feed Africa, a claim that smacks of ignorance or intentional mortgaging of one’s soul for monetary gains, and neither does it speak well of the proponents.”.**

with organics. Meanwhile, the contamination of non-biotechnology crops (wheat fields in the U.S. state of Oregon) continues.

The desire to control the global food supply chain is directly linked to the quest for human control. The person who controls what you eat has control over your life. Besides, the person who controls what you eat can manipulate your future. And the one controlled is at the bidding and mercy of the one who controls.

Tinkering with nature is just human folly. History has proven the folly of human attempts to usurp the rights and wisdom of creation and the stupidity that arises from such attempts. Results have exposed the stupidity of humans who think they can reshape creation in their likeness. Examples abound of the catastrophic end of such stupidity, yet humans have failed to learn.

The Operation Cat Drop in Borneo (the third largest island in the world located in Southeast Asia, bordering Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei) was one necessitated by the stupidity of humans. In the 1950s, DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), a highly



toxic synthetic insecticide, was sprayed (by the World Health Organization) on Borneo Island to wipe out mosquitoes that spread malaria in the area. The result was an unforeseen chain of catastrophic events. The insecticide (DDT) bioaccumulated in the bodily tissues of wasps (a group of insects), exterminating the insects (wasps) which fed on caterpillars while small lizards fed on them (the wasps)—geckoes ate the insects which were poisoned by the DDT while cats fed on the geckoes. With the wasps gone, caterpillars multiplied and destroyed homes, feeding on roofing materials. Cats began to die from eating geckos poisoned by DDT. In the absence of cats to control the rat population, the number of rats skyrocketed. The rats began to spread diseases—typhus fever—and there came a plague. Thousands of cats were purchased and airdropped on the Island to control the rats. This chain reaction underscores

how interconnected the biosystem is.

Another example in history was Operation Smash Sparrows, which followed Mao Zedong's initiation of the "Man must conquer nature" programme to reshape China. Mao, the first chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, in 1958, was convinced that sparrows affected low crop yields. Based on his conviction, he launched a campaign to eradicate sparrows (and three other pests—rats, flies, and mosquitoes). With about 2 billion sparrows reportedly killed, sparrows were almost extinct in China, destroying the balance of the biosystem. With the decimation of sparrows, making them unavailable to control the insect population, locusts that ate more grains than sparrows boomed and ravaged crops, ultimately resulting in a famine that killed millions.



China's One Child Policy is a more recent incident that is familiar to us. Families, especially in the urban areas, were forbidden to have more than one child. Couples used medical technology for fetus sex selection in favour of males. The results were the slaughter of female fetuses in favour of males and subsequent imbalance in the male-female population in China. A 2023 data showed that there were 31 million males more than females in China.

Going back again to the casualties of GMO propaganda, GMO makers are in for a monopoly of food to make people dependent on them. The first casualty is the promoters who have abased themselves so low for \$. Monocropping (promoted by GMOs) is anti-ecology and anti-creation.

In 1992, GMO crops were approved by the Bush-Quayle administration to enter the US market. But they were designated "Generally Recognized As Safe" (GRAS). The GRAS status was based solely on sponsored research conducted under the control

of GMO company contracts—money and self-policing! Not everything that is purported as science is scientific. Many studies published as independent science are sponsored and controlled to promote the agenda of the sponsor. In the 1990s, the United States Surgeon General (Minister of Health), Everett Koop, undertook the responsibility to prohibit smoking cigarettes in public. Guess what? Cigarette companies sponsored numerous "scientific" studies to counter him. Luckily, the Surgeon General won.

The right to adequate food is a human right. At the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN affirmed everyone's right to adequate food. GMO proponents often use this as a rallying call for their propaganda but leave out two core

aspects of the declaration: "The availability of food in quantity and QUALITY sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, FREE FROM ADVERSE SUBSTANCES, and acceptable within a given culture." The accessibility of such food should be in ways that are sustainable and do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights. Health and freedom from subjugation are major human rights concerns here.

