

eco~
INSTIGATOR

A PUBLICATION OF HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION

ISSUE #16

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**We
Are Not
Guinea Pigs**



**Durban Fishermen
Say No To Oil**

**Unpacking
Re-source
Democracy**

**Safe Food
is a Human Right**

eco~INSTIGATOR

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

EDITORIAL TEAM

Nnimmo Bassey
George B.K. Awudi
Oluwafunmilayo Oyatogun
Zaid Shopeju
Cadmus Atake Enade
Daramfon Bassey
Edna Ojemire
Omolola Abulatan
Joyce Ebebeniwe

ADMINISTRATION

Dotun Davids Olatundun

Layout

Babawale Obayanju (Owales)
Cover Design:
Babawale Obayanju, (Owales)

Circulation:

Shehu Akowe

Advisory Board:

The Advisory Board is composed of women and men who have distinguished themselves in the struggle for environmental justice and the rights of Mother Earth:

Chris Allan (USA) – Environmental health campaigner and philanthropy activist
Akinbode Oluwafemi (Nigeria) - Environmental justice campaigner
Siziwe Khanyile (South Africa) – Environmental justice campaigner
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Nnimmo Bassey (Nigeria) – Environmental justice advocate
Pablo Solon (Bolivia) – Climate justice campaigner, diplomat and movement builder
Liz Hosken (UK) – Mother Earth rights advocate
Lim Li Ching (Malaysia) – Agro-ecologist and rights advocate

Published by Health of Mother Earth Foundation
Top Floor 214, Uselu Lagos Road
P.O.Box 10577 Ugbowo, Benin City, Nigeria
Tel: +2348173706095
www.homef.org

All mails, inquires and articles should be sent to editor@homef.org



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HOME RUN

We have spent the first half of 2017 hosting dialogues on Re-Source Democracy in communities and Sustainability Academies on the same issue in two universities- the University of Port Harcourt and the University of Uyo. We also co-hosted the 2017 edition of the Right Livelihood Lecture at the RLC campus of the University of Port Harcourt. We serve you with reports from some of the events. The community dialogues focussed on forest issues anchored on the unnecessary Superhighway project as well as our right to safe food.

We are also bringing you reports and articles related to our efforts to promote true biosafety devoid of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Nigeria and Africa. A highlight of our work in this regard was a major March Against Poison that saw hundreds of Nigerians marching to the National Assembly in Abuja on 7 June 2017 to demand a repeal of the National Biosafety Management (NBMA) Act of 2015. Our disciplined objection to the permitting stance of NBMA has resulted in abusive responses from GMO promoters as you will see in one of such articles reproduced in this edition.

A momentous landmark was reached on Monday 19 June 2017 when we teamed up with SDCEA and the fisherfolks in Durban, South Africa, to launch the Fish Not Oil campaign - a grassroots resistance to offshore extractive activities. This campaign is being deepened in FishNet Dialogues with fisherfolks in our countries and our aim is to see this replicated globally.

As usual we bring you poetry and a selection of books that you should read. We also indicate upcoming activities to which you are cordially invited.

Until Victory!

Nnimmo

MARCH AGAINST POISON:

NIGERIANS SAY NO TO GMOS AND
SEEK A REPEAL OF THE
BIOSAFETY LAW



Hundreds of Nigerians marched against the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) into the country on June 7, 2017. The march was coordinated by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in collaboration with the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Women Environmental Programme (WEP), Climate Transformation and Energy Remediation Society (CLIMATTERS) and the Save Nigeria Group.

The march was aimed at increasing awareness on the dangers of genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and to make the demands on the Nigerian National Assembly and the Government to repeal the existing Biosafety Act; nullify and or withdraw the permits granted to Monsanto for field trials of maize and the commercial placement of Bt cotton on the market. The citizens also called for a total ban on GMOs in Nigeria or at best restrict them to the confines of laboratories of research institutions.

The people insisted that Nigeria's food challenges can be tackled effectively with

natural crops and increased support for our farmers rather than opening arms wide for a technology that has notoriously failed and proven to pose severe risk to human, animal and environmental health is far from the solution.

According to the Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation, "GMOs do not give greater yield and are not more nutritious than natural crops. They have increased the use of toxic chemicals and thrive in monocultures while they deprive farmers the right to save and re-use seeds."

The response of the leadership of the Nigerian Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), has remained consistent, tending to allay fears rather than dealing with the concerns of the public. Their position that Nigeria will regulate the use of GMOs based on science and not sentiments does not in any measure respond to the known negative impacts of GMOs.



We believe that sentiments cannot be wished away. We are human and not laboratory rats. The science of GMOs must consider its ethical, moral, cultural, socio-economic and other ramifications. Science itself has shown that it is limited in its very own processes. It must be in the public interest.

As was explained by a Molecular geneticist, Dr Ify Anlebo, in a recent lecture at an HOMEF event, scientists do not have total control of the direction of the new genes which are introduced into plants' DNA. The normal functioning of cells gets impaired and several novel proteins are produced which cause severe health complications.

This is one reason for the increase of chronic and other diseases since the introduction of this technology. Apart from allergies, birth defects, liver diseases, neurological and gastrointestinal disorders, the processes can result to mutation which is one of the long term impacts of this technology. Glyphosate, an active ingredient of Monsanto's Roundup chemical which accompanies the use of GMOs was announced

to be carcinogenic by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organization in March 2015. Despite strong denials by the biotech industry, the harms posed by these toxic chemicals cannot be wished away.

Supporters of this technology in Nigeria keep saying that other countries have taken to genetic engineering and Nigeria must not be left out.

Nigerians are perplexed by this cheap position. They ask: Are we seriously going into a potentially deadly technology because other countries are using it? Do we have the capacity to contain the impact of these crops on our health and the environment?

Have we stopped to ask why there is yet so much controversy over this technology since its introduction and why 6 out of the 8 industrialised countries, (G8) have banned the cultivation of GMOs?



GMOs do not only present threat to human health and the environment; the Nigerian economy is also at stake on this issue. A large percentage of our agricultural exports are to the European Union. However, we will recall that they rejected 24 of our food products in 2016. The European Union food safety authority had likewise rejected beans from Nigeria in 2015 because it contained between 0.03mg/kg and 4.6mg/kg of dichlorvos pesticide when the acceptable maximum level was 0.01 mg/kg. At least 19 EU countries already have a ban on GMO products. If Nigeria accepts GMOs we would lose any trade edge with many countries.

A patriotic approach to the food challenge in Nigeria will be to engage in rigorous and independent research to certify the safety of GM seeds in terms of short and long term impacts on humans and the environment; to consult with the people, especially the farmers, to know how best to support them to improve agricultural productivity and to make decisions based on proven facts in resonance with the culture and needs of the indigenous people.

Other actions that can address our food needs include: increased support for organic farming, access of farmers to loans and grants, provision of extension services, storage and processing facilities and good infrastructure to ensure access markets.

