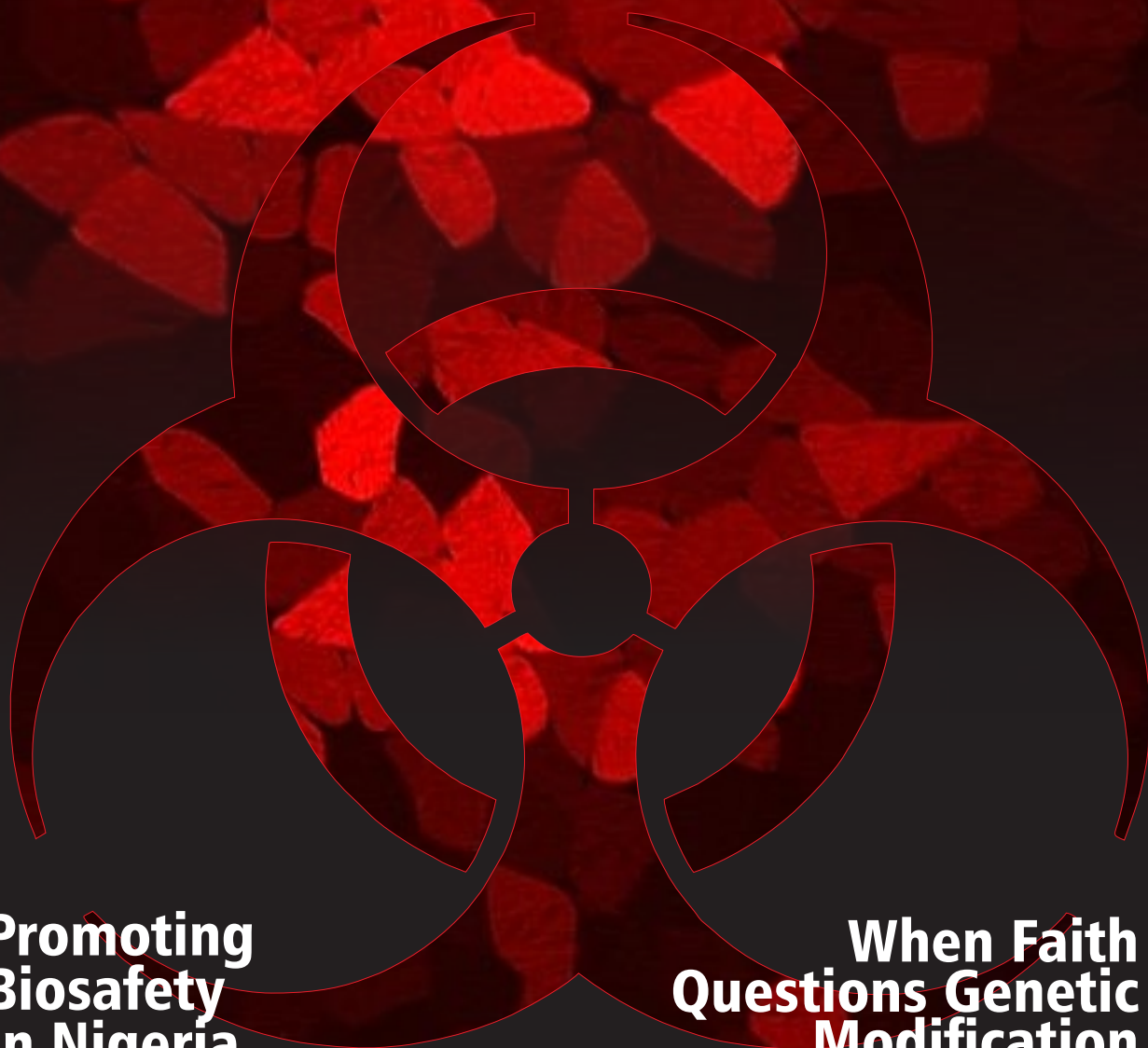


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**INSTIGATOR**

A PUBLICATION OF HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION

ISSUE #15

MARCH 2017



**Promoting  
Biosafety  
In Nigeria**

**When Faith  
Questions Genetic  
Modification**

**System Change  
Will Not Be  
Negotiated**

**Watch Your  
Carbon  
Footprints!**

The Eco~Instigator is a quarterly publication of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)

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Mother Earth  
Foundation

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The Journey to Galicia 29

The heat is on, as the saying goes. As the forces of environmental harm increase the heat on the planet, ecological defenders are stepping up on mobilisations and vigorously standing up for justice.

One key trending environmental matter in Nigeria in the first quarter of 2017 is the soot or black carbon that has blanketed Port Harcourt. The visible pollution has got people talking and government agencies scrambling to check the situation.

Another boiling issue is that of Biosafety or the threats of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Nigeria. An innocuous newspaper report relaying the findings of an ad-hoc committee of the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) set up to advise the body on issues of genetic engineering has led to strenuous rebuttals and disclaimers from public agencies working on Biosafety and GMO issues. We serve you the report, the rebuttals and our own response. We promise to return to this matter in Eco-Instigator #16 as the promoters are planning to step up their campaigns, including by a public march scheduled for April in Abuja, according to their social media posting.

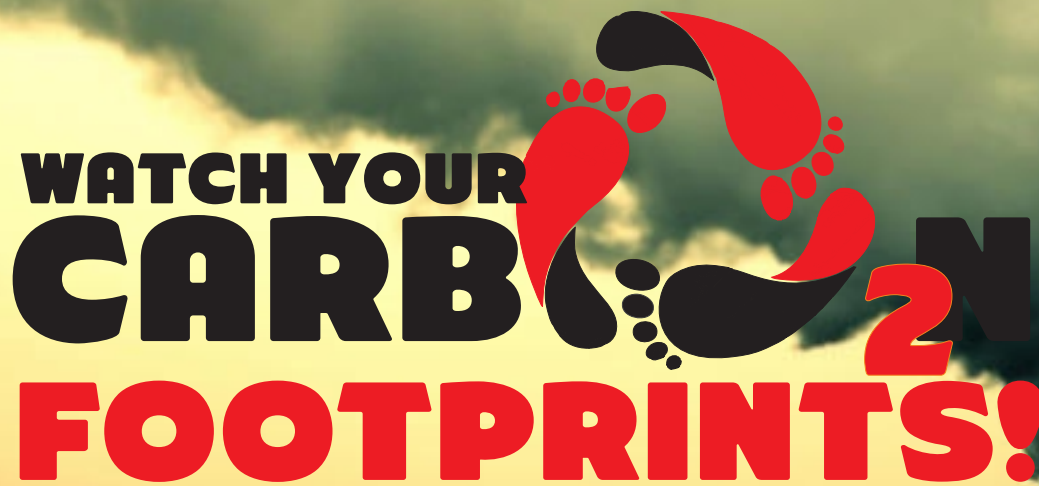
Always on the go? Check out the article by Sonali Narang on the need to watch our carbon footprint. And we serve excellent poetry from the pen of one of Nigeria's acclaimed poets, Amu Nnadi.

Read, think, react, reach us.

Until victory!

Nnimmo





# WATCH YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINTS!

By Sonali Narang

**L**ife on the earth began since 4000 million years ago since then it has exhibited extraordinary changes in its climate and the living beings that live on the earth, It has always witnessed strange natural phenomenon's but now it seems that our planet being transformed not by natural events but by anthropogenic activities.

The nature we see around us has taken millions of years to develop into the present contour of mountains, hills, plains, lakes, rivers seas, beaches air above and plants below with the living world of animals around us. This beautiful inherited wealth has been abused and spoiled by man since centuries. Human acts like reckless cutting of forests, unmindful dumping of industrial and chemical wastes and excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides have to lead to rise in the levels of carbon dioxide and other pollutants in the environment, thereby causing "global warming"-the biggest challenges before us. The Problem of global

warming which plagues all nations alike is a hot topic of debate at every forum. According to the Scientists, the root cause of global warming is the increase in amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by our industries and automobile.

The big question today is, "How to save our mother earth from climate change?" if we think that it is only government which has to get in the action mode to save our environment, then it is high time we change our thinking. Government does have a major role to play in this regard, but we all, too, have to do our actions on the environment to make a difference.

We should recognize and understand the repercussions of our actions on the environment and must reform our acts individually and collectively, nationally and internationally.



## Cutting Down Demands

A careful analysis shows us that governments always responds to the people's needs, and it is people's needs that drives industry to produce a particular good. We all have to play an important role in reducing our demands of such goods which cause pollution. This would put the top polluting factories and governments out of business.

The world has more than enough resources to feed twice as many people as we have now. Billions of rupees spend on wars machinery and the military, and the billions of good food wasted in western societies each day. People in Iraq and of Middle East have more weapons than they have food to feed their own people. Many African dictators spend more than half their national income on war implements than they do in investing in their own people. Where do we place our priorities? When will we stop looking to governments and do what we can to erase this growing menace?

At global level, nation states are trying to reach on an agreement which can be helpful in global emission reduction of greenhouse gases. But in order to save this world from global warming we have to work on the personal level as well. There is an immediate need to change our way of living, but by follow some simple steps, we can contribute in the fight against climate change. These all steps

are so simple that we can easily follow them during our everyday life.

If each of us plants one little tree, it can amount to a great amount of afforestation making the environment healthier. Increasing the use of bicycles or making a habit to walk down short distances can contribute to reduction in air pollution. Try to minimize the use of vehicles and pay heed to their maintenance; clean their exhaust pipes and keep the pollution they cause under strict control.

Look at the gadgets you use at home. Are all of them necessary? Do you maintain them well and use them efficiently? Turn off the ACs as also the lights and fans in unused rooms. Make sure to switch off the lights, the television or radio systems before you leave the house. Remember to switch off your computer when no one is using it. Did you know that your refrigerator and water heaters consume a lot of power? A careful use of these gadgets is a good way to save the electricity. Use CFC-free products.

## Preventing Wastage of Water

One of the most important constituents of the environment is water. Preventing the wastage of water and curbing water pollution is one of our primary duties. Turn off the taps; do not let the buckets overflow.



Do not dump garbage down a storm drain. It is very important not to pollute water bodies. It is said that recycling is one of the best measures of saving the environment. Buy the products that you can reuse. Try to use renewable sources of energy. Lessen the use of rubber and plastic. Instead, use paper bags and cardboard containers. Even a simple habit of buying in bulk can save a lot of packaging material, thus contributing to saving the environment. Buy the products that you can reuse.

When in office, print only when it is absolutely necessary. Printing every soft copy leads to a heavy wastage of paper. Avoid an excessive use of air conditioners in the office. Use emails instead of paper correspondence. Do not use disposable cups when you have an option of using the ceramic ones.

We all must minimize the use of animal products, which involve their killing. Animal fur and ivory are some of the excessively used products that are gradually leading to the extinction of the animals that provide them.