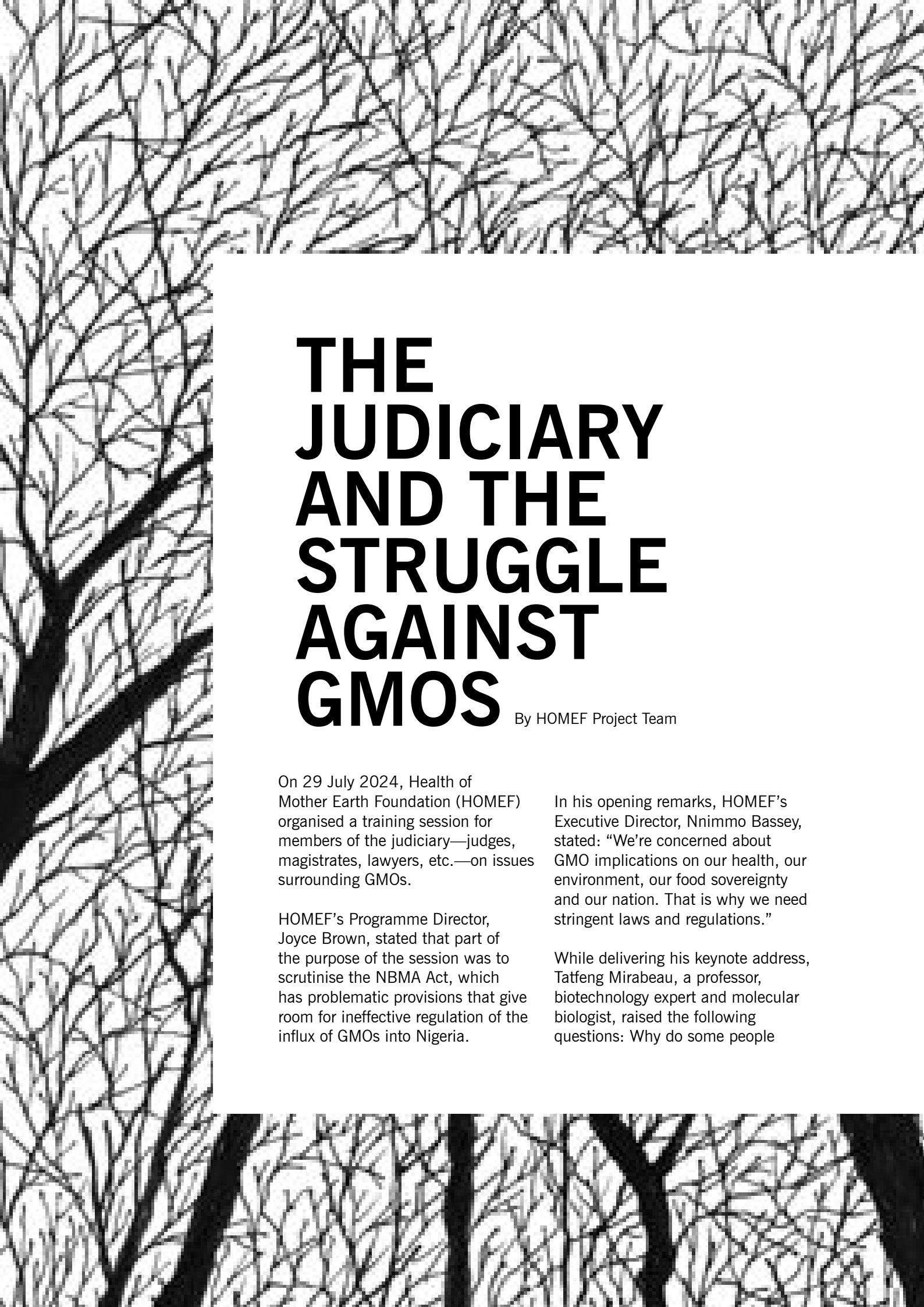
GMO proponents who refer to the UN declaration ignore two important phrases: the first is food that is "Free from adverse substances," and the second is food that is produced in "ways that are sustainable." Instead, they focus on quantity and the utilitarian nature of GMOs. They argue that GMO products address the challenge of hunger. However, money and profit are the primary concerns disguised as a charitable effort to feed the hungry.

The fight against GMOs is not an attempt to write off selective breeding but gene alteration. Ancient humans practised selective breeding for thousands of years. Farmers keep the best seeds or tubers for planting in the next season. That is natural. The "gene alteration" practice is not only different from selective breeding, but it also appropriates seeds to a company. Hence, farmers must buy seeds year after year from the company.