The letter submitted to the Senate President which was jointly signed by Nnimmo Bassey, the Director at Health of Mother Earth Foundation;



Mariann Oruwu, coordinator of Friends of the Earth Africa's Food Sovereignty Programme (FSP); Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, Convener of Nigerians against GMOs and Jackie Ikotunye, Country Representative, Bio-integrity and Natural Food Awareness Initiative stated that a repeal of the Nigeria Biosafety Management Act will resolve the biosafety challenges facing the nation.

The letter also characterised the Act as having failed in its duty to secure our biosafety because it has proven within a few months of its creation to be a law merely for permitting the entry into Nigeria of GMOs.



Several issues need to be addressed and these include the composition of the board of the Regulatory Agency.

The group strongly object to the National Biotechnology Development Agency's (NABDA) presence as board member of NBMA. Critics see this as "a classic case of conflict of interest that cannot be permitted, especially concerning the sensitive of issue biosafety and biosecurity"

The Act does not specify clearly how large-scale field trials would be contained and regulated to avoid contamination of surroundings or farms.

It does not ensure the implementation of the precautionary principle (essential feature of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB)) that entitles our government to decide against approval or for restriction in cases of incomplete or controversial knowledge and does not have provisions for strict liability and redress.

NBMA keeps telling Nigerians that the mere fact of having a biosafety Act is an adherence to

the Precautionary Principle. In terms of labeling, we all know that mere labeling of GMOs will not work in our context as road-side food sellers would not label the corn they roast or the akara (bean cake) that they fry. The need to consider our peculiar context cannot be ignored.

The coalition made the following demands on the government:

- A nullification of the permits issued to Monsanto and NABDA on Sunday 1st May 2016 and call for an investigation of the process and circumstances leading to the granting of these permits by NBMA to Monsanto and NABDA in disregard to the complaints of millions of Nigerians.

Nigerians should not be used as pawns or as guinea pigs in a commercial gambit to open the country to toxic technologies in furtherance of blatant commercial interests.



- A close surveillance of our markets and farms to halt illegal entry of GMOs into Nigeria and into our food supply.
- A ban of all toxic agrochemicals – especially those identified as probably carcinogens.
- A halt to the assault on our agriculture through genetic modification of our staple crops including cassava, maize and beans, among others. We urge that Nigeria should be circumspect about technologies that aim to contaminate our environment, destroy our agriculture, culture and rupture our socio-economic fabric and assert unbridled controls over our agriculture and foods.

The Senate Committee Chairman on Ecology and Climate Change, Senator Bukar Ibrahim and Senator Abu Ibrahim met and addressed the march on behalf of the Senate President.

The director of Health of Mother Foundation (HOMEF), Nnimmo Bassey and Rhodes Gbadebo Vivor made submissions of the demands of the protesters to the senators on

behalf of the coalition.

Senator Bukar Ibrahim responded to the demands and said that the lawmakers are also very much concerned about the safety of Nigerians as regards GMOs and Biosafety. He pledged that the concerns outlined will be looked into with appropriate actions taken to protect and preserve the lives of the people.

Following the response, the senate representatives were assured of our readiness to work with the National Assembly to repeal and replace the NBMA Act 2015 with one that can protect our biodiversity and ensure biosafety and biosecurity in Nigeria.

A participant in the protest march, Shehu Akowe, summed up the day by saying, "The solution to the challenge of feeding the growing population is with Nigeria and not the biotech corporations and their official surrogates. African nations must look inwards to seek ways by which to improve on their food production and to make decisions that are in the best interest of the people."

IN THE SHADOWS OF THE FUTURE

(For Jay Naidoo & Stephen Pittam)

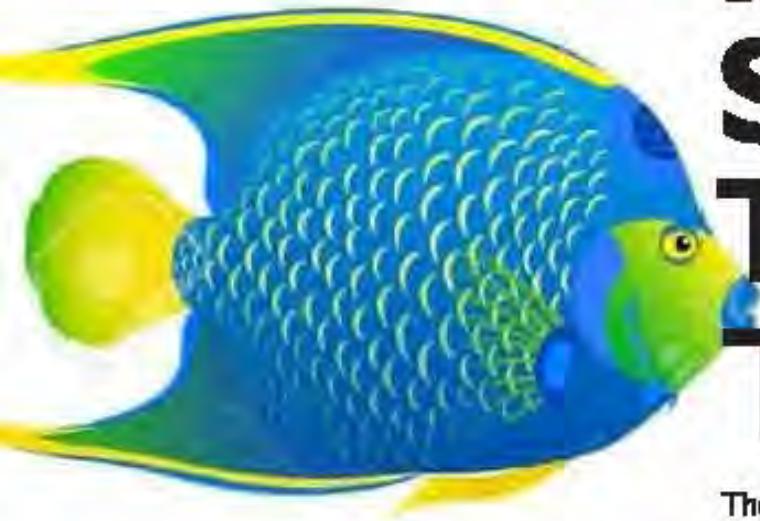
By Nnimmo Bassey

In a hide-away in Rustlers Valley
Lodged where the EarthRises to meet the
mountains
Drawn by the call of caves and waterfalls
Enraptured by the pull of ancestral footsteps
Sucked into the silence of wisdom
Etched in the solidity of memories long
grafted in our blood
We knew we were here thousands of years
before
Humbled
We stooped
We rose
And beheld far flung horizons
Future Africa etched in a rocky vista
Global and Greengranteeing
Hope and solidarity
Poli poli
Things start from the bottom
Yet many prefer the summit
With eyes set at the pockets
Ladders kicked to secure lonely spots
Alone, encrusted in gold and diamond debris
while
Folks at the bottom drown in acid mine
drainage and still
Buffoons in power relish their tango in gilded
caskets
In a hide-away in unnamed valleys
Taunted by numerous sunsets men celebrate
Burials in twisted metallic mind-sets
Dozing blinded by blinkers of exaggerated
self-glory

Blind to
Soft trees
With roots tucked in stubborn soils
Split rocks
Yes, we are soft saplings
On the edges of the future
Ears pressed to the rocks we hear
Ancient rhapsodies we hear
Unspoken questions wafting in the air
Which is firmer as you ponder this mountain
Grass or rock?
Beholding solid shadows
We hear the oft whispered queries as
Hearts pump as we ponder the mountains of
life
Are you ascending?
Are you descending?
What is the spiral locked in your DNA?
Standing in silence we
Untwist our minds as we
Stand at liberty at the feet of Mother Earth as
we
Eliminate blinkers of exaggerated self-glory
we
Know that saplings
With roots hooked in stubborn soils
Will split the most stubborn rocks
Poli poli
As we ponder the shadows and the cracks
This poem will be finished...
In the valley or
on the mount
11 May 2017



DURBAN FISHERMEN SAY NO TO OIL



The KwaZulu-Natal fishing community on Monday launched a campaign against gas and oil exploration along the coastline.

They say permission from government allowing seismic drilling tests will destroy the livelihood of about 12,000 subsistence fishermen.



South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) head Desmond D'Sa said they want to send a clear message to the oil cartel that they will not allow them to destroy the KwaZulu-Natal coastline.