### **Small Step, Big Leap**

A small step by each of us can make a huge leap towards saving the environment. The late Michael Jackson in his song says, "If you want to make the world a better place...just look on the man in the mirror...and make a change". The world must take a serious look

on how we use what we have and stop the blame game. We must watch our own carbon footprints and see how much individually we are contributing to climate change. Where we put our rubbish, do we recycle, how much paper we use each day in our offices, how much electricity we use, when we use the car instead of walking or taking the bus, and the list goes on. When the next generation will look back at us and scream asking, why could you not take a step forward and do something? We must teach our kids the importance of walking; take a bus instead of driving everywhere. This may not be much in the big idea of things, but it's a positive start so that their future can be filled with hope.

To conclude, "Let every individual and institutions now think and act as a responsible trustee of Earth, seeking choices in ecology, economics and ethics that will provide a sustainable future, eliminate pollution, poverty and violence, awaken the wonder of life and foster peaceful progress in the human adventure."— John McConnell, founder of International Earth Day.■

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## Why Should I Care

why should I care if flowers die  
If their soft petals turn lip up  
heartbroken, sombre like dirt  
and slowly brown, disintegrate  
and fall down to earth

why should I care if water loses its way  
searching for its level  
frightened, snapping like mongrels  
ferrying waste and my drenched soul  
swallowing bits of my earth

why should I care if the sun goes blind  
returning home for dinner  
groping, tapping its rays like a cane  
and, lost, lies down among a shiver of  
rivers  
dandruff of stars on hunched shoulder

why should I care if birds lose their  
feathers  
neck bent to the pot in wordless plea  
feet knotted, gripping nothing  
but their pride  
wishing futilely feathers hold up our head

why should I care if flowers die  
if water loses its way  
if the sun, gutted, goes blind

why should I, why should I care  
if we go home hungry  
if our head drops down  
if life stares with gutted eyes  
and there is nothing  
but fallen flowers, broken earth  
and graves of what is dreamed

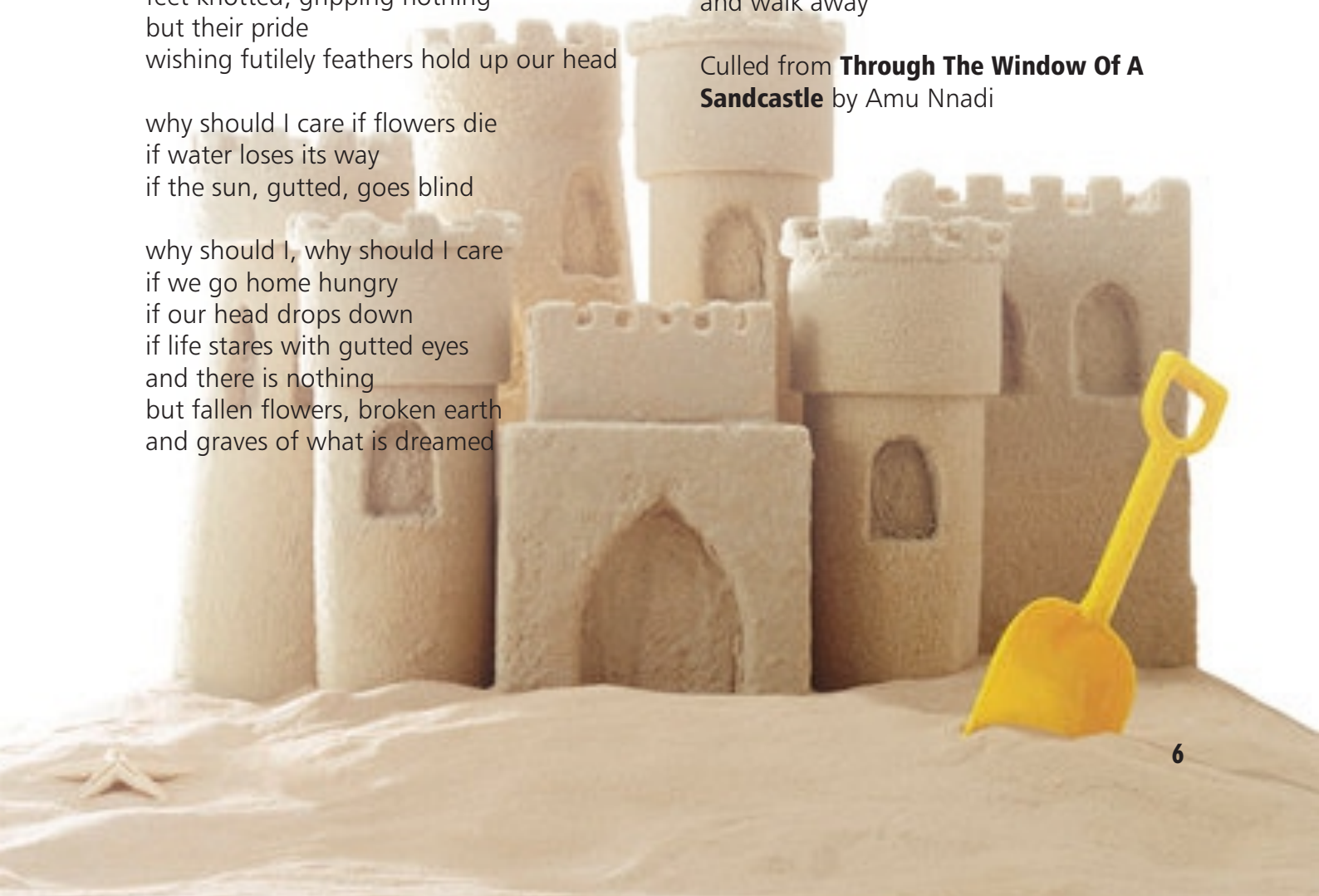
## Plunder

i will take these moments with you  
without fear  
without remorse  
this plunder  
digging as they do for diamonds  
into your earth

this is our rite of thunder  
because it rains in our hearts a flood of  
misery  
and our groans like these rumbles  
bemoan the darkness that covers us

pray, what more can it be?  
with what fear can the chicken weep?  
what more suffering  
can draw blood from our eyes?  
we have sold our hearts  
for privatizations of pleasure  
bound only to this release  
when we must stand,  
bereft of tenderness.  
and walk away

Culled from **Through The Window Of A  
Sandcastle** by Amu Nnadi





# LAWYERS EXAMINE NIGERIA'S BIOSAFETY PREPARADENESS

**O**n Wednesday, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) held a stakeholders meeting with about 40 legal practitioners from the Benin branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA). The meeting was a step in establishing a network of experts to address the crisis of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and identifying the challenges with the 2015 Nigeria Biosafety Management Act. GMOs are organisms whose genetic composition are altered by a transfer of genes from a foreign organism which may not be related to it. GMOs are novel organisms. In the last few years, GMO foods have infiltrated the Nigerian market along with the risks they post to our health and ecological integrity.

Chima Williams of Friends of the Earth Nigeria and Green Alliance Nigeria anchored the meeting and set the agenda for the program. According to him, 'our concern is for the environment, agriculture and our people. As lawyers, we are joining the debate to determine whether the Biosafety Law is good for us or if we are accepting foods that have been discarded in other countries.' He noted that the outcome of this meeting will determine whether the legal practitioners will join forces with the rest of civil society to call for

an amendment or outright repeal of the law. He also welcomed representatives from the media and encourage that the outcomes of the meeting be disseminated effectively to all stakeholders.

The majority of participants were members of the Benin branch of NBA with a few members attending from Uromi and Ekpoma branches. There were also media representatives.

The meeting was an important dialogue among professionals from the legal community as well as environmental activists. As Ede Asenoguan, Chairman of NBA, Benin City, delivered the welcome address, he highlighted the important role played by the legal community in the social and developmental space.

Therefore, the NBA's participation in the biosafety discourse was one of necessity. According to him, 'the primary role of lawyers is to promote the rule of law and ensure there is justice in every ramification of our existence. So, we are here to take a look at the Nigerian laws on GMOs and Biosafety as well as articulate the health and social implications of the law on our lives as well as ensure that the law and its implementation work best for our people.'

This sentiment was echoed by the representative from Brot fur die Welt, who described his organizations interest in promoting development and healthy, safe and profitable agriculture. "This requires good knowledge of the situation as well as a boost in the awareness about biosafety in Nigeria" he said. He expressed his organization's solidarity with HOMEF in the struggle to ensure the biotechnological integrity of the Nigerian landscape is protected.

During Nnimmo Bassey's presentation, he stressed that 'GMOs artificially cross genetic boundaries' and lead to resistance from nature in form of superweeds and super pests. When farmers plant GM seeds, they save on labor and weed control. These seeds are also able to withstand application of herbicides which kill other unwanted crops. As the weeds and pests grow resistant to these sprays, they evolve into super weeds and super pests and in turn accelerate insecticide and herbicide use. These large GM organizations, which have

patents on their seeds, also collect millions of US dollars annually from farmers whose farms might have been contaminated by their seeds from neighboring farms. Furthermore, the unintended consequences to the ecosystem could be invisible for decades and the industrial scale at which they are released does not allow the public differentiate between GM and Non-GM food crops. "The ethical, social, economic and ecological consequences of GMO foods are dire and there is a gap in the holistic assessment of these consequences" said Bassey. It is therefore important to preserve our seed and our agriculture as small scale farmers (rather than large mono-crop GM farms) are the future of food in the world. Nnimmo Bassey concluded by saying "GMOs are unsafe and we cannot use Nigerians as guinea pigs. Instead, agro-ecology principles must be introduced into Nigerian agriculture as it provides a holistic solution to the food and economic challenges we face."





## Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety



Mariann Basse Orowuje, Coordinator of Food Sovereignty Campaign for Friends of the Earth Nigeria, gave an in-depth review of the 2015 Biosafety Management Act as well as an overview of the international agreements relevant to biosafety.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety became the first (and only) international law to deal purely on genetic engineering and GMOs. It was adopted in 2000 in Montreal and entered into force in 2003. As of 2012, 163 parties mostly from developing countries and including Nigeria have signed unto the law. The Protocol hinges on the precautionary principles of prior informed consent before risk-taking as well as national sovereignty in decision making and the right to refuse GMOs.

This law is followed by the African Model Law on Biosafety which was first adopted in 2003 by the African Union and which raised the bar for best biosafety practices across the Union. The modified and finalized Model Law was adopted in 2014. These international laws influenced Nigeria's local law. In 2001, the Nigerian Biosafety Guidelines were put forward as advisory procedures for handling GMOs.

They evolved into the 2010 Nigeria Biosafety Bill which was marred by promotion from GMO supporters such as USAID and AATF as well as a skewed public hearing.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through a \$5.4 million grant was also instrumental in the infiltration of GMO foods through African borders. The result in Nigeria was the passing of the defective 2015 National Biosafety Management Agency Act which inhibits access to information, appeals and reviews, labeling and the right to knowledge, liability and redress as well as public consultation. There is also no mention of the precautionary principle on which the Cartagena Protocol was developed.