This throws up the issues of insecurity and food shortage. We cannot, and should not dismiss outright, the link between insecurity, food shortage, and the promotion of GMOs in Nigeria. This was mentioned in 2016 and dismissed as a conspiracy theory. But the reality at hand seems to suggest a link. This is not to say that it is intentionally planned, but this should not be dismissed outright. [This topic has been extensively dealt with in another article in this volume].

The call is for all to insist on eating natural food for a quality life. There is a saying: "If you do not eat your food as medicine, you will end up eating medicine as food."

*[Rev. Aniedi Okure, OP is the General Promoter of Justice and Peace and the new Permanent Delegate to the United Nations for the friars of the Order of Preachers. He once served as executive director of the Washington DC-based Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN)]*



# THE JUDICIARY AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST GMOS

By HOMEF Project Team

On 29 July 2024, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) organised a training session for members of the judiciary—judges, magistrates, lawyers, etc.—on issues surrounding GMOs.

HOMEF's Programme Director, Joyce Brown, stated that part of the purpose of the session was to scrutinise the NBMA Act, which has problematic provisions that give room for ineffective regulation of the influx of GMOs into Nigeria.

In his opening remarks, HOMEF's Executive Director, Nnimmo Bassey, stated: "We're concerned about GMO implications on our health, our environment, our food sovereignty and our nation. That is why we need stringent laws and regulations."

While delivering his keynote address, Tafeng Mirabeau, a professor, biotechnology expert and molecular biologist, raised the following questions: Why do some people



think GMOs are necessary in Nigeria? Why are concerned Nigerians saying GMOs are not needed in Nigeria? What are the health, environmental and sociocultural concerns surrounding the big push for GMOs in Nigeria? He highlighted that any structural information in the bodies of living organisms is stored in their DNA, and GMOs are organisms whose DNAs have been forcibly altered. He emphasized that food is at the top of man's physiological needs pyramid. Hence, it is crucial that humans [and all living organisms] consume healthy and non-poisonous food.

Professor Mirabeau argued that genetic modification in agriculture is highly contestable due to the numerous demerits which outweigh the merits. For instance, many GMO crops produce stems that are non-degradable, necessitating burning by farmers. Using the TELA maize as a case study, touted for its drought and herbicide resistance, the professor pointed out the fact that these traits are the result of manipulated genes. Rebutting the common justification—combating hunger—used by GMO proponents to gain entrance into Nigeria, Professor Mirabeau said that the country's endowment with arable land and a wide variety of seeds undermine any sense in such justification. The 'combating hunger' narrative is the political ploy of capitalist politicians trying to make a profit off the lives of the Nigerian people.

On the health risks of GMOs, Professor Mirabeau highlighted studies on GM-fed rats that indicated that the intestinal mucosa of the rats showed distortions in the cell cycle and regulatory mechanisms of the lumen cells, potentially leading to cancer. Some compounds in GMO products

are carcinogenic and toxic. He pointed out that adequate safety testing for GM products typically requires two years, but the GMO companies often push for a 90-day testing period, which is insufficient for determining the safety of the products.

Concerning the claims of the proponents that GMOs reduce the use of pesticides, Professor Mirabeau pointed out that pesticide use has doubled over the last 16 years due to the emergence of super pests and the continued planting of GM crops. He also noted that the sociocultural impacts of GMOs on Nigeria include the controversial patents on genetically modified (GM) seeds, which often prohibit replanting or sharing of the seeds, a practice alien to traditional agricultural systems. The current circumstances surrounding the approval of GMOs across Africa can be likened to that of a laboratory in which Africans serve as both technicians and test subjects under the supervision of external powers.

Similarly, Justice Aisha Bashir-Aliyu, Nasarawa State Chief Judge, lamented that Africa is being treated as a dumping ground for low-quality products. Another lawyer expressed concern that Nigerians are becoming more accepting of artificial or scientifically modified food.

Participants at the training expressed worry that people might not know how to distinguish between real and GMO crops. Some also sought clarification on the difference between fortified foods and GMOs. Professor Adeoluwa Olugbenga explained that fortification does not necessarily mean genetic modification; however, the processes involved should be scrutinized. It was also noted that it is challenging to differentiate between GMO and non-GMO crops—which is regarded as a deliberate attempt to deceive the public. While the labelling of GMO products is possible, companies avoid it to prevent public rejection. Another concern raised by most participants was that organic food products are more expensive than chemically treated ones. This was



said to be caused by intentional efforts by the promoters and benefactors of GMOs to undermine organic farming in Africa. The corruption linked to GMOs exacerbates this issue, coupled with inadequate regulation, which allows low-quality, cheap and therefore unhealthy food products to penetrate the market. According to Professor Mirabeau, if regulatory bodies performed their duties effectively, issues of low-quality food in Nigerian markets would be significantly reduced. These points underscore the urgent need for stringent regulation and a re-evaluation of the role of GMOs in Nigeria's agricultural system. The question of whether Nigeria needs GMOs at all was addressed by Professor Adeoluwa Olugbenga, a soil fertility specialist, whose

markets being filled with unwholesome food, which, in turn, gives birth to various diseases.