"You have destroyed other parts of the world, don't destroy us, our fishing reserves, our food, our benefits to our homes and families. We are today launching the project called Fish not oil. We can't eat oil and we can't eat money, but we can eat fish and sell fish to feed our families. Our fishes are destroyed by gas and oil exploration. By government allowing oil companies who have destroyed the Gulf of Mexico to come and destroy our coast is not on. Government should have done a survey among fishermen."



"Our campaign is about the resistance against oil and gas from destroying the livelihood, communities and families of fishermen and women. Fishing communities are unique. There are thousands of fishermen in Durban who live off fishing," said D'Sa.

Last year, Petroleum Agency of South Africa (PASA) was reported to have granted Texas company Schlumberger a licence to conduct a 3D seismic survey in South African waters.

"People have spotted seismic testing boats on the Indian Ocean. There has been no consultation. And it has a huge impact on communities," said D'Sa.

Nnimmo Bassey, director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation in Nigeria, said he has been collaborating with the (SDCEA) in building a campaign with the fisher folk across the continent.

"Our fisheries are being assaulted by destructive activities, mining and fishermen are being restricted from certain fishing grounds. In Nigeria we have severe pollution of our waters in the oil fields. That has affected the health of communities, health of environment and people. The fisher folk have to go into deep seas to make a catch and not many can afford to do that. Fighting for our fish is fighting for our lives. Fish are more valuable than oil, than gold and diamonds. It's the basis of our food security," said Bassey.

Fisherwoman Sale Govender, 47, of Chatsworth in Durban, said she has been fishing

since the age of two.

"I started with my parents and grandparents. We follow the right practices and watch if others catch undersized fish and make sure they put it back and also that they stick to the bag limit. It is great gift for any parent to teach their child to fish.

"Crime in the country is high because of unemployment. Why not learn to fish to make a living and provide food. I fish every weekend to help supplement the income at home," said Govender.

Another fisherman said he's been fishing for 50 years and was taught by his father to fish. He makes a living out of fishing and also feeds his family from fishing.

"There are thousands of us in Durban that live off fishing," he added.

PASA didn't respond to queries.

Culled from

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/sci-tech/2017-06-19-durban-fishermen-say-no-to-oil/>

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) head Desmond D'Sa, right) with Nnimmo Bassey of HOMEF at the launch. Image: JACKIE CLAUSEN





U N P A C K I N G Re-Source DEMOCRACY

Progress has been measured by how much humans are able to transform Nature and increasingly this has been seen to be directly related to how exploitative of Nature and how polluting a nation or corporate entity can be. Clearly, the environmental crisis confronting the world is inseparable from the economic crisis.

The quest for materials and their transformation over the years have led to colonisation, autocracy and diverse socio-cultural corruption and manipulations. It has led to forceful dispossession of persons, communities and nations of their heritage through wars and other violent confrontations. This exploitative pathway, in which we have chiselled and drilled into the belly of the earth, polluted our rivers and atmosphere, mowed down mountains, chopped down forests and poisoned our food systems, has taken humans further away from Nature over time.

Humankind's quest for the control of Nature has led to the waging of unwinnable wars over natural forces and manifestations. Rising consumption and wastages have led to massive extinction of species and severe environmental changes – some of which may well be irreversible. Progress is largely measured by

uniformity of products that yield to mass production, transportation and consumption. We seem to have forgotten that Nature thrives in diversities. This psychological and physical drifting from Nature is proving unsustainable as planetary boundaries and limits are being reached and exceeded.

The current global economic crisis will not go away as long as the current basis of relations stays. A capitalist economic system respects neither nature nor environment or peoples. It is based intrinsically on exploitative, competitive and non-regenerative relationships and cannot be sustained in perpetuity. When you don't regenerate, you are not restorative and your actions are firmly planted on the path of degeneration. Even the accumulation of wealth by the 1 percent has reached its peak and the only way forward has to be down.

The current system denies reality. That is why the president of arguably the most powerful nation on Earth can wake up and exit from a global effort to fight a common challenge: climate change.

That is when power trumps good sense. This myopic power denies science and even defies reasonable self-interest.



Image from <http://s3.india.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/us-exits-paris-agreement.jpg>

Although the Paris Agreement is largely inadequate, the pulling away of the USA, the top global polluter, from the global climate space, as outrageous as it is, only confirms that power only respects primitive self-interest.

Sustainability is not just a measure of a thing being available or useable in perpetuity. It also connotes its staying recognisable in form and speaks of intergenerational justice and responsibilities.

Re-Source democracy calls for a re-turn to the source, a re-connection to Nature. It calls for a recovery of memory. It calls for a dream of our preferred future or even multiple futures. It calls for the recognition of the fact that humans are just one of the species on Planet Earth and that we are a part of a system whose survival depends on interrelationships and solidarity.

To ensure Re-Source democracy, we have to be immersed in the defence of life and staying in the battle line against inequality as well as political and social injustices. We have to build a future that promotes cooperative and collaborative behaviours. That is what creates shared abundance, the good life or *eti uwem*. Scarcity is promoted by competition and that

breeds all sorts of social and environmental misbehaviours.

Nature is self-regenerating, but human and corporate activities have brought in disruptions of those circles and cycles of life. Examples include the utter degradation of our environment by oil spills, gas flares, toxic wastes, industrial effluents and the like. It includes the exploitation of re-sources without prior informed consent of citizens in the territories. We have to pause to ask what the Niger Delta will look like by the close of the century. What would be the situation of the far North if desertification is not checked? What would be the case of our territories if gully erosion and deforestation continue unabated?

Environmental degradation disrupts our linkages to Nature, shrivels our humanity and throws us into unhealthy rivalry and struggles for whatever goods remain. It alters our thought patterns and social relations. It makes the unacceptable appear attractive and even acceptable. How would anyone drink water that is visibly polluted or eat foods that are clearly known to be toxic? How would we accept these without major uprisings

What would make Nigeria stay in the present unsuitable unitary national architecture fabricated by military adventurers to suit their command structure? How could we dream of building a democratic and federal nation on the scaffolds of autocratic and dictatorial military scaffolds? More questions can be asked, but let us restrict ourselves to the way we have treated Nature's gifts to our nation. The arrival of crude oil and petroleum resources literally poisoned and damaged our environment, economy, politics and socio-cultural relationships. Agriculture got ignored, manufacturing got side-lined and all eyes got riveted on US dollars flowing into the national pot. We became captives of voodoo economics. Do nothing, grab everything.

Re-Source Democracy requires that we train our eyes to see what Nature has presented to every community and to what extent are the communities involved in decisions that affect the exploitation, protection or use of the re-sources in their territories. It requires that no one gets killed or colonised simply because of such endowments. It requires that we question how what we have is utilised and on what basis. It is about our right to life, freedom from contamination and respect of the Rights of Mother Earth.