Here is a summary of comments that followed the presentations:

1. Uniting against GMOs: Legal practitioners, researchers and public commentators must come together and project as a group through the media in order to stand up against large and powerful entities like the GM organizations.





According to Barrister Osakwe of NBA Benin, 'our generations unborn will suffer the impacts of chemicalized foods and drugs.' Partnerships, such as that between HOMEF and the NBA, allow each

constituent group to contribute its expertise to the dialogue.

2. Closing the information gap: The circulation of erroneous information has led to a widespread belief that GMOs will solve hunger in Nigeria. Therefore, massive awareness as well as forums among stakeholders must continue in order to keep correct information about biosafety in circulation. Information is critical to combat unfavorable policies.

3. Closing the food gap: A challenge has been put forth to the scientific community to develop methods (in partnership with farming communities) that can help fill the gap in food production in our country. E.S Odaman (chairman, NBA, Ekpoma) pointed out that with the benefit of this lecture, it is clear that the GMO foods coming into Nigeria are poisonous rather than solutions to the food gap in the country.

4. Alarming health and safety concerns: It has become apparent that the life expectancy in Nigeria is dropping as a result of several factors including the over-chemicalisation of the things we consume. We might be able to avoid GM lotions and soaps but food is unavoidable. Therefore, the laws against GMOs must be tightened to ensure food safety.

5. Demanding an act that protects us: The porous laws surrounding GMOs in Nigeria need to be amended in favor of the people they ought to protect. Ede Asenoguan proposed that the way forward is to put forward recommendations for the amendment of the existing bio-safety act in order to preserve our overall health and safety. Ojie Inegbeboh also recommended that a comprehensive list should be drawn up to identify what comes into the country and subject them to proper testing before they are approved. ■

# BENIN CITY DECLARATION ON PROMOTING

## BIOSAFETY IN NIGERIA

At the conclusion of the One Day Stakeholders meeting on Promoting Biosafety held at BAR HOUSE, Benin City, Edo State, by the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in Collaboration with the Nigerian Bar Association Edo State, on the 22nd February, 2017, the Stakeholders brought to the fore, critical issues and concerns of GMOs and the Nigerian Biosafety Management Act 2015. They also brainstormed on the increased aggressive push of the biotechnology companies in partnership with their local actors in Nigeria to ensure favourable legislations as a step towards unleashing their products and commodities on Nigerians.

Participants Resolved as follows:

1. The Nigerian government, in passing the Nigerian Biosafety Act 2015 into law, did not take into account the concerns of local farmers and critical stakeholders, contrary to the provisions of the African Union's Model Law on Biosafety and the Cartagena Protocol. The Act in its current form lacks the legal safeguards to protect Nigerian food culture, environment, ecosystems and human health.
2. There are several fault-lines in the permissive NBMA Act requiring that the entire Act be urgently reviewed and the GMO permits issued withdrawn.
3. The constitution of the Board of NBMA makes the agency open to conflict of interests as already seen in the case of a board member (National Biotechnology Development Agency) teaming up with commercial interests to apply for and receive permits to introduce GMOs into Nigeria.
4. That Institutions that are created to protect our environment and biosafety are actually hand-in-gloves with corporations that are trying to flood our country with exotic and risky products and merchandise.

5. The National Biosafety Agency (NBMA) did not take into account the objections and critical concerns submitted to its agency by key NGOs supported by over 100 groups, bothering on health, environmental, socio-economic, technical and administrative concerns before issuing permits to Monsanto Agriculture Nigeria Limited on behalf of Monsanto Company, based in St-Louis, Missouri, USA, for commercial release and placing on market of genetically modified cotton and for the confined field trial of two maize events .
6. There is inadequate information and awareness on food sovereignty issues in the media thus shutting out critical stakeholders, deepening public ignorance and inhibiting contributions to solutions
7. Our governments have been largely complacent about the covert activities of the biotechnology industry to undermine food sovereignty in Nigeria
8. There is need for a local and national paradigm-shift towards food sovereignty based on local contextual considerations, promotion of small-scale farmers, pastoralists and fisher-folk which have defined indigenous agriculture based on human rights and sustainable natural resource use.
9. The mythical benefits of GMOs have been debunked by many experts. For instance, a report issued by over 400 scientists and development practitioners from developed and developing countries, under the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), concluded that small scale farmers should be supported as modern biotechnology would have very limited contribution to the feeding of the world in the foreseeable future.
10. Production of GMOs is a threat to our biosafety; poses great threat to human and environment health and severely impedes the attainment of sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty/security,
11. Promoters of GMO and their allies have deliberately ignored the importance and the peculiarities of Nigerian culture, environment and agriculture in their aggressive attempts to impose their products and merchandise on Nigeria. Rather than promoting agroecology, which works in harmony with nature, they have become tied to the apron-strings of speculators and neo-colonial powers whose objective is to exploit, subjugate and destroy food production systems in Nigeria while promoting monoculture and use of toxic agro-chemicals.

Signed

Barr Ede Asenoguan – Chairman, Nigerian Bar Association, Benin Branch

Nnimmo Bassey – Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation

Barr Chima Williams – President, Green Alliance of Nigeria



# A Report Triggers Debate:

## NIREC cautions FG against GM foods

The National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has advised the Federal Government to be cautious in allowing Genetically Modified (GM) foods into the country.

NIREC in a report by its committee set up to investigate claims for and against GM foods said it was not advisable to go on with GMOs in Nigeria for now because the country was not ripe for it.

The report entitled, "Final report on GMOs and Recommendation," said the agency in charge of biotechnology industry in the country does not have facilities and expertise to regulate and control GM practice in the country.

The Committee members include: Prof. M.C. Asuzu (Chairman), Prof. Musa N. Borodo (Co-Chairman), Prof. L.O. Sanni, Prof. A.A. Oladosu, Prof. Y. Saidu, Prof. Philip Njemanze, Nnimmo Bassey, Prof. Maurice Iwu, Prof. Labode Popoola, Dr. Rufus Ebegba, Dr. Rose M. Gidado, Utaan Omozusi, Aduwu Reuben (NIREC Officer).

NIREC said it set up the committee following several complaints regarding the possible dangers of the unguarded release of GMOs into the Nigerian agriculture and food chain.

(<http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/nirec-cautions-fg-against-gm-foods/184953.html>)

## NABDA replies NIREC on GMO claim

By Zakariyya Adaramola | Publish  
Date: Feb 28 2017 2:00AM

The National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) has said the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC's) investigation on the safety of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) is biased and should be disregarded by Nigerians. NIREC had cautioned the Federal Government and Nigerians against allowing GMO into the country.

Its committee setup to investigate the safety of GM foods had said there were controversies surrounding its safety and therefore should not be adopted by the country.

But NABDA through Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology, Nigeria (OFAB) said NIREC was biased because it failed to get the input from any member from the modern biotechnology promoters group.

"The NIREC Committee set-up to look into the Genetic Modification Technology in Nigeria was one sided and had her no Membership from the Modern Biotechnology promoters group", a NABDA director and the coordinator of OFAB Nigeria, Dr Rose Gidado said in a disclaimer yesterday.

(culled from ([culled from http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/nabda-replies-nirec-on-gmo-claim/187155.html](http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/nabda-replies-nirec-on-gmo-claim/187155.html))

## Ebegba not NIREC member – NBMA

The National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) has said that its Director-General / CEO, Dr. Rufus Ebegba, is not a member of the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC). Director-General of the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), Dr. Rufus Ebegba

The agency disclosed in a statement on Friday, February 24 2017 that a media report listing its Dr. Ebegba as a member of the NIREC was untrue.

The statement reads: “The Agency wishes to state that Dr. Rufus Ebegba is not a member of the council nor does he sit on any of its committees.

“Dr. Ebegba was only invited by NIREC committee on GMOs to a workshop, where he highlighted the level of Nigeria's biosafety preparedness and the role of NBMA in the regulation of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Nigeria.

“At the said workshop, which was held in Abuja, August 2016, he was emphatic that the NBMA was ready and will not compromise safety in the deployment of GMOs in Nigeria. He further stated that the NBMA is well equipped and will ensure that the deployment of GMOs does not cause harm to humans and the environment.”

(Culled from  
<http://www.environmentnigeria.com/ebegba-not-nirec-member-nbma/>)

## DISCLAIMER\*\*\* by Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology, Nigeria

[February 16 at 2:58pm:](#)

On the Daily Trust publication below (NIREC cautions FG against GMOs), the OFAB Nigeria Coordinator, Dr. [Rose Gidado whose name appeared as part of the Committee wishes to state that she was called to answer questions at the Committee meeting but was never part of the Meeting not to talk of being part of the approval process of the final report that was produced.](#)

In her remarks at the meeting when she was summoned to represent her DG/CEO, she stated that Nigeria's Population was on the increase and faces issues of declining agriculture which required the country to embrace technological tools and innovations that can improve agriculture.

She told the Members that Agricultural Biotechnology is one of the techniques available for developing improved crops with resistance/ tolerant to insects/pests, drought, salinity and other harsh weather conditions. In addition, she said the Nigerian government, convinced that Biotechnology, a cutting edge technology, could contribute to achieving food security, poverty reduction, wealth creation, affordable health care delivery system, industrialisation and sustainable environments, approved a biotechnology policy in 2001 which led to the creation of National Biotechnology Development Agency.

Dr. Rose also explained to the Committee that Biotechnology is the only technology that has been found to develop crops that will produce insect/pest resistant seeds and warned that global warming is on the increase but its attendant consequences can be reduced with biotechnology. She encouraged the committee to be progressive in their report as other countries are using this technology for their good.

The committee as well, stated at the meeting that NIREC is in support of GMOs but among the 3 ways to improve agriculture. The urged National Biosafety Management Agency to take regulation as a top priority.

'Including my name in the list of Members of NIREC is malicious, an act of indiscipline, evil intentioned, defamatory and ill-natured. This does not speak well of anyone who wants to promote the well-being of the citizenry especially at this time of economic diversification. They want Nigerian farmers to remain poor and continue to languish in abject poverty", Dr Gidado lamented.

She hereby dissociates herself with this publication and its contents. Nigeria must join the rest of the world in moving forward in the area of agriculture. Our farmers must be in business. ■

( C u l l e d f r o m  
[https://web.facebook.com/OFABNigeria/?hc\\_ref=PAGES\\_TIMELINE&fref=nf](https://web.facebook.com/OFABNigeria/?hc_ref=PAGES_TIMELINE&fref=nf))



Response to the Denials:

## When Faith Questions Genetic Modification (NIREC and the trouble with Nigeria's GMO Twins)

By Nnimmo Bassey

Recently there was a news report that the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) cautioned the Nigerian government with regard to permitting Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) foods into Nigeria. That significant report may have escaped many Nigerians. However, the strident denial by the directors general of National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) and National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) that they were not members of the NIREC committee on GMOs helped to bring up the report again.



Both officials are right to say that they were not members of the NIREC committee because they were not. I was a member, so I can testify to that. They were invited to share information on GMOs with the committee set up by NIREC. And the director of NBMA did while NABDA was represented by an assistant director of the agency.