GMOs require higher costs to ensure quality, and GM corporations often target countries with weak legislation to introduce their products so they can cut corners. Rather than GMOs, Professor Adeoluwa emphasized the need to seek and implement agroecological alternatives to ensure food security without compromising our health and the environment. These alternatives include conventional or traditional breeding done through selective breeding, cross-pollination, and stabilization of selected traits. These alternative practices are time-tested, safe and have no regulatory hurdles, although they might be time-consuming and imprecise.



presentation focused on the challenges of food security in Nigeria, highlighting the various scientific solutions and alternatives to GMOs. He pointed out that food security in Nigeria is projected to remain problematic in the next two years due to anticipated scarcity. While there is global food insecurity, Nigeria faces unique challenges that require urgent attention.

Professor Adeoluwa shared his concerns about the diminishing trust in medical and scientific authorities due to unethical practices, as well as in farmers due to the prevalence of those who cut corners to produce food quickly, most of whom do not consume what they sell. These unethical practices have resulted in our

Another alternative to GMOs is Marker-Assisted Selection (MAS), which uses markers to select desirable traits through genetic mapping, genotyping, and phenotyping. This is a natural process that is faster with increased accuracy and allows for simultaneous selection. Again, there is agroecology, which prioritizes ecological principles, encourages biodiversity, improves soil health, supports ecosystems and encourages the preservation of native foods. Another practice similar to this is organic farming, which utilizes natural processes and materials; it is safe and environmentally friendly. Mutation breeding is another alternative which induces mutations to select desired traits without transgenic



DNA modification, so it is considered safe. There is also the option of non-GM editing techniques, which are potentially safe and can avoid GM-related concerns. Traditional improvement methods whereby breeders select and cross-pollinate desired traits are equally safe. It is time-consuming but effective. There is also subsistence agriculture, that is, small-scale farming for local consumption, which is sustainable and reduces dependency on external, commercial food capitalists whose overarching interest is profit-making. Other available options, such as hybrid crops, which are developed through traditional breeding methods, are adaptable and do not involve genetic modification. Lastly, heirlooms, which are traditional crops that are passed down through generations, are resilient, highly adaptable and preserve agricultural heritage.

Nnimmo Bassey, while speaking about the implications of gene editing and synthetic biology in agriculture, stated that “Food sovereignty is the right of people to healthy food and the right to defend/produce our own food.” According to him, with gene drives, a technology designed to ensure that offspring inherit specific

desired traits, undesired traits are expected to disappear over several generations, theoretically resulting in a population with uniform desired characteristics. He also noted that gene drives are still not fully understood, and their long-term impacts remain uncertain, further critiquing the practice as “a solution in search of a problem.” He argued that modern agricultural practices, such as labelling plantations as forests, reflect a broader misunderstanding and misapplication of technological solutions. He questioned whether governments truly work in the best interest of the people, citing instances where governmental actions have not aligned with public welfare.

Speaking on synthetic biology, he pointed out the danger of relying on a system that aims to create life from scratch, eliminating the need for natural materials in food production. Bassey warned that this approach could force those dependent on natural materials to seek alternatives, as synthetic options become more prevalent. He further highlighted the example of nipa palm in the Niger Delta, which has become an invasive problem due to synthetic biology interventions.

He raised further concerns about the ecological and environmental impacts of organisms produced through synthetic biology, as these artificially constructed organisms often disrupt existing ecosystems. He also questioned the widely accepted notion that GMOs are safe, noting that many countries have banned GMOs due to potential health and environmental risks associated with their consumption. In contrast, Nigeria’s regulatory framework is weak, allowing GMOs to proliferate without adequate public awareness or sensitization. Mr Bassey stressed the need for a strong regulatory framework to protect Nigerians’ sovereign right to safe and healthy food.