We have hopes that unpacking the concept of Re-Source Democracy will provide us with ideas on how to redirect the nation from divisive and exploitation pathways and provide the platforms for truly democratic relationships with each other and with Nature – one that is built on local knowledge and wisdom. It should help us cultivate mutual respects between the many groupings in our nation. It should above all help encourage us to handle the gifts of Nature with respect.

The Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo provides an excellent academic environment for the interrogation of these existential challenges. And we are happy that you have welcomed us to be part of this conversation and many to follow.

Remarks by Nnimmo Bassey, Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), at the Sustainability Academy on the theme Unpacking Re-Source Democracy held at Bath Ebong Hall, University of Uyo on 2nd June 2017



For Scott Pegg

By Patrick B. Naagbantou

We met in the downing dab
Marched in the breathing being
We marched in the weeping
columns
We marched angrily with their
maimed bones
Excavated from the coward
graves

We gapped pointlessly at them
In the presence of the grimy
hangmen
Their presence did not frighten
you
The persistence in your search
Unknot the down and out
Barred from the Bodo and Bane
bounties

Your resilience awaken me
Your awards are not like others
It is long-awaited,
From the hands of honour
The beginning of the search

Port Harcourt, Rivers State
Monday, 24 April, 2017



RESOURCE CONTROL, GENDER AND PEACE IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

by Hon. Amb. Nkoyo Esu Toyo

I have had to wrestle with a number of themes to arrive at the title of this presentation and hopefully will try in a rather simplistic way to weave different thoughts into a narrative that captures not only the essence of today and its pursuit of peace but the activist perspective of the organizations involved in this endeavour. Importantly, I will also examine the significance of HOMEF's descriptive engagement with RE-source Democracy. In fact, I argue that Re-Source Democracy provides a basis to interrogate the place of gender relations in the resource appropriation debate and its differential implications for women and men. Overall, a resources lens underpins the entire argument, bringing into focus the crisis and conflicts around fossil fuel, the state of the Niger Delta region and its embattled but delicate ecosystem. Looking at the entire gambit of issues, at the core of the problem is the absence of peace and development in the Niger Delta.

Why is the Region readily identified and associated with crisis rather than peace? This has produced widespread frustration as citizens of the Region cry for change. A cry for peace engendered by equitable development for men and women and where the politics of the time allows the central administration, rule of law and accountable mechanisms to find a working balance.

However, underlying it all is underdevelopment despite huge resources and a culture of endemic crisis where norms which should be at the root of peace and a sustainable culture of development have been destroyed. In making this presentation, one is reminded that the Niger Delta region, still faces unabating levels of violence, crime, militancy and destruction of human and environmental life. Given the levels of these challenges and the unacceptable damage caused by the exploitation of fossil fuel and its consequential impact on the environment, a new approach is needed.

Even as we envisage change, there is the urgency to act on the exploitation of weak ecosystems, despoliation of ecology, disruptions of power relations between the so called “owners” of the resource and their exploiters. In fact, the very existence of the “owner-exploiter” relations have been defined if not abused by the lack of respect for earth's endowments, its privileges and rights. With these debasements of communities, there are accompanying unaddressed issues of gender,

conflict and resource expropriation. Their dimensions vary depending on whether the argument is being made for “resource control” or the countervailing thoughts around Re-Source Democracy.

A significant debate which seems unexplored and holds sway in the Region continues to be what is the dominant logic of resource control given its interaction with the principles of fiscal federalism and the restructuring of the Nigerian state as envisaged by the 2014 National Conference.

So, I interrogate the region's fixation with “resource control” and the issues it has spawned inside and outside the region. I accept as true that this is critical juncture for the region and that the options available to her are narrowing, so there is need to re-engage with the debate in ways that usher in new consciousness about existing or alternative facts. The debate needs to open other pathways towards prosperity, peace and the transformation on the Region.

2. Resource Control and/or Re-Source Democracy?

The opinions around resources and its ownership have been with us since the discovery of fossil fuels in the Niger Delta Region. Much of the conflicts in the region are traceable to the exploitation of oil and how the Nigeria State has failed to address the needs of its citizens despite these resources.



These failures and agitations have resulted in countless attempts in the last two decades to bring about meaningful constitutional reviews or reforms. In almost all instances, the efforts have been confronted by the singular question of how to manage and share the resources of the country in a more responsive manner. Not much has changed even though the Region has



had some of the most strident advocates who verbalised their views at the 2005/2014 National Reform Conferences, sometimes holding the conference to ransom. Rights activist, Ms Annkio Briggs, captures the mood of the region when she notes that

"Despite our enormous resources in the Niger Delta, problems have remained unattended; the region is lacking access to basic necessities; that is why we must represent the aspiration of the people of Niger Delta making linkages between the advocacy of representatives and the people's reality. Leader of Social Action, Dr. Isaac Osuoka, reviewed the history of the struggles in the region and noted that "Some of the participants of today's conference, including some of our eminent leaders know that the idea of the Pan Niger Delta Conference dates back to the 1990s, especially during the late Abacha military junta. Following the genocide in Umuechem (Etche), Ogoniland and parts of Ijawland, organisations like the Chikoko Movement, Southern Minorities Movement (SMM), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Rivers Coalition, Environmental Rights Action (ERA) Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) started

discussing the framework for a process of joint analysis and collaborative intervention in mobilising our peoples to promote the demands of self-determination within the Nigerian State, as guarantee for environmental and economic justice."

In summary, these advocates now need to be challenged by a local logic which only partly addresses the larger issues expropriation of resources. Where do they place the global imperatives such as those agreed upon at the Paris COP which promotes market environmentalist approaches that mask the responsibility for measurable action. Why will they continue to argue for resource control when in actual sense at least 80% of currently known fossil fuels reserves must be left untapped and unburned to keep temperature increases to below 2°C. What is even more troubling is that these issues are not conspicuously on the agenda of Region nor of the National Conferences that they attend. These dimensions have been dwarfed by the arguments for resource control, restructuring and fiscal federalism.

Additionally, would it not be right to say that Region's call for resource control, is a case for partial control and not full control, since even where the Niger Delta oversees its own resources, it may not amount to uncoupling unsatisfactory relations with IOCs nor the region's tendency to pursue non-strategic development of the Region. The call in this paper to examine "Re-source Democracy" is a call to revisit and broaden the argument for action not only against central governments but within the region, states, communities, among groups of peoples, within animals and earth life public as matters of rights.

Celestine Akpobari, a participant at the recently concluded Roundtable on the UNEP Report held in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, reminds us very vividly of this imperative when he said of the resource course that "...to destroy a people, you destroy their environment.

." Very often, the widely-canvassed notion of resource control, unlike Re-source democracy is not hinged on the recognition that what is known as 'resource' fundamentally belongs to nature.

A nature focussed approach estimates the proper place of resource exploitation and interprets resources through the prism of communities, species and peoples living in the region who have traditionally seen themselves as supervisors of what they own. Re-source democracy is about stewardship and less about control or regulator' rights. Re-source Democracy recognises the stewardship towards the resource and the right of citizens to establish rules and act in line with traditional as well as best available knowledge which safeguards the soil, trees, crops, water and wildlife and allows those involved to enjoy its gifts as a necessary provision that supports their lives and livelihoods as well as those of future generations.