A disclaimer published by Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology, Nigeria (OFAB) on behalf of NABDA opens with these words: "On the Daily Trust publication below (NIREC cautions FG against GMOs), the OFAB Nigeria Coordinator, Dr Rose Gidado whose name appeared as part of the Committee wishes to state that she was called to answer questions at the Committee meeting but was never part of the Meeting not to talk of being part of the approval process of the final report that was produced." She met with the committee as a representative of NABDA.

A preliminary comment that is of important at this point is that these two agencies operate like conjoined twins. And that may be so because NBMA is purportedly the brainchild of NABDA. No, that is not my imagination. It is alarming because the NABDA as the name implies is a biotechnology research, development and promotion agency. Their job is to ensure that GMOs are placed on the dining tables of Nigerians whether we want them or not.

The fact of one being the brainchild of the other was revealed at one of the sittings of the committee. The inseparable nature of the two agencies was also illustrated before my eyes in the studios of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) where their two heads were invited to the Good Morning Show to which I was, unfortunately, also invited. They would not consider sharing the precious space with someone who would speak against their positions. They apparently do not want Nigerians to hear the other side of the story – about the impacts of GMOs and agro-toxics

on the environment, humans and biodiversity. One of the chiefs literally dragged the other out of the studio with the NTA officials pleading with them to stay and participate in the programme, to no avail. That display of disdain to criticism must have shocked the staff of NTA and signified very clearly the sort of leadership we have on biosafety issues in Nigeria.

NABDA and NABMA work hand-in-hand in a manner that is unacceptable. A true regulator would be an impartial umpire on biosafety and GMO issues. In his rebuttal to the news report that erroneously stated that the two biotech leaders were part of NIREC, the head of NBMA stated that he was assuring Nigerians that his agency will supervise the safe deployment of GMOs in Nigeria.

First, he takes the introduction of GMOs into Nigeria as a given. Why would a biosafety regulator consider himself as a supervisor of GMOs? Can we tolerate a referee, in a soccer match, who celebrates whenever one side scores a goal? Secondly, when he talks about the introduction of GMOs he used a militaristic terminology, deployment, probably signifying that the battle lines are drawn against Nigerians who are suspicious of any GMO hemlock.

It makes sense to see that it was patently wrong to have a biotech promotion agency operating in Nigeria, with tax payers' money, in a situation where there was no biosafety law in place. So, they had to cook up something. And that is what we have. A NBMA whose board is populated by GMO promoters, including NABDA.




This murky situation gives us a spectacular template for conflict of interest in the regulation of GMOs in Nigeria. And NABDA did not waste any moment in putting its insider placement in NBDA to work. How? They teamed up with Monsanto to apply for field trials of two GMO maize events in Nigeria and promptly approved the application.

However, when NABDA blames the NIREC committee of bias and in another breath, claims that the NIREC committee endorses GMOs, that is a figment of the agency's imagination. It simply is not true. The committee, made up of seasoned academics and religious leaders, raised questions over GMOs and did not recommend it as a way forward for Nigeria. With the attitude of brooking no dissent, it was curious to hear the chief of NABDA accuse the NIREC committee of bias, because, according to her, the committee did not have GMO promoters on it.

The committee was at pains explaining to the two agencies that, in carrying out their work, they must understand that the critical baseline is the interest of Nigerians and our environment and not that of any commercial or political interest- no matter how powerful. The two agencies could not convince the expert committee that they had enough tools to adequately carry out their tasks. Among other things, the committee also saw that NABDA was functioning more as a GMO advocacy agency rather than engaging in useful research, while the Biosafety Management Act itself requires urgent radical review.■

<http://www.homef.org/article/when-faith-questions-genetic-modification>



# Dangerous Air Pollution in The City of Port Harcourt

By Fidelis Allen

Port Harcourt seems to have lost the appeal of being a destination for holidaymakers. At least, this has been true in recent times, for those easily whacked by stories that roll the spine. The city is rightly, warm-heartedly referred to as the headquarters of the oil-rich Niger Delta. "Garden City," was the signature phrase that described it. It was clean, and at some point, one of the most mentioned peaceful cities in Nigeria. As a young lad without exposure beyond the immediate rural village setting, Port Harcourt, was indeed desired as a place to visit every other time.

My early curiosity about life had a lot to do with this city as a place of interest and social investment.

But not many admire the city's colonial legacy. Like many colonial enclaves, the city was a crucial exit point for the immorally acquired raw materials by European adventurers. Colonialism ended with promises of change in the post-colonial state.

The change offered, is oil. The coincidence of discovery of that commodity in commercial quantity in 1956 and preparation for the post-colonial era remains mysterious. The oil would turn out to be a real replacement for the palm oil and other agricultural produce previously the basis for the establishment of the colonial state. But, it is not all that glitters that is cold.

The oil is not the gold after all. It is the reason foreigners enter the city weekly. At the local airport, the foreigners touch down in droves every week, and only have to work briskly and confidently into the hands of waiting oil company representatives or drivers, and government security, who must take them to different hotels in town.

What is the issue with Port Harcourt today? Local city dwellers are asking what has gone wrong with the air. People

consider daily drops of black soot a strange phenomenon.

Yet they look helpless. They are not used to such things. The worry that follows regular pollution of air through gas flaring among natives has never been specifically linked many negative tendencies. Let me say that the soot is not rain on which people traditionally expected for several reasons, including farming. Rain-fed agriculture used to be a key element of livelihood patterns among people in the Niger Delta. Farmers were used to celebrating the rain after several weeks of waiting.

Outside issues of flooding and the impact of oil and gas pollution on the rural economy, there were hardly serious issues of concern with pollution on massive scale and threat as it is now with oil companies and other actors. There is a new threat in the air, that was never visible to eyes. The present noticeable air pollution is part of the consequences of an old message on the unfriendly nature of fossil fuels on environment. Daily shower of the dust on residents of the city of Port Harcourt is now far more than a source of worry.

Telling the story to those who live outside this city, who probably visit occasionally and lodge in fancy hotels, would give a different impression. The hotels, especially the good ones, have perfected ritualized cleaning, done frequently as part of good business practice. This is not in any fight against the dust.

It is important to note that fight against the dust cannot be won by pretext nor by feeble higgledy-piggledy habit in an effort to keep customers. Cleaning the floor of hotel rooms and restaurants does not clean the air of the pollution, nor nostrils of the dust. Toilets, floor tiles, and kitchen gadgets now receive more attention than ever because of the nauseating accumulation of the dust.



Bedrooms and sitting rooms are not excluded, as they have to be cleaned at least three times each day. We are now all looking like field oil workers for the dirt regularly under our feet because of stepping regularly on the dust in homes. The internal human body system is most vulnerable. But the story is yet to be told.

In the past three months or so, routine journeys to and from work, as well as to my children's schools to bring them home after school, has turned very uninteresting. It used to be exciting, living with the sense of responsibility that comes with it. The air is filled with the black dust. The State Ministry of Environment has only simply warned against unnecessary exposure to the dust. Relocating from the city of Port Harcourt is an option for some in jobs that permit such relocation. But how easily can this be, in the face of economic hardship. The long years of failure on the part of business and government officials, to imbibe a culture of protection of environment is part of the problem. The quality of the air that people take in, and the impact this has on life, is something no one should treat with levity. I am amazed that we have been in this environmental quagmire for than four months without any meaningful response by relevant government authorities such as the Federal and State Ministries of

Environment.

I, like many others, worry about this criminal silence over an issue that puts all of us in danger. No one can tell exactly when the real impact of what is happening right now will start to manifest in people's lives. It may be two, three, four, five or more years.

In my view, the business community, oil companies, government officials, residents of Port Harcourt, non-governmental organizations need to come together to find a lasting solution to the problem, which border on structural and systemic issues with the petroleum capitalist economy. Meanwhile, relevant government agencies at the federal and state levels should swing into action with seriousness by locating the polluting organization immediately.■

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# C'River Community protests against highway construction, insists on internal roads

By Anietie Akpan, Calabar

The people of Ekuri community in Akampa Local council of Cross River state have protested against the construction of the 260 kilometer super highway by the state government. Rising from a one-day training programme organized by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) for the old and new Ekuri, Edondon and Okokori communities at the weekend. The youths, men and women took to the streets protesting a plan by the state government to commence construction of the road this month as said by the commissioner of information, Mrs Rosemary Archibong.

The youth president, Anthony Otio Enwa said: "The anger here is that we have been so forgotten by the government that is why we the youths of this community are not happy. We are not even supposed to welcome you as come but we said we should just relax and ask what brought you here. Since you have made us understand why you are here, we are in full support of your organization but as we support you, you should teach us more about development. You should also take our message back to the government."

Also, the Ekuri deputy youth leader, Philip

Okoma said: "Our leaders in Calabar and Abuja are not taking us along. Our position is that the government should come and complete this first road they have started and forget about the super highway. They will destroy the forests and abandon the road halfway just as they did to this one. So they should come and complete the little one they have started."

In the same vein, the chief of Ekuri community, Chief Steve Oji; spokesperson of old Ekuri, Livinus Akparawu and others also rejected the superhighway saying: "the last time they came they brought false news that the road had being completed. You are here and can see that it is false. The road is still pending. Because of the bad road we have been having so many accidents that have caused so many deaths. If not for God's protection many of us will not even be alive today. You people that have come today are our redeemers. Please tell them to come and finish the first road."

(The Guardian Newspaper, Monday March 13, 2017)



# As Soot Blankets Port Harcourt

By Nnimmo Bassey

The air in parts of Port Harcourt has been darkened by soot over the past few months, raising a cloud of concerns about the attendant health impacts. Citizens in parts of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, are getting worried about the air they breathe. To put it another way, many citizens are afraid to breathe. And that can be deadly.

Soot is a general term that covers pollutants derived from incomplete or inefficient burning of fossil fuels or biomass (plants or plant-based materials used as source of energy). The major sources of soot include fuels like diesel used in transport and in electricity generators. For the Niger Delta, the sources include the aforementioned and include others such as: gas flares, illegal refineries, the burning of illegal refineries and crude oil, burning of oil spills by incompetent contractors and the burning of sundry wastes. Bush burning can also be a source of soot in our

environment.

The burning of illegal, or bush refineries, by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF), the incendiary acts that have been raised as banners of victory over oil theft, is one source that must be halted immediately. The bush refineries are basic and flimsy contraptions that can easily be dismantled and safely disposed of. The same goes for wooden barges arrested with stolen crude.

Dropping grenades on those toxic wares and sending smoke signals above the creeks may be seen as acts of bravado, but they have serious health impacts on the environment and citizens in the area. The JTF, working with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the oil majors, should set up recovery centres where recovered stolen crude are logged, stored and safely disposed of by the original owners or as agreed.