The presentation of Akinbode Matthew Oluwafemi, Executive Director of CAPPAA [Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa], which focused on the manipulation of the food industry and the impact on consumer choice, highlighted the common trend where corporations seek to control the food chain from production to consumption. He pointed out that food is not only about nutrition but also a fundamental human right, as well as about culture and cravings. Therefore, it is crucial to question the

origins and contents of our food and promote people's right to food choices, the right to reject certain foods, and the right to demand compensation when necessary.

Mr Akinbode underlined a troubling trend in our country: Nigeria is rapidly becoming a fast-food nation. He posited that this trend is not accidental but comes as a result of deliberate and organised efforts by corporations to change Nigeria's food system. This is evidenced by the influx of junk food companies who are increasingly infiltrating the Nigerian market, using strategies which often include media attacks, deceptive advertising, and influencing policy-making to favour their products. Mr Akinbode argued that this is undermining free choice, as consumers are being manipulated rather than making informed decisions.

Another critical concern raised by Mr Akinbode was the targeting of children in advertising campaigns. He maintained that it is unethical and often illegal for companies to market junk food to children, yet this practice is widespread in Nigeria. This manipulation influences children's food preferences and undermines parents' efforts to provide healthy diets to their kids.

Mr. Akinbode, thus, argued for greater scrutiny and regulation of the food industry to protect consumer rights and promote healthy eating habits. He called for increased public awareness and activism to combat the manipulative practices of food corporations and to ensure that food choices remain free and informed.

When Barrister Mariam Basse Orovwuje, Deputy Executive Director of Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, spoke on how weak regulations contribute to the spread of GMOs, she pointed out the deliberate laxity with which governmental agencies go about their regulatory functions. She especially criticized the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) for renegeing on their duties. She also criticised the National Biosafety Management Agency Act of 2019 for the use of dubious and vague language (within the Act), which gives more power to the foreign corporations seeking to bring GM products into Nigeria than the regulatory body, thereby giving the corporations leeway to manipulate the system. Stressing the nationwide health risks

which GMO products pose to Nigerians, Barrister Mariann, along with some participants, called for the complete overhaul of the Act and the redrafting of various problematic sections in the Act. According to her, the redrafting is necessary to reflect the commitment of the NBMA to putting the safety of the Nigerian people before the greed of the corporations and politicians.

In the panel discussion session of the training, a panellist, Barrister Ifeanyi Nwankwere pointed out the Nigerian courts' discouraging habit of striking out GMO cases based on procedural issues rather than substantive ones. He noted that while the Supreme Court has stated that procedural dismissals should touch on substantive issues, this is rarely observed in practice. A significant challenge is that many courts, including the Federal High Courts, lack adequate understanding of GMOs, which complicates the adjudication process.

Another panellist, Barrister Inibehe Effiong emphasized that evidential issues are expected in GMO-related cases. He argued that the burden of proof should lie with the agencies granting GMO approvals, requiring them to demonstrate the safety and necessity of GMOs. This would help ensure more rigorous scrutiny of GMO applications.

During the panel session, a participant posited that effective legislative advocacy is crucial to ensure that laws reflect public health and safety concerns regarding GMOs, emphasizing that this approach would empower judges to make informed decisions based on robust legal frameworks.

As a final word to all the participants, Barrister Mariann Basse Orovwuje highlighted the aggressive tactics employed by corporations against dissenters, including intimidation and bullying, to maintain their GMO agenda. She urged all participants to take legal and public advocacy seriously in order to protect those challenging corporations' narratives.



# Cracking the Food and Climate Crises

By HOMEF Project Team

*The world is currently grappling with multiple crises, chiefly hunger and climate change. These crises are predominantly caused by our reliance on an agricultural model that treats food as a mere commodity, leading to hunger and encouraging biodiversity loss. There is evidence that this system of agriculture the industrial model contributes significantly (up to 40%) to the climate emergency.*

the right to food and the rights of food producers. A transition to an agroecological system of farming is crucial at this time.

It is, therefore, important that our farmers are equipped with adequate knowledge of agroecology to enable them to sustain their livelihoods and continuously meet the responsibility of producing safe, nutritious and culturally adapted food in the face of the climate crisis.

In Nigeria, efforts at increasing food productivity and adapting to the climate crisis have erroneously included the adoption of genetic engineering in agriculture – a false solution that further compounds the problems.