3. The Niger Delta Context and the Resource Question

In the Nigerian context, control seems to privilege the role of central governments as different from their regional and local counterparts. Failure to interrogate the local context has often closed our eyes to how it is controlled and for whose or what purpose it is controlled. This presents another reason for seeking a shift in the content of engagement with resource control. In several of the communities in the Region, the inequitable distribution of wealth has resulted in conflicts and growing incidences of militancy, cultism, crime, violence, hate and unhealthy rivalries. These objectionable outcomes make the point that this model is not adequately advancing the development of the region nor giving appropriate value to its resources.

It clearly shows how multiple layered the issues are and suggests to us that although women are often caught in the cross fire of resource conflicts, they are not integral to the resource control agenda/debate whether it be in its

formulation, implementation, development of strategies, decisions and resolutions. On the other hand, women remain the closest to the impacted communities, and far from the direct accruable of resource control. Left as speculators within their communities and sometimes victims; women are manipulated by local and global market forces that use their resources against their own good.

Women therefore are bound to agonise and demand their participation in decisions that determine access to, and enjoyment of nature's gifts/resources as well as seeking ways to remove those obstacles erected by the politics of access and power. This politics of resource control must recognise not only their participation in sharing the proceeds of resources but their call for restraint particularly placing certain limits to extractive activities in fragile ecosystems or in locations of high cultural, religious or social significance in order to support the higher objective of clean and safe environments that support citizens' wellbeing.

4. Women, Gender and Re-Source Democracy

Going forward, we shall not return to the debate about women's expected roles as we do know that they have undergone extraordinary change over the last four decades of world conferences on women. In addition, there has been the phenomenal rise in women's education, employment for women, access to information, their gathering and mobilization through women's movement and campaigns. More recently, the introduction of mobile phones and communication devices has provided information to women giving them a basis to assess their actions and develop independence of thought. What this demonstrates is that while there are actions to be taken by states to advance the rights and status of women, the norms that define the way women address their concerns must be worked out by women themselves through everyday actions led by ordinary people.

Building the control of resources around the centrality of safeguarding mother earth allows campaigners to go beyond the confines of existing publicly accepted norms to provide alternatives practice which have the force of conviction to influence the way things are perceived and done.

If we must get women into the role of influencing critical norms, they need to be a part of the debate and re-examine the stymied fixation with “resource control” which has crystallised minds and emitted negative reactions. Women must be conscious of the many ways they can communicate truth to power without inheriting the views which many associate with divisive politics. Such a shift in strategy and action must agree that resources first and foremost belong to mother earth, before region, states, community and families can lay claim. The challenge is to understand, domesticate and engage with Re-source Democracy in ways that see the values and norms of protection and preservation of the natural resources. As institutions of learning and activists often do, it is time to develop, inculcate and incubate advocacies that promote harmony between different actors and nature's endowments. Taking a leap of faith in this direction will require extensive research into the politics of state and resources and finding ways of delicately balancing state, law and accountabilities to nature and humanity.

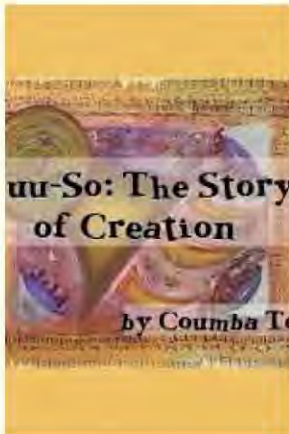
5. A paradigm shift and the charge.

Writing on How Change Happens, Duchan Green notes that the adoption and implementation of new human rights norms is conditioned by different nonlinear stages of change and norming. Engaging with Re-source Democracy requires that we adopt concepts that instruct on the co-existence of mother earth with its exploiters. Such an approach also needs to be engendered such that it addresses the question of the rights of 'mother' earth (a reproductive being) as a pre-condition to any exploratory rights. The repression of the rights of mother earth can be likened to the discrimination and marginalization that women suffer. To bring to focus these exclusions, we are engendering the debate.



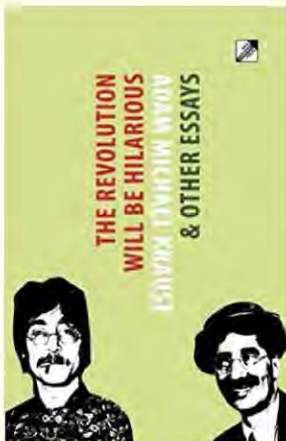
BOOKS

YOU SHOULD READ



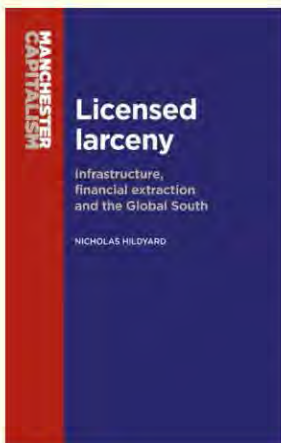
Muu-So: The Story of Creation by Coumba Toure, published jointly by Darija Press/Falia Editions Enfance

Muu-So is a story of creation aimed mostly at younger readers. “To those willing to carry the clay pot, Muu, will be given the power balance and a sense of justice” proclaims the supreme deity, Maa Ngala Ba.” They will be named Muu-So, the pot carriers.” The story of creation has diverse interpretations across the world. This new story comes from the Sahel where one of the oldest civilisations once prevailed. It is a tale of the beauty of the process of creation and how it is also necessary to closely care for and love that which we are responsible for.



The Revolution will be Hilarious by Adam Michael Krause, published by New Compass

This look at comedy and social change shows that humour, democracy, and creativity are all closely related. However funny it may sound, comedy can help us create a kinder, gentler, and far more rational future. This is not a joke. ...



Licensed Larceny by Nicholas Hildyard, published by Manchester University Press, June 2016

Inequality is not just a problem of poverty and the poor: it is as much a problem of wealth and the rich. Licensed larceny is a proxy for how effectively elites have constructed institutions that extract value from the rest of society.

The provision of public services is one area which is increasingly being reconfigured to extract wealth upward to the 1%, notably through so-called Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

The push for PPPs is not about building infrastructure for the benefit of society but about constructing new subsidies that benefit the already wealthy. It is less about financing development than developing finance.

Understanding and exposing these processes is essential if inequality is to be challenged.

Such legalised looting – or “licensed larceny” – extracts considerable wealth from the global South and siphons it to the elite 1% of the global rich.

Such engendering will confront those who refuse to acknowledge the pre-eminence of the female and deny her qualities as conceptualized by Mother Earth and her rights. There is work ahead, getting women who have been on the periphery of the resource debate to act to preserve, to reject a culture of silence and confront actions that seek to de-legitimise both their voice and contributions particularly those that question their locus. Like it was with Ken Saro Wiwa, the process acknowledges that the new direction of the debate will be gradual and progress over time towards the institutionalization of RE-source Democracy. Such progression towards new values open opportunities for women to participate and domesticate new standards which will be subsequently captured through enabling laws and institutions. As a matter of fact, many of the environmental regulatory bodies in Nigeria came on the heels of environmental rights campaign of the late 1990s.