The disposal methods could include sending such crude to the refineries or by exporting them if the quality is not compromised by the process of rough handling. A variety of soot is one called black carbon. We have also heard of black snow arising from carbon particulates that accumulated in the Himalayas, for instance, and is said to aid the rapid melting of snow by reason of the heat they trap. Dramatic carbon pollution in the winter of 1952 led to the death of about 4000 persons within five days.

The current situation of soot blanketing the skyline of parts of Port Harcourt is deeply troubling and requires urgent actions from relevant government agencies as well as research institutes. In particular, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), Nigerian National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), Directorate of Petroleum Resources (DPR) and, in general, the Federal and State Ministries of Environment and those of Health should step up to tackle the emergency situation.

When reports of gathering soot came up a couple of months ago, sources at NESREA confirmed that the soot originated from hydrocarbon or oil-sector related sources. That conclusion rules out bush burning as a possible source. For those that have noticed the thick black smoke belching continuously from the Port Harcourt refineries, those sources are very strong suspects. And then, the bush refineries and the bombing of those rickety refineries by the JTF remain strong contenders. These should all be investigated. The scenario has raised the urgent need for air quality measurement and control in Nigeria. Within accurate measurement of levels of exposure, causal links may not solid and culprits may wriggle out and avoid accountability and responsibility. It is the duty of our regulatory agencies to pinpoint the source of this menace, enforce a

cessation of the obnoxious acts and penalise the culprits. We know that the conflicting boundary lines governing the duties of these agencies may complicate the processes for addressing this issue, but joint meetings should overcome territorial defences in the face of the risks our people are exposed to.

This is a serious situation and government cannot afford to remain silent on it. The health impacts of soot and black carbon are well documented and are known to include effects on our respiratory system and bloodstreams. They can trigger cardiovascular diseases such as asthma, chronic cough, sinusitis, bronchitis and colds. The fine particles can also have carcinogenic effects. They can also negatively affect the development of the lungs in children. Life expectancy in the Niger Delta is already precariously low, the effect of soot and black carbon will push those low figures through the bottom.

We should also mention here that Ekpan community at Warri, Delta State, has been suffering extensive pollutions from black carbon emanating from the petrochemical plant located there. The community is more or less heavily coated with soot continually and residents often have to keep their windows shut in futile to keep out the deadly stuff. When the community petitioned the National Assembly over the situation, an order was issued that the plant should be shut down until it was adequately serviced and fitted with devices that would halt the noxious emissions. It does not appear that the order was adhered to as the community is still reeling under the weight of black carbon whenever the machines come alive.

Residents of Port Harcourt, Ekpan and the Niger Delta as a whole deserve a breath of air that is fresh and devoid of soot and black carbon■



## **RESOLUTIONS REACHED AFTER A TRAINING ON FOREST MONITORING ORGANISED BY HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION (HOMEF) HELD IN EKURI COMMUNITY IN AKAMKPA LGA OF CROSS RIVER STATE ON MARCH 11, 2017**

A training on forest monitoring was organized by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in Ekuri Community. The training had four five representatives of CSOs (Green Concern for Development, Peace Point Action, Environmental Protection and Child Rights Awareness, NGOCE, Community Forest Watch), 5 media houses and 200 participants from Edondon, Okokori, Old Ekuri and New Ekuri communities.

The key objective of the training was to train community members on Forest Law, Impact of deforestation and forest monitoring and proper reporting.

At the end of the training the following were the resolutions reached by the community people:

- 1) We urge the Government of Cross River State to stop the proposed Super Highway project which is to pass through our forest and as a matter of urgency to call-back the contractor handling the Africa Development Bank Assisted road construction work from Ochon to Ekuri community to return to site and complete the abandoned road construction project which they claimed to have completed.
- 2) Government should provide standard primary and secondary schools in both Old and New Ekuri communities and also provide adequate and qualified teachers for the schools.
- 3) Government should provide good pipe-borne water and electricity for us.
- 4) We are tired of being cut-off from the world and urge the government to partner with the telecommunication companies to provide telecommunication mast in Old Ekuri community to enable us have access to telecommunication network.
- 5) Government should provide us with good hospital and adequate medical personnel.
- 6) We urge the government to provide small business grant to the youths of our community in order for them to start up a business.
- 7) Our efforts at forest protection have gained international recognition to the state and the government should support our efforts to conserve and protect our forests

Signed  
Chief John Egeh  
Village Head – Orontemi  
For: New Ekuri Community

Mr. Brendan Wilfred Egbe  
For: Old Ekuri Community

# System Change will not be Negotiated

By Nnimmo Bassey

We frequently hear calls for system change, at public mobilisations, in conference halls and even in negotiation halls. The calls come as slogans, they come in anger and they come as a strong rebuke to the systemic scaffold on which our pains, our exploitation and the denial of our voices and rights are hung.

The necessity of system change is inescapable. The present system is dependent on the extreme exploitation and enslavement of nature and labour, built around an inherently unjust core. We are in the dying days of a civilisation driven by fossil fuels. This end is not coming merely because of the recorded and predicted severe species extinction, or by peak oil. Its end is being heralded by a looming climatic catastrophe and by the reawakening of social forces realising that slavery persists as long as the enslaved is unaware of his state.

As Oilwatch International highlight, there are *'similarities in the current pattern of resource exploitation in countries of the Global South, and affected peoples in the rest of the world which reflects historical legacy of disempowerment of peoples, plunder of natural resources and*

*destruction of environment, and [Oilwatch] considers the recognition of the right of peoples to self-determination and cultural integrity as primary in the resolution of environmental problems.'*

Our urgent task is to reclaim the future, and this will not be attainable if the current system persists.

## Green Capitalism

Green was once a colour. Today it has turned into a silencing code that lulls us into accepting that Nature cannot be protected unless financial value is placed on her. The Rio + 20 summit served as a platform for the elevation of the concept of Green Economy as a major plank for global environmental governance, especially with regard to climate change. 'Green Economy' permits the financialization of everything, through a plethora of instruments such as those intended to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD, REDD plus), emissions trading schemes (ETS), clean development mechanisms (CDM) and the like.





Photo credit: <http://canadianlabour.ca>

Green economy is a neo-liberal idea that hoists the financialization of Nature and carbon offsetting as ideal tools for nature protection. It has been cooked up to entrench current capitalist production modes and power relations where might is right. Poor, vulnerable and cash-strapped nations that contribute little or nothing to global warming see the trickles that drop into their empty bowls from market mechanisms, while their citizens are displaced from their territories, forced to bear a disproportionate level of real climate actions. With climate change neatly 'boxed' as a matter of means of handling carbon emissions, the world conveniently ignores the root cause of the crises: the origins of those emissions.

This entrenched situation is neo-colonial and imperialist. It upturns every notion of justice, including the common but differentiated responsibilities anchor of pre-2011 climate negotiations.

A just climate regime ought not to scratch for funds to tackle the emergencies already throwing up climate refugees. A clear

solution for climate finance can be found in the Peoples Agreement, which demands that countries cut their emissions by at least 50% at source between 2013 and 2017, without recourse to offsets and other carbon trading schemes, and that developed countries commit 6% of their GDP to finance adaptation and mitigation needs. The payment of climate debt is not seen as a mere demand for reparations, but as a means of decolonising the atmospheric space and redistributing what meagre space or carbon budget is left. It is a means towards obligating humans to take actions to restore disrupted natural cycles of Nature.

Climate change negotiations offer us a clear lens to see that market environmentalism approaches are merely means of escape from responsibility and measureable action. A look at the Paris Agreement reached at COP21 reveals that the major cause of global warming – fossil fuels utilisation in production and transportation – is not recognised in the process of tackling global warming.

The notion that any carbon, emitted anywhere, can be offset by carbon absorbed anywhere else has given rise to the concept of net emissions, offering polluting nations the ultimate escape hatch through which to retain their levels of pollution and consumption, while grabbing lands, forests and waters elsewhere to compensate.

It is now well known that at least 80% of currently known fossil fuels reserves must be left untapped and unburned to keep temperature increases to below 2°C. What's troubling is that not only is this not being discussed at climate negotiations, but that new reserves are being sought, and extraction methods are being intensified. A clear throwback to fiddling while the city burns.

The fact that fossil fuels are not renewable does not deter the fossil addicts. In order to remove the cloud of dust (and doubt) over fossil fixations, the industry came up with the term clean coal, and the notions that carbon pollution can be tackled through carbon capture and storage or sequestration, or through types of geo-engineering. These unproven technologies are all ways of resisting the need for change and ensuring business as usual. The best possible outcome would be to postpone the evil day and build an uncertain future for our children. Unfortunately, that day cannot be postponed much longer.

## **Centrality of Nature**

The call for system change is a call to a common-sense path that would secure the survival of the human race. It is also a call for humans to recognise their humanity as just one of the species on planet earth. Studies and observations have shown that species stand better chances of survival

when they cooperate, live and work in solidarity rather than in competition; when we build bridges and not walls, when we give up some space and allow others to breathe.

The Earth speaks. The sky speaks. The trees speak. All of Nature speaks. Communication is a vital tool for survival. Let us take one example of how certain trees in the African savannah communicate in order to avoid having their leaves eaten up. Researchers found that when giraffes start to eat the leaves of umbrella thorn acacias, the trees release some toxic substances that offends the taste buds of the giraffes. That was a direct defence line. The researchers noticed that the giraffes would then skip the next umbrella thorn acacia trees, and move by about 100 metres before resuming their dinner.

Why did they move over such a distance before resuming their feast? This is the explanation (Wohlleben, 2016): "The acacia trees that were being eaten gave off warning gas (specifically, ethylene) that signalled to neighbouring trees of the same species that a crisis was at hand. Right away, all the forewarned trees also pumped toxins into their leaves to prepare themselves. The giraffes were wise to this game and therefore moved farther away to a part of the savannah where they could find trees that were oblivious to what was going on." Trees communicate by a variety of other ways, including through their roots systems, affirming metaphorically that indeed, it takes roots to weather the storm.



## Re-Source Democracy

We speak of the gifts of Nature as re-sources. Yes, re-sources, intentionally hyphenated because we are speaking not of commodities, but of the vital need for humans to return to the source, to reconnect to Nature, to think of the source before lifting the chisel, hammer, shovel, drill or rig.

Re-source democracy is a call for the recognition of the rights of Nature, including her right to regenerate and maintain her cycles. It is built on a clear understanding of the uses and intrinsic values of the gifts of Nature. Re-source democracy demands the interrogation of the meaning of progress and development, to help us draw the line between what we can accept or reject in our environment. Navdanya further gives clarity to this idea: 'We need a new paradigm to respond to the fragmentation caused by various forms of fundamentalism. We need a new movement, which allows us to move from the dominant and pervasive culture of violence, destruction and death to a culture of non-violence, creative peace and life...the Earth democracy movement...provides an alternative worldview in which humans are embedded in the Earth Family, we are connected to each other through love, compassion, not hatred and violence and ecological responsibility and economic justice replaces greed, consumerism and competition as

objectives of human life.'