Mounting scientific evidence continues to show that Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) have dire implications for biodiversity and human and environmental health and that they do not support local economies; rather, GMOs are promoted primarily because of the profits they earn for just a handful of transnational corporations. Further, the continued registration and use of highly hazardous pesticides also contribute to the existential threats facing biodiversity in Nigeria and elsewhere.

To address these issues, it is imperative that we critically evaluate and change our mode of food production and consumption.

Agroecology has been proven to not only assure food sovereignty but also cools the planet and helps farmers and communities across the world adapt to the climate crisis. Agroecology strengthens local economies and enforces

Health of Mother Earth Foundation, in collaboration with the GMO-Free Nigeria Alliance and Be the Help Foundation, organised practical training for CSOs and Trainers at the Agroforestry Farm in Kwali Area Council, Abuja, on 17-18 May 2024.

The training, which brought together 15 farmer group leaders and trainers from across the country, focused on the implication of GMOs and inorganic pesticides; practical production of organic pesticides and fertilisers; agroforestry including water, carbon and nutrient cycles, plant and soil health and reproduction; biodiversity improvement; and farm management. As a follow-up to the training, the trainers and CSOs will be organising step-down training in their various communities.

Participants acknowledged that agroecology, including agroforestry models of regenerative agriculture, is the safest and most effective way of solving the food and climate change challenges in Nigeria while empowering local farmers and communities. This understanding becomes significant as the



industrialization of agriculture, which has been proven to bring farmers out of poverty, has, over time, hindered farmers' productivity and disrupted ecosystem balance and nature's cycles. Again, Nigeria's outlook on modern agricultural biotechnology as a solution to the current food system challenges and food insecurity in the country is misleading, as this technology does not align with Nigeria's indigenous food system. It also does not address fundamental agriculture-related issues such as insecurity, poor access to land and credit, lack of proper infrastructure for processing and storage, poor extension service, poverty, etc.

GMOs are not the answer to food insecurity in Nigeria. Key implications with the use of GMOs include the

contamination of local varieties, the need to continuously purchase seeds due to patent rights, lack of accountability, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation resulting from excessive use of herbicides, and health complications linked to the consumption of GMOs.

Agroecology, on the other hand, cuts down costs for the farmer, increases yield, and reduces crop loss and soil death while providing for the well-being of the farmer. Agroecology ensures that pests and weeds are effectively managed using natural methods that help rejuvenate biodiversity and sustain life in the ecosystem.

There are many barriers to the adoption of agroecology among farmers. First, there is an existing knowledge gap, as not many farmers know what agroecology entails or what its benefits are. For this system to work effectively, farmers must be trained and equipped with the knowledge of the models to bridge the gap. Other barriers to the adoption of agroecology include poor access to land arising from Nigeria's land tenure systems and unavailability of funding. The push for the adoption of GMOs by some promoters in Nigeria, if unchallenged, would exacerbate hunger and climate change impacts on farming in Nigeria.

In light of controversies surrounding the safety of GMOs, the House of Representatives made a laudable decision in May 2023 to probe the approval of GMOs in Nigeria. However, the government must ensure that the investigations are fair and thorough. As a matter of urgency, while the investigations are being carried out, GMOs should be banned in Nigeria because of their serious economic, environmental, and health implications. Rather than falling for the gimmicks and lies of GMO promoters, there should be a proper examination of the root causes of food insecurity in Nigeria, with direct and radical measures taken to address them. Part of the solution to the food crisis in Nigeria should be the government's decisive step towards providing farmers better access to land to encourage the adoption of agroecology, which is a sustainable agricultural practice that does not require the application of hazardous chemicals. Also, the food crisis will be mitigated if the government at all levels increases support for farmers by providing them with the needed infrastructure, improved extension services, and good roads to access their farms and markets.

The government's endorsement and adoption of agroecology as the sustainable farming system in Nigeria will not only ensure food security but also bring about food sovereignty while improving farmers and the entire agricultural sector's

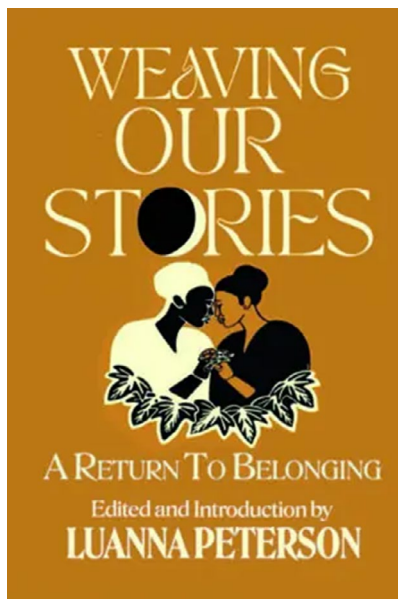
adaptation to climate change.