Researchers are important to this endeavour to understand and act upon Resource Democracy, they bring clarity to who should be targeted and how strategies influence existing norms in the region. The region must liberate itself from the skewed interpretation of “control of resources” and open the conversation of resources to more democratic fundamentals.

6, Critical juncture: Resource dis-control as a precursor to inclusive development.

Acting and timing are crucial and the time is now. The efforts of the current government to address the rising tide of violent crimes and discontent following the failure of institutions such as NDDC, Presidential Amnesty Programme, the Environmental Regulatory agencies and a host of other interventionist programmes including the UNEP programme for cleaning up Ogoni lands, has brought significant pressure on the central government to respond to the issues presented by PANDEF when it met with President Buhari. In general, the language of this government is that we cannot continue with business as usual. We need to change or perish and those within the

environmental and rights community see the danger ahead as the presence of fossil oil and the politics of its control will continue to cause untold crisis and support the festering of local and national disagreements.

Consequently, there are serious reasons to seek an alternative agenda and act differently with an agenda that benefits all sides. This action includes seeking answers raised by the economic challenges currently facing the nation which is tied to the volatility of crude oil, the fall in the price of crude and the shift of buyer of our crude oil to shale oil. This inevitable fact also means that sooner or later, fossil fuel development is bound to become out dated in the same way steam engines gave way to new technology and options. Overall, the region today is in a far weaker situation that it is ready to acknowledge. With the recession in the economy, the exit of many businesses from the region and deep concerns about the hostile business climate, things are no longer at ease.

On the part of states, rather than quell for excess crude funds and Paris club refunds, the time to run a profligate system is over and this is time to get hapless citizens who are victims of the distorted control of resources to live within a sustainable reality. These facts present an urgent call for diversification of the economy and awareness that the resource control arguments barely make the case for an inclusive approach to development. With high profile reviews of the economy by the FG, the urgent need to transit to a post-petroleum economy is evident. A Re-source democratic approach could find its place of pride if it enables planning to address issues such as inclusive development, environmental restoration, equitable use of resources and the post-petroleum Nigeria. The Resource Democracy template affords the region the opportunity to say that another Niger Delta is possible.

A presentation by Hon. Amb. Nkoyo Esu Toyo at event hosted by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) and Institute for Conflict and Gender Studies, University of Port Harcourt, 24 May, 2017



WE ARE NOT GUINEAPIGS

Unjust, unsafe, unsustainable. These are the three key words that can be used to describe food systems based on genetic engineering and other chemical based agricultural systems that seek to pollute the environment and to overturn local knowledge, local food culture and local economies. Unjust because they are often introduced surreptitiously or illegally and without adequate information to the public.

Unsafe because they are unnatural and because of the very process and nature of genetically engineered or modified organisms including by the inherent allergenicity of some of the organisms and the fact of some of them being basically insecticides. Unsustainable because they operate as monocultures and would eventually subvert African food systems, disrupt local economies, build dependency on agrotoxics and on monopolist seed companies.

The public needs to be repeatedly reminded that there is no evidence to assure the world of the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Products of modern agricultural genetic biotechnology are a real threat to our biodiversity, soils and ways of life. Pesticide crops do not only kill target pest but other beneficial organisms, including pollinators and those in human guts.

We must never forget the fact that once GMOs are released into the environment they cannot be recalled and would persist, contaminate and literally poison our environment. There are proven agricultural systems that require government support through the provision of extension services, research, rural infrastructure and linkages of farms to markets. These are where our governments must step up to the plate. Literally.

We are talking about our right to know what is on our plates and our right to choose what we eat. It is worth saying again and again that what we eat must not eat us. We cannot allow forces that are against our best interests to drive our agricultural narrative and suggest that nutrition can only be manufactured in modern biotechnology laboratories. We must uncover every surreptitious effort to contaminate our agricultural and food systems. It is time to monitor our imports including those that come as food aid.

It is time to march against poison! Yesterday the world paused to think about our global environment. The theme for the day was Connecting People to Nature. The world resolved to Stand with Nature. GMOs do

never eliminate the fact that GMOs are marketing tools designed to secure profits for corporate entities and to secure political control for neo-colonial and imperial forces. GMOs are the current epitomes of colonialism via the gastronomic route.

They are being pushed by external political and commercial interests into Africa and the Nigerian government and her agencies should not play the willing tool to be used as the window through which Africa would once more become enslaved by forces ranged against her interests. This must be stated very loudly because the public has a right to know. If the current government inherited a dangerous programme from the previous government it should be bold enough to distance itself from it.



exactly the opposite - they don't only disconnect us from Nature, they fight against Nature.

GMOs have been spectacular failures in Africa. GMO cotton failed with small scale farmers in South Africa's Makhathini Flats. The crop recently failed and was banned in Burkina Faso. Investment on GMO cotton experimentations in Ghana have just entered the pause mode with the purveyor of the failed technology, Monsanto, withdrawing financial support.

It is incomprehensible that the Nigerian Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) would permit the commercial placement in the Nigerian environment of a crop that has failed in a resounding manner just across our borders. This is the time for Nigeria to retreat from the GMO path before more damage is done. Populist propaganda for the technology will

Environmental corruption is infinitely more deadly than monetary thievery. The fight against corruption must include against the corruption of our food systems, socio-cultural and ethical codes.

We reiterate that we have a right to know that GMOs are against our interests, including in the health, economic, social and cultural spheres. We have a right to know that the threats that GMOs pose to us are real, present and dangerously intergenerational.

We have a duty to state categorically that there are tested and successful and viable farming practices that are safe and should be promoted. That route is provided by agroecology, a system that is independent of controlling political, agrochemical and seeds corporations.



We have a duty to insist that the weak biosafety laws being pushed across Africa, and in contradiction to existing African Model Law on Biosafety, are not in our best interest. They are laws set up to permit atrocious assault on our health, agricultural and food systems. The NBMA Act 2015 is a prime example of a law begging to be drastically revised or repealed outrightly. The law is replete with provisions that block public information, promote conflict of interests promotes vested interests and restricts avenues for adequate punishment for harm caused.

To gain a full understanding of the needless nature of GMOs, we must listen to our farmers, economists and scientists that are not tied to the apron strings of biotech corporations. This understanding should place a responsibility on all of us to demand food safety and reject attempts to force our peoples to become guinea pigs in needless and dangerous experimentations.

That is why we are here today.

*Welcome words by Nnimmo Bassey, Director, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) at the Stakeholders Workshop on GMOs held at Apo Apartments, Abuja on 06 June 2017



Repeal The National Biosafety Management Act

Resolutions from Stakeholders Workshop on Food Sovereignty and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

On the 6th of June 2017, Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) organized a workshop on The Right to know: Food Sovereignty & Dangers of GMOs. The event took place at Apo Apartments in Abuja and had in attendance farmers, scientists, academics, professionals, traders and representatives from the media and non-governmental organizations.