## Convergence of Movements

System change will be birthed by a convergence of movements. It will not be a matter of either or, it will be a matter for all. We have to continually remind ourselves that our lives and realities are formed by a web of relationships, issues and realities, and that we require diversity of approaches to effectively confront and overcome them – with the diversity of movements coalescing around common organizing principles. For example, in the case of ecological resurgence, movements can come together using the Precautionary Principle as a pivot. Another basic impulse will be the recognition of the leadership of communities of peoples - especially indigenous women - on the frontlines of ecological defense and system change struggles.

## System Change will not be Negotiated

The present fossil-based civilization is running out of gas and its terminal point is imminent – whether planned or not. Our task is to hasten the demise of this destructive system, in which unjust relations are seen as opportunities for amassing profit. This is the time for drastic actions to bring about ecological health for all our communities and relatives on planet Earth.

It is time to change the narrative that we can measure well-being by aggregating gross domestic product. The struggles of First Nation brothers and sisters in North America, the Ogoni in Nigeria's Niger Delta, the Yasunidos of Ecuador and many others show that the battle can be tough and abrasive. But we have no options: industrial growth societies have been built on the platforms of gross injustice.

Those who benefit from the unjust, disruptive and unsustainable system – the handful of men that have more financial means than billions of men and women – will not listen to logical needs for system change. They have heard it over and over again. It is a system where the poor, no matter how wise, cannot sit at the official negotiation tables. It is a system that believes that, with the right financial means, one can make a dash for safety to another planet if apocalypse happens.

History will judge the present generation very harshly if a transition is not made to a Life-Sustaining Society – a society in which humans and the environment are linked, not ranked. This society will come about only if we stand together with Earth Protectors and denounce the criminalisation of dissent and the constriction of democratic space that is fast becoming the norm.

It is time to speak up and let a thousand solutions bloom. It is no time to be silent. System change will come about when the power of We the People becomes a rallying call and a pivot of action. We the People can redefine energy and own our clean, localised, energy generation and production systems. We the People can reclaim our streams, creeks and rivers and deny industry their privatisation and use as sewers.

As the saying goes: freedom is not something that is given, it is taken. System change will not be negotiated. Change will come as fists burst through the cracks in the pavements just like saplings spring from hardened soils■

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Break Free from Fossil Fuels  
2017

·

The Media and Biosafety –  
Benin City, March 2017

·

The Media and Spills – Port  
Harcourt, April 2017

·

Biosafety and the Gavel II –  
Abuja, April 2017

·

No Nukes – Dialogue with  
Alyn Ware at University of  
Lagos, May 2017

·

Right Livelihood  
Lecture/Sustainability  
Academy – with Alyn Ware at  
University of Port Harcourt

Sustainability Academy on  
Unpacking Re-Source  
Democracy at University of  
Uyo



# Yes To Life No to Mining: The Journey to Galicia

By Babawale Obayanju

In solidarity, nine regional coordinators of Yes to Life No to Mining, YLNM met in Galicia, Spain from 1-6th March 2017.

The coming together was the first physical meeting of the regional coordinators after over five years of virtual link ups. YLNM was initiated in 2012 by some activists from different organizations around the world to address the social and ecological injustices inflicted on Mother Earth by destructive mining.

The aim of the gathering was to discuss the way forward for the Network, finding best ways to strengthen the reactive and collective solidarity work of YLNM with frontline communities resisting mining and to discuss and explore the root causes of extractivism with post-extractive future in mind.

The regional coordinators in attendance came from West Africa, South Africa, Latin

America, Pacific, Asia-Pacific and Europe.

Galician farmers' union Sindicato Labrego Gallego alongside ContraMINAccion activists, fisherfolks and some community people from Galicia shared their space for learning and sharing with the regional coordinators on destructive mining and the impacts on Mother Earth.

Folks present shed light on fights by communities resisting mining, the losses and the victories. The act of criminalizing the people, human rights abuses and environmental injuries and injustice by mining industry are common lines in all the struggles happening around the globe.

Of key interest to me were the stories from two Galician fisherfolks, Asoar Armega and Plademar Muros-Noia, that was in sync with the struggles of their colleagues in the Niger Delta.



They have lost their livelihoods to destructive extractive activities, like the deltans, their life expectancy has shrunk to 49years, their water bodies are heavily polluted with mining wastes and their ecosystems destroyed.

Their stories of victory in their resistance against the extractive activities was heart warming.

The role of the YLNM network and problem we exist to address was clearly spoken of by Hanninal Rhodes the Coordinator from United Kingdom. Shared stories from other regional coordinators highlighted the problem of neo-colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and corruption amongst others as being the bull to be caught by the horn if we truly seek a world devoid of mining.

In the words of Hannibal, "unless the drivers of mining are addressed, a mine stopped in one place is simply a mine shifted elsewhere. Sustainable mining is a myth. Our planet, source of life, cannot sustain this extractive assault. Any realistic and ecologically viable future must be post-extractive and take us beyond dependency

on 'new' minerals and metals".

During my presentation I emphasized that until we begin to see the natural endowment around us as blessings and part of us and not Resource to be devoured for money and power, we might not be able to stop these injustices on Mother Earth and her inhabitants.

As first steps to finding a way out, the group agreed that exchanges amongst communities should be encouraged with the goal of sharing tact/strategies that gained victories in the fight against corporations and government mining pacts, finding real alternatives to extractivism that will not involve further destruction to mother earth but will ensure a just transition to a post extractive future.

And finally to build a strong global movement that stands in solidarity for a safe future for Mother Earth.





The evening climaxed with an event of poetry and chants to all environment heroes across the globe, who died in the fight for justice of Mother Earth. This became necessary as it coincided with the one year remembrance Berta Caceres an environmental justice Martyr. Our own Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni 9 were not forgotten at the event.



### A sign of hope at Froxan

A tour to Lousame, Froxan guided by Joam of Contraminaccon, began with a visit to Whitewash site of the government of Spain.;whose doors were rarely opened.

The site is a closed mine owned by Tungsten San Minx SL, a subsidiary of the European company Sacyr Group.

On tour we saw the mining museum built in the area to celebrate the old tungsten mines that fuelled war efforts throughout the 20th Century. The structure is an attempt to present the abandoned mine as a 'cultural mining landscape' and as a testament that it could be useful after mining ceases.

A similar site with same mindset exists in Oloibiri, where the government of Nigeria made a monument around the first oil well in the country and tagged it a heritage site. Observing the ongoing impacts of historic mining on their lands and waters, the people of Froxan are opposing every attempt by their government under the EU's raw materials policy to re-open the mine. The land and rivers are managed by the villagers as all lands are seen as Common Lands.

Local people allege the mining company has appropriated common land by constructing barriers around some lands. Also visited was a tailing dam on the verge of collapse. We gathered that it was built in the 20th Century when the mine was in fully in operation; waste from the mine processing plant heavily trailed the path of the river being dammed.

Local community folks alleged that the runoff is polluting the waters of the village with heavy metals and if nothing is done quickly a health disaster is imminent.

The villagers expressed joy that our visit was the first time they have had visitors from all over the world in a group coming to see to their plight. Thus as a sign of hope and regeneration we joined them to plant trees at another abandoned mine shaft currently being filled by the commoners.





YLNM Coordinators and some Froxan community folks at the Abandoned San Fix Mine



Joam giving us a history of the whitewash site



Some of the buildings at San Fix Mine



Natalie Lowrey Standing on the dam on the verge of collapse



Enteng Bautista planting a tree at Froxan

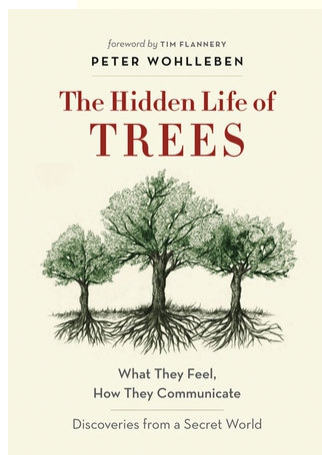
We ended the tour with a further assurance that our vision of encouraging communities saying NO to mining to connect across the planet, to collaborate and build confidence through mutual solidarity, and support one another to stand firm was a just path to take.

Evidently the struggles and resistance against extractivism are similar across the world, thus the need to build strong movement cannot be overemphasized. Until victory Aluta Continua!■



# BOOKS

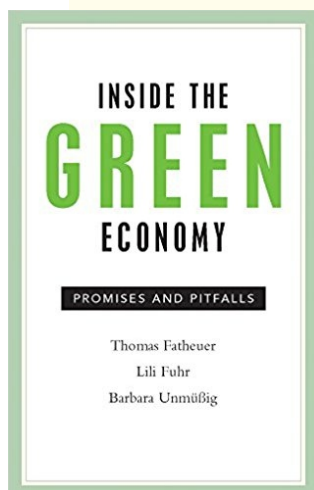
## YOU SHOULD READ



### **The Hidden Life of Trees – What they Feel, How They Communicate**

By Peter Wohlleben

Are trees social beings? In this international bestseller, forester and author Peter Wohlleben convincingly makes the case that, yes, the forest is a social network. He draws on groundbreaking scientific discoveries to describe how trees are like human families: tree parents live together with their children, communicate with them, support them as they grow, share nutrients with those who are sick or struggling, and even warn each other of impending dangers. Wohlleben also shares his deep love of woods and forests, explaining the amazing processes of life, death, and regeneration he has observed in his woodland. After learning about the complex life of trees, a walk in the woods will never be the same again.



### **Inside the Green Economy – Promises and Pitfalls**

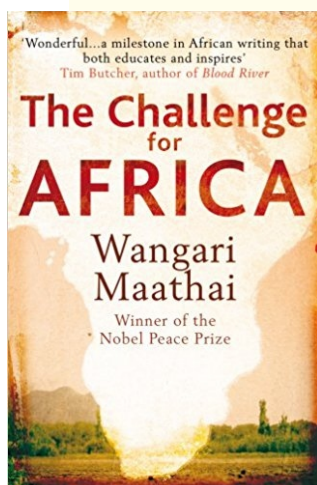
By Thomas Fatheuer, Lili Fuhr and Barbara Unmüßig

The economic and ecological bases of a general prosperity are in danger, the gap between rich and poor is widening. The concept of the Green Economy offers a new model, based primarily on large-scale technological solutions. But the Green Economy cares little about politics, barely registers human rights, does not recognize social actors and suggests the possibility of reform without conflict. It suggests that the world as we know it can continue with green growth.

But can efficiency be a solution if it results in even more consumption? Is it possible to save nature by putting a price on the services it provides?

Should we rely on magical technological solutions to save us?

This book puts the Green Economy to the test, discusses its promises, describes actual consequences and names its blind spots. It is an invitation to embrace radical optimism to find transformative strategies for a liveable future.