Strategic partnerships between the government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and pro-agroecology groups like HOMEF and the BHF would give rise to the government setting up agroecology demonstration farms in communities. With this, the knowledge and practice of agroecology will be extended to more farmers and communities across the country.

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- Technical Workshop on the Legislative Bill on Pesticide Control
- Survival Stories from Communities: A Documentary Screening
- Rally Against GMOs — October 2024
- Media Training on Pesticide Control — November 2024
- National Seed Fair — November 2024
- Sustainability Academy — November

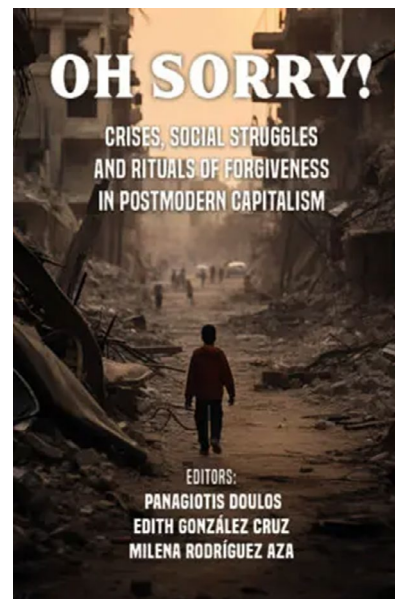
# Books You Should Read



## ***Weaving Our Stories: Return To Belonging*** – An Anthology by Luanna Peterson

The book is named after a Hawaii-rooted abolitionist programme—Weaving Our Stories—which utilises storytelling as a vehicle for liberation. The programme revolves around teaching storytelling as an act of resistance, dismantling existing harmful narratives, and nurturing the ability to weave counter-narratives that acknowledge and celebrate the inherent beauty and brilliance of storytellers.

The stories advocate for justice and liberation. *Weaving Our Stories: Return To Belonging – An Anthology* stands in the tradition of esteemed works such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Colour* and *Na Wahine Koa: Hawaiian Women for Sovereignty and Demilitarization*, thereby continuing the radically insightful conversations started by those important works. This anthology includes poetry, essays, visual art, and narratives penned by authors and artists who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour from Hawaii and beyond. The contributors span a diverse spectrum of experiences and identities, all sharing a common commitment to individual and collective well-being. They astutely showcase how their expressions of resistance and liberation, whether through visual art or written text, align with one or more of the central themes of *Weaving Our Stories*: resistance through cultural memory, accountability, resisting false binaries, and countering hegemony.



## ***Oh, Sorry! Rituals of Forgiveness, Crises and Social Struggles in Postmodern Capitalism*** by Panagiotis Doulos, Edith González Cruz, and Milena Rodríguez Aza

In this compelling work, *Oh, Sorry! Rituals of Forgiveness, Crises and Social Struggles in Postmodern Capitalism*, the authors unveil the complex interplay between public apologies, social justice and popular mobilisations. The chapters are devoted primarily to the experiences of Latin America, particularly Mexico, Guatemala, Chile, and Brazil. But there is also a chapter on the struggles for Palestine. As the world grapples with the legacy of crimes of enslavement, colonialism, genocide and mass killings, imprisonment and murder of children, attempts at eliminating the cultures and histories of Indigenous Peoples, looting and perpetuating other crimes against humanity, the performance of public atonement has become increasingly prevalent. Apologies from state actors and institutions are issued in solemn ceremonies, often acknowledging the collective guilt for historical atrocities. Despite the solemnity of these events, there is a growing scepticism surrounding the sincerity of these apologies, particularly when they are not accompanied by tangible reparations, healing, reconciliation or systemic change.

This scepticism is rooted in a perception that these acts of contrition are sometimes less about making amends to the aggrieved and more about assuaging the guilt of the aggressors and maintaining the status quo, providing the illusion of progress without the substance. This book engages these debates, calling us to critically interrogate these rituals of forgiveness in our capitalist world.



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