The Workshop was on food sovereignty and the rights of the public to have adequate information with regard to safety of the foods they eat. At the end of the workshop, the following resolutions were made.

1. Review the National Biosafety Management Act

It was agreed that the National Biosafety Management Act 2015 in its present form cannot protect the interest of Nigerians and that it should be urgently reviewed or repealed. The Act leaves loopholes that can be easily manipulated to allow GMOs into the country. An example is the composition of its board which has promoters of modern agricultural biotechnology, including the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), as board members of NBMA. The fact that NABDA teamed up with commercial interests, quickly applied and obtained permits illustrates how this arrangement can breed conflict of interest and defeat the role of the agency as an unbiased regulator.

2. Investment in independent Research

The Nigerian government should invest on research institutes and empower scientists especially those that are not tied to the biotech corporations to investigate both short term and future impact of GMOs on the Nigerian environment, her culture and the health of individuals.

3. Public Consultation

The needs of the people must be taken into consideration in policy and decision making especially in matters of food which affects everybody. Top down decisions may end up being counterproductive. Majority of our farmers are family or smallholder farmers and they are in the best position to say the challenges they are faced with and are capable of sharing knowledge on how those can be overcome without compromising the health of the people.

4. Loans and grants should be made available to grassroots farmers

Loans, grants and extension services should be made available to farmers especially, those in the rural areas to boost agricultural activities. Increased access to land and tools are essential for improving productivity.

5. Support for Organic Agriculture

Stakeholders at this meeting agreed that Organic farming is a more sustainable solution for provision of safe and healthy food as it allows farmers to control and save their seeds, enriches the soil and preserves biodiversity. The organic sector of the Ministry of Agriculture should be empowered to provide extension service to farmers.

6. Seed banks

Organic seed banks should be created in our different ecological zones to safeguard our indigenous seeds and secure our biodiversity.

7. Provision of storage facilities and access to markets

Focus should be on reducing post-harvest losses by providing proper storage facilities and creating

creating bridges between the farms and the markets. The problem is more of food wastage than of food shortages.

8. Restrict GMOs to Laboratories

GMOs should be restricted to laboratories. The recall of GMOs after they have contaminated our environment will be very slim. Restriction to research laboratories will protect Nigerians from the health and environmental impacts.

9. Security agencies to monitor and investigate the uprooting of immature crops

Investigation is required into the uprooting of young plants by unidentified agents in many regions and also the conflicts between farmers and pastoralists should be urgently resolved.

10. GMOs violate human rights.

The issue of GMOs in Nigeria is beyond food. It represents an approach which neglects the rights of individuals to choose and control what they eat. The Workshop resolved to demand respect for the rights of the public to safe food. It was also noted that the peculiarities of our context including our informal marketing systems do not allow for standard labelling of products as may work elsewhere and this exposes us to unique risks that cannot be ignored.

11. Land preparation

Farm produce are as good as the soil and the soil on the other hand is as good as the organic contents in it. To experience good yield and increase productivity, the soil must be carefully managed and protected from chemicals which destroy its natural composition. GMOs and their accompanying agrochemicals negatively impact on the quality of soils.

12. More agencies to regulate food and biosafety issues

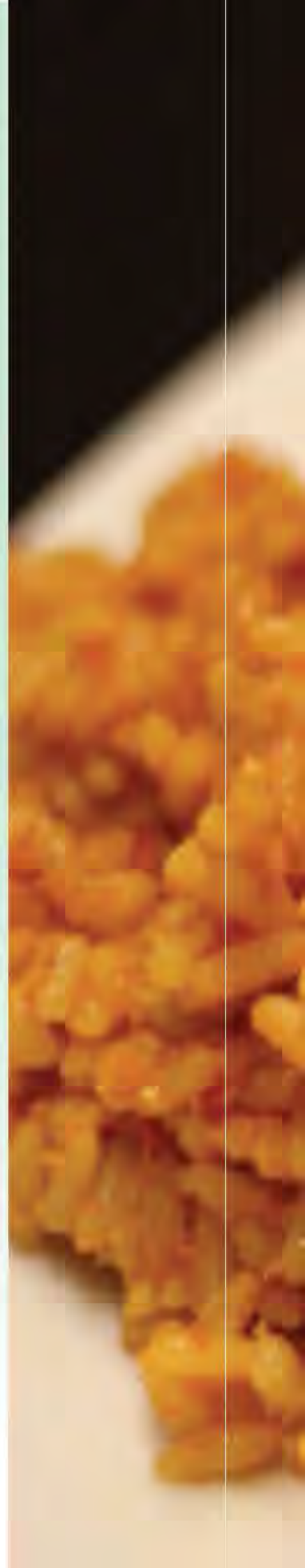
It was also agreed that one agency cannot adequately address the issues of Biosafety in Nigeria. There is need for a strong collective effort to protect our interests, culture, environment and health.

13. Increased Awareness

The masses are largely unaware of the state of biosafety in the country. A majority do not know about what GMOs are about and how it affects them. One of the strong points made at this event was that of increasing awareness among the people of the dangers of GMOs. We agreed that this information should be spread especially in the rural areas and in languages that the people can easily understand.

14. Nullification of Permits and other deployments

The workshop resolved that the permits issued by NBMA for GMO varieties (Maize and Cotton) should be withdrawn. The failure of similar GM cotton variety in Burkina Faso and its being banned in that country two weeks before their approval in Nigeria was noted as a cogent reason for concern. The deployment of genetically modified cassava and beans in Nigeria was denounced and participants called for a halt on all fronts.



Safe Food is a Human Right

Should science not be in the public interest and in service of society? The answer to that is obvious and it is a YES. Science has to be in the interest of society. Is all science in the interest of society? Again, this question attracts an easy answer and that answer is NO.

Must a people utilize a technology based on unproven or mythic promises? Indeed, must we use a technology simply because it exists or because we can acquire it? Does domesticating a technology, such as modern agricultural biotechnology, make its utility inevitable? Do nations shy away from utilising the technology that produces atomic bombs merely for lack of access to the technology or for reasons of safety and survival of humankind? Where does public participation begin and where does it end with regard to decisions that are matters of life and death?

If we are malnourished what must be done? Can food aid solve the challenge of food shortages in the North East when the root causes fester and lurk under every shrub or clump? Why are fisher folks in our Niger Delta creeks depending on imported frozen fish?

These questions are raised to remind us that there are many issues surrounding the matter of our food and the challenge of agricultural modern biotechnology that require clarifications and in-depth interrogations.

On 13th November 1996, the World Food Summit hosted by the United Nations, the world affirmed that all humans have a right to access to safe and nutritious food in a manner consistent with the right to adequate food and freedom from hunger. The provisions for the right to life in our constitution and other global covenants speak of the right to food that is safe and nutritious.