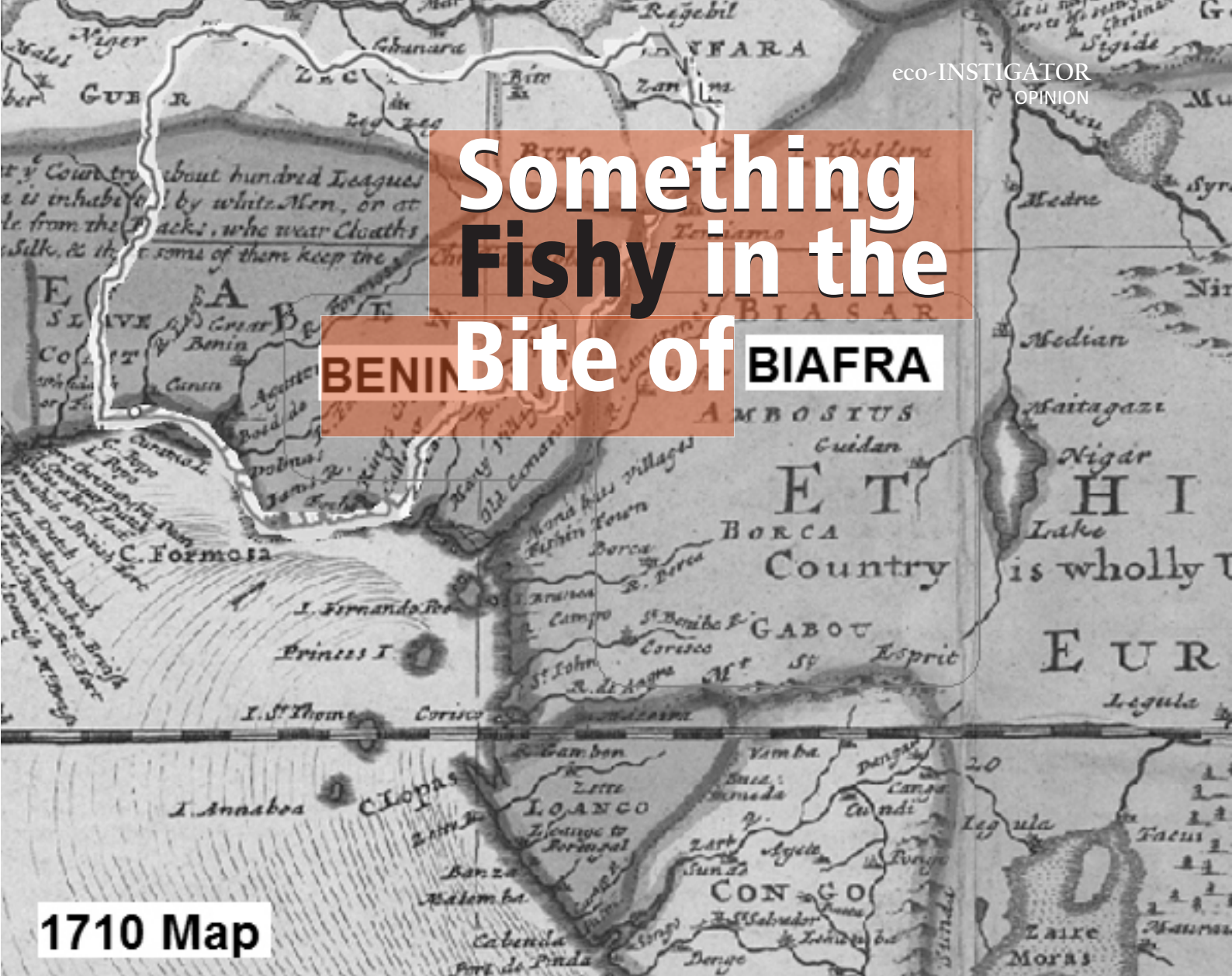
### **The Challenge for Africa**

By Wangari Maathai

In this ground-breaking work, the Nobel Peace Prize-winner and founder of the Green Belt Movement offers a new perspective on the troubles facing Africa today. Too often these challenges are portrayed by the media in extreme terms connoting poverty, dependence, and desperation. Wangari Maathai, the author of *Unbowed*, sees things differently, and here she argues for a moral revolution among Africans themselves. Illuminating the complex and dynamic nature of the continent, Maathai offers “hardheaded hope” and “realistic options” for change and improvement. She deftly describes what Africans can and need to do for themselves, stressing all the while responsibility and accountability. Impassioned and empathetic, *The Challenge for Africa* is a book of immense importance.

# Something Fishy in the Bite of BIAFRA

BENIN BIAFRA



1710 Map

With offshore oil rigs, Floating, Processing, Storage and Offloading (FPSOs) vessels and other installations dotting the African continental shelf and deep waters, an observer from space would not be wrong to imagine that an invasion of the continent is underway. Add to that picture the hundreds of trawlers and thousands of artisanal fishing boats and the picture would be quite alarming.

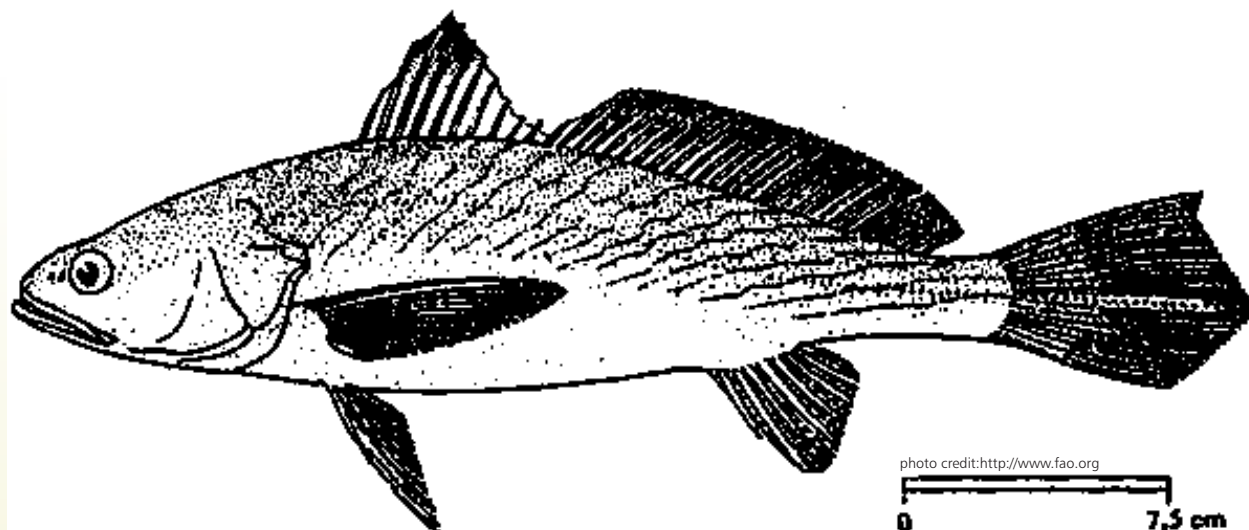
No invasion of the military type is ongoing. However, there is an ongoing contest for resources by two vast economic sectors, both extractivist and both determined to hold their grounds.

The two competitors are the petroleum

resources sector and the fisheries sector. As noted, they both extract resources, but in terms of operations the only point of intersection is that the oil companies name some of their offshore fields after endemic fish species. An example is the Bonga field operated by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) named after the bonga fish.

The saying goes that when two elephants fight, the grass suffers. In West Africa, the struggle is mostly between two elephants that care little about the grass. These elephants are international oil companies and legal/illegal industrial scale fishing by companies from other continents – especially from Asia and Europe.





The grabbing of the fish stocks in West Africa for use as animal feed in the factory farms of Western nations poses threat to food supply in the region. Fish mills set up in Senegal, Mauritania, for example, have driven the price of fish beyond the reach of some locals who are forced to depend on scraps.

Overfishing in West African waters, by operators of foreign trawlers coupled with the destructive impacts of oil extraction is rapidly leading to threats of extinction of some fish species in the region. According to a study conducted by the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN), threatened species include the Madeiran sardine (*Sardinella maderensis*) and the Cassava Croaker (*Pseudotolithus senegalensis*) that has declined by 30-60% over the past 10 years due to overfishing.

The contest between oil and fish in the Gulf of Guinea has led some of the coastline communities to loudly insist that they want to secure their fish resources as a means of survival. The conflict between these two sectors have multifaceted sources. One of these is the fact that areas of offshore operations are treated as security zones and are off limits to fisher-folks. Secondly, oil spills from those offshore locations impact fisheries all the way from the locations to the shore lines and through waterways to inland locations.

Oil spills also affect fisheries by their destructive impacts on mangroves and coral reefs – affecting both the spawning grounds and overall living environment of marine life forms. The canalisation into inland locations promote intrusion of salt waters into fresh water ecosystems and the increased movement of vessels and equipment compound the harm.

Nigeria's oil spill record is horrendous and countries just entering the business all insist that they cannot slide onto the Niger Delta route. However, the case of Ghana is no consolation, because the country recorded three oil offshore oil spills before the first shipment of crude. There are no definitive studies to show the largescale impact of oil spills on fisheries in the West African region. However, almost three decades after the Exxon Valdez oil spill off the coast of Alaska, the fisheries there have not fully recovered. A few examples of offshore oil spills in Nigeria illustrate the point. In 2011, Shell spilled 40,000 barrels of crude oil from its Bonga offshore platform. In 1979 the same company spilled 570,000 barrels of oil from its Forcados offshore terminal. Mobil spilled 40,000 barrels from its Idoho platform in 1998 while Chevron's gas rig blew up in January 2011 and its fire raged for one month before being put off.

We should mention here that the seismic exploratory stage of petroleum activities has impacts on marine ecosystems. Denials have been made, but the high incidence of dead whales washing on to the shores of Ghana and elsewhere are often connected to oil company seismic activities.

Beyond the impact caused by oil spills and gas flaring connected to offshore oil drilling and exploitation, the installations themselves are also becoming marine ecosystem hubs. These structures include the standard oil platforms as well as the more complex FPSOs. The bright lights on oil platforms are known to attract fish and in some countries fishermen follow the fish to the areas around those massive structures. In West Africa, the offshore installations are off limits to fishermen. This is double jeopardy for the economy of the fishermen and the countries.

Millions of West Africans are employed in the fisheries business. The marine artisanal

fishing subsector in West Africa is a major contributor to GDP, especially in Ghana, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and others. With increasing oil development along the West African coast, the threat to fisheries here is huge.

The oil sector is not a high employment sector – by reasons of its highly automated processes and by the fact that the bulk of investment in the sector is carried out outside the shores of the region. Most West Africans depend on fish and marine foods for protein.

The critical question now is for West African states to answer if they will preserve marine ecosystems, promote the sector that provides high employment and nutrition or pitch their tents with oil extraction and its enclave economy. It is time to decide and, the for the 400 million people in Western and Central African countries, the choice is stark: fish or oil ■

photo credit: <http://dkortepphoto.com>





Photo credit: <http://beautifuling.com>



# Food for Life

By Joyce Ebebeinwe

**T**he task of ensuring that science responds to popular needs of society should be the major challenge that scientists have to overcome.

While that task is met regularly, the issue of presenting science in a way that citizens can easily grasp can be daunting. Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), the ecological think tank, hosted media practitioners in Benin City recently at a training focusing on Biosafety and agricultural modern biotechnology in particular. The journalists came from print and electronic media houses based in Lagos, Port Harcourt and Benin City.

The training offered an opportunity for the sharing of information on the issues of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and biosafety with particular focus on sifting the myths from the facts as well as taking a critical look at the National Biosafety Management Agency Act of 2015.

Journalists were urged to help increase

awareness and in so doing ensure the political forces and commercial interests behind any risky approaches to food production in Nigeria and in Africa operate with a sense of responsibility.

The subject of GMOs is a very important one as it deals with our food and directly affects our wellbeing.

After some welcome words from Nnimmo Bassey, director of HOMEF, the stage was set for Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour to speak of the basics of GMOs.

He explained what GMOs are and underscored the fact that crops are genetically modified to make them herbicide resistant or to act as pesticides. Both Bassey and Rhodes-Vivour stressed that claims that GMOs offer higher yields, more profits to farmers or are more nutritious are mostly mere propaganda.



# MEDIA TRAINING ON BIOSAFETY

Promoting Biosafety in Niger



On health impacts of GMOs, animal studies of The American Academy of Environmental Medicine (AAEM) were cited showing organ damage, gastrointestinal and immune system disorders, accelerated aging, and infertility. Human studies also show how genetically modified (GM) food can leave material behind inside us, possibly causing long-term problems.

Genes inserted into GM soy, for example, can transfer into the DNA of bacteria living inside us, and toxic insecticide produced by GM corn have been found in the blood of pregnant women and their unborn fetuses. It was also noted that the percentage of Americans with three or more chronic illnesses jumped from 7% to 13% in just 9 years after the introduction of GMOs in the 1990s; food allergies skyrocketed, and disorders such as autism, reproductive disorders, digestive problems, and others are on the rise.

GMOs cross pollinate and pollen grains have been known to travel several kilometers thereby contaminating non-GMO varieties. It is impossible to fully clean up our gene pool once contaminated.

GMOs reduce bio-diversity, pollute water resources, and are ultimately antithetical to sustainable agriculture. Self-propagating GMO pollution will outlast the effects of global warming and nuclear waste. The potential health impact is very huge, and has inter-generational implications.

Most GM crops are engineered to be "herbicide tolerant". Monsanto, for example, sells Roundup Ready crops, designed to survive applications of their Roundup herbicide. With the rise of "superweeds," that are resistant to the herbicide, farmers are sometimes forced to use even more toxic herbicides every year. Not only does this create environmental harm, GM foods contain higher residues of toxic herbicides. Roundup, for example, is suspected to be linked to sterility, hormone disruption, birth defects, and cancer.

By mixing genes from totally unrelated species, genetic engineering unleashes a host of unpredictable side effects. Moreover, irrespective of the type of genes



the very process of creating a GM plant can result in massive collateral damage that produces new toxins, allergens, carcinogens, and nutritional deficiencies.

### **Why are GMOs being promoted in Nigeria?**

The National Biosafety Management Act came into being on 18 April 2015 after the Bill was signed into law by the former President Goodluck Jonathan. The Act established the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) that has the “responsibility for providing regulatory framework, institutional and administrative mechanism for safety measures in the application of modern biotechnology in Nigeria with the view to preventing any adverse effect on human health, animals, plants and environment.”[NBMA Act, 2015]

Mariann Orowuje, who spoke on Nigerian Biosafety act, said the Act in itself is defective. Among many issues, Biosafety Act does not take into cognizance the

concerns of local farmers and critical stakeholders.

Some of the problematic areas of the Act include the following:

- The Act does not make public participation obligatory when applications to introduce GMOs are being considered.
- It does not specify clearly how large-scale field trials would be contained and regulated to avoid contamination of surroundings or farms.
- Farmer organisations are not represented on the Governing Board. The Board has GMO promoters and vested interests.
- The Act does not state criteria for risk assessment nor does it stipulate that such assessments must be carried out in Nigeria and not offshore. This is important because the effect of the GMO on non-target organisms has to be measured with non-target organisms that exist in Nigeria and are ecologically important.
- Strict liability and provisions for redress are not included in the Act.







The Act does not ensure the implementation of the precautionary principle that entitles our government to decide against approval or for restriction in cases of incomplete or controversial knowledge. This is the essential feature of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB), driven by the interests of African negotiators and should be implemented in Nigeria.

- No provision for mandatory labeling.

- The constitution of the Board of NBMA makes the agency open to conflict of interests. It is populated with GMO promoters and this inhibits its role as an unbiased Biosafety umpire.

Institutions that are created to protect our environment and biosafety are actually hand-in-gloves with corporations that are trying to flood our country with exotic and risky products and merchandise. Our governments have been largely complacent about the covert activities of the biotechnology industry to undermine food sovereignty in Nigeria

According to Nnimmo Bassey (Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation), "It

was wrong of us to have established a biotechnology promotion agency [NBDA] when there was no regulatory body [NBMA] in place. The forces behind proliferation of GMOs in Nigeria are those of control and technology fostering dependency on the multinational corporations."

One of the journalists shared this thought: "Genetic engineering of food is a seed for the re-colonisation of African countries and other developing nations. What the promoters of GMOs are trying to do is force down our throat a food programme that will not only destroy our natural habitat but could cause severe harm to our health."

What is the way out?

There is inadequate information and awareness of the public on food sovereignty issues thus shutting out critical stakeholders, deepening public ignorance and inhibiting contributions to solutions. Sustainable food security is only way possible under the umbrella of food sovereignty – ensuring that right of the people to produce food that is healthy, culturally appropriate and produced using ecological sound methods.





role in publicizing basic information and findings from domestic and foreign research in order to raise public awareness and promote public participation in biosafety issues. The public requires such information to understand GMOs, assert their right to a safe and healthy food and to be able to make informed choices with regard to food.

According to Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, "The movement to protect our food system is one that requires collective efforts. We must all take up responsibility to ensure we keep our environment free of contamination and protect our biodiversity.

There is need for us to strengthen subsistence agriculture by providing adequate storage facilities, good access roads to markets, providing subsidies on farming implements, better access to farmlands and education of the public on the advantages of local food production."

Akinbode Oluwafemi who spoke on the role of the media in promoting biosafety noted that the media plays an important

The sessions were highly interactive and information documentaries were screened to buttress the points shared. Participants acknowledged that they were empowered by the training and will endeavor to promote public awareness on the issues of biosafety.

One left the session reinforced in the conviction that GM crops and foods should not be allowed into Nigeria because they would not only create health challenges, destroy our natural ecosystem but also lead to the neo-colonization of Nigeria and Africa. ■

Joyce Ebebeinwe is Project Officer with Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)

The forest communities of Old Ekuri and New Ekuri in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State have staged a protest against plans by the state government to go ahead with the construction of the 260 kilometre super highway, despite the latter's withdrawal of its earlier order revoking 10 kilometres on each side of the length of the proposed road.

The state government has stated that when the construction of the road is complete, and put into use, it would facilitate the traffic of cargo from the proposed Bakassi Deep Sea Port in the southern part of the state to the northern part of Nigeria.

The protesters comprising youths, women and community leaders from both communities staged the protest at the weekend which took off from the premises of the community health centre in old Ekuri and marched through the only major road in the community, chanting anti-super highway songs with placards.

Some of the placards read: "Save our forest, our life"; 'Realign your highway off our forest'; 'Give us road but don't destroy our forests, construct the existing road from Ochon to our community'. "The protesters who took to the street after attending training by the Home of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)



# Forest Communities Protest against 260km Superhighway

By Bassey Inyang, Calabar

on ways to preserve their forests, instead called for the provision of socio-economic activities by the state government to both forest communities.

The spokesman of Old Ekuri, Livinus O. Akparawu, while communicating the stance of his community, said: "The government should work on the existing road, and not the superhighway. In the case of our old road that has been abandoned, the government has deceived us for a long time. They promised they were going to build the road, but did not do anything. They have gone ahead to announce that the road has been completed which is completely false. It is just a blatant lie told to the world.

"If they want to satisfy us, let them complete the road and make it assessable. When the first road is done, maybe the second one will be better. The first road, you have done nothing and you are talking of a second road. We do not believe them. We have no confidence in them. That is why we kick against the superhighway. They say they want to take over our forests that God has given to us and build a road. We disagree with them whatever it is. We are still the people and we should not be kicked around."

Youth President of Old Ekuri, Anthony Otio Enwa, who said he was speaking the mind of his people, also added his voice against the construction of the proposed super highway.

Standing together with his deputy, Philip Okoma, the president said: "Our position is that government should come and complete this road first-he one they have started-and forget about the superhighway. That is what we aer after. We don't want them to destroy the forests and abandon the road halfway. So they should come and complete the little one they have started. They went there and published that they have completed the road, meanwhile they have not done anything. The road is not even half done. After the road is completed, we want electricity, pipe borne water, hospital and a good school. We want to be educated. They should empower us before they talk of the superhighway. They should make sure they equip us sufficiently so that if anything happens to the forest, we would understand. That is our stand."

Representing New Ekuri community, its spokesperson, Chief Egbe Wilfred, said his community was not sure government honest concerning the construction of the super highway.

"We are against the Superhighway. These forests have been with us from time immemorial. We want development, but not the one that will destroy the environment and the people. They want to come and collect kilometres of our forests and wipe us from our motherland.

"There is a first road that leads to this community that was abandoned and now they are talking of doing another road. We have conserved our forests since the days of our forefathers, and will continue to do so. The forest is our life, Wilfred said."

Director of HOMEF, Rev Nnimmo Bassey, who was represented at the training by Cadmus Atake , Project Officer HOMEF , said the training facilitated by Small Grants Project of the Global Environment Facility aims at protecting the pristine community forests of the state and the National Park from degradation, and destruction under any guise or activities inimical to the interest of the people of the forest communities and, the planet , earth.

At a recent press conference, the state Commissioner for Lands, Dr. John Ofem Inyang, blamed some non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and individuals for allegedly attempting to sabotage the super highway project.

"We want to once again tell our opponents to look for something else to criticise this government and not the superhighway. We have sacrificed the 10-kilometre span on either side of the road, limiting us to just 70 metres. And I think from today, they have nothing to say against the Superhighway other than to cooperate with us. So we are going to be aggressive after the second week of March, if we don't get our EIA. We have met all the requirements as far as EIA approval is concerned."

(<https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2017/03/13/forest-communities-protest-against-260km-superhighway/>)





**Unfolding environmental changes require  
strong pushback from eco protectors.  
It will take strong movements  
and dedicated peoples to stem the tide.  
HOMEF is building a corps of Eco Defenders.  
Join the TEAM.**

**Sign up today as a volunteer  
by sending a mail  
to [home@homef.org](mailto:home@homef.org)**



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