As we begin our conversations on the state of biosafety in Nigeria, let us state that the fundamental way to ensure safe, nutritious food is through the promotion and support of food sovereignty. This is the way to ensure sustainable food production. Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to safe and culturally appropriate food produced through methods that are ecologically sound and sustainable. It is critically the right of our peoples to define their own food and agriculture systems. It allows communities to control the way food is produced, traded and eaten. We understand that the best food security can be attained through food sovereignty. Any other understanding of food security leaves open the gates for dumping of inappropriate foods and products with the singular end of filling hungry mouths and stomachs. It essentially erodes a people's sovereignty and promotes food colonialism.

The media has an enormous responsibility to inform the public about issues that fundamentally affect their safety – especially with regard to the sort of food or things that we eat. It is a sacred duty to lay open basic information and to encourage public participation in policy issues surrounding our food systems. We have a biosafety law, the National Biosafety Management Agency Act 2015, that is not only permissive in favour of the biotech industry, but is adversarial or against the

public interest. This is illustrated by the fact that the Act only requires NBMA to hold public consultations at its discretion as in its Section 26(1). We believe that holding public consultations on plans to release genetically modified organisms should be a legal and binding requirement and not left to the whims of the Agency. Section 25(2) of the Act also allows NBMA to decide whether to advertise applications to introduce GMOs in national or local newspapers.

The 'public enlightenment' events held by promoters and regulators of biosafety in Nigeria merely suggest that our people are misinformed about the risks that GMOs pose. What our people need is accurate information from all sides of the issues so that they can make informed decisions and demand for or reject risky technologies. Assurances that NBMA will not allow dangerous GMOs into Nigeria are nothing but mere platitudes if the claims are not backed by open, neutral and unstilted adjudications.

How much do we know of the GMO beans that will soon be unleashed on Nigerians? And what does the public know of GMO cassava experimentations/release in Nigeria? What about the approval of GMO cotton that failed in Burkina Faso for commercial release in Nigeria? Burkina Faso's cotton production is regaining its former productivity since the government decided to jettison the GMO variety and return to planting natural cotton. Why is Nigeria being pushed blindly into a failed venture? We cannot be fooled when we are told that a permit for commercial release and placement in the market is the same as a permit for trials to be conducted.

As the conversations begin, let us all keep in mind that this is a matter of security, cultural heritage, freedom from neo-colonialism and a human right to life. We are talking about food. And food is a human right.

Welcome words by Nnimmo Bassey, Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), at a Media Training on Biosafety hosted by HOMEF at Apo Apartments, Abuja on 24 May 2017

CONNECT PEOPLE TO NATURE

Report of HOMEF's Forest Town Hall Meeting,
June 5th 2017, Abuja

By 'Funmi Oyatogun

On World Environment Day (WED) 2017, Health of Mother Earth Foundation organized a Forest Town Hall Meeting which was attended by 150 people including representatives from forest communities, CSOs, government and the media. The day, which is commemorated globally every year on June 5th, was a much-needed dialogue session among stakeholders to address the need to protect the forests and fight for justice of the communities which depend on them. This was apt as the theme for this year's WED was Connecting People to Nature – an all-encompassing goal which cannot be achieved without protecting the forest.



The Town Hall was held with the support of the Small Grants Programme of the UNDP. In attendance was Mrs Ronke Olubamise the National Coordinator of GEF-SGP in Nigeria.

Gloria Ekpo, a researcher and development practitioner, moderated the panel of speakers which was made up of Dr. Ako Amadi, Rita Uwaka, Odey Oyama and Martins Egot. Dr Amadi is a renowned environmental service professional and has worked on prominent international environmental projects. Odey Oyama is also a prominent human rights activist and the director of the Nigerian Rainforest Resource Development Centre (RRDC). Rita Uwaka has worked extensively on forest and biodiversity with Environmental Rights Action (ERA) which is also known as Friends of the Earth, Nigeria. The event was also attended by the representative of the Honorable Minister of State for Environment.

While the panel discussed forests in general, Ekuri Community Forest in Cross River State was front and center as it is a recent and on-going example of how the forests play a central role in connecting people to the forest. A frivolous super highway proposed by the Cross River state government will destroy portions of the forest and annihilate the livelihoods of the people as well as the ecological integrity of the forest ecosystem. The situation at Ekuri, as described by the panelists, displays a blatant

disregard for the abundance of undiscovered plant and animal species and their potential for pharmaceuticals and other future innovations.

The first speaker, Rita Uwaka, began on a note that resonates with all and sundry. "The forest is life! It gives us food and our livelihoods." As she gently reminded the room of some of the functions of the forest, it became clear that environmental protection is not an act of nobility, but a necessary action which we must carry out in solidarity with the planet that gives us life.

Rita set the scene for the meeting, outlining the major threats facing Nigeria's forests including crude oil pipelines, forest fires and mangrove contamination due to oil spillage, unsustainable logging practices and land-grabbing for industrial agro-business. In her words, "These plantations that feed faceless loggers and the international lumber trade, have devastating social and economic implications on the communities who depend on the forests for their survival." She likened deforestation to a war.

According to Uwaka, "communities must demand their human rights, value for their communities over profit and proper consultation."



Martins Egot spoke both passionately and knowledgeably about the Ekuri community's historical interaction with their forest. He was the Chairman of Ekuri Initiative and played a key role in organizing the affairs of the community, contributing to their recognition as winners of the prestigious Equator Prize in 2004.

The prize recognizes excellent community forest management practices. His perspective was therefore important as he spoke about first-hand issues experienced by him and his community members. Currently, as he stated, 80% of the community is directly dependent on the forest. "The history and economy of our people depends on the forest and any activity being carried out on our land required our consultation and input" he said. Presenting the stance of the community, Egot clearly iterated – "We do not want this project, we want the improvement of existing roads as well as creation of small feeder roads to service the needs of the community."

A proverbial story resonated with the participants as Odey Oyama shared it, "Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's book – Things Fall Apart – made the crucial point that if you find a man defecating in your house, you would take a stick and flog him away." The premise of this story is the one shared by the Ekuri Forest Community and other stakeholders. He highlighted that land is a heritage provided by God and the government is responsible for holding it in trust for the people. "Also", he continued, "land should not be sold to people who will wipe out its relevance to the people by setting up monoculture plantations." He also demanded that the following questions be answered: where are the funds for the Ekuri Superhighway coming from, what are the conditions attached to the funds and what are the implications for the economic autonomy of the community and state?

These points were buttressed by Dr. Ako Amadi, who likened clearing out the forest as withdrawing all of one's savings from the bank. "Don't mind that forest people are called 'bush men' in a derogatory way...they have the prerequisites to life", he said. He expressed that the forest is a privilege and went on to outline the historical and cultural antecedents to the gross disregard for the forest today. "In fact", he said, "the colonial periods were better years for the forest than these days because there was a global interest in forest science in the 19th century."

Of course, these were gradually replaced by the clamor for crude oil.

The audience was well engaged, asking questions, making contributions and coming together to draw up a communiqué which resolved to demand clarification of the funding sources of the Cross River Superhighway, unite to amplify community engagement and mobilization, demand a holistic regard for the forest among other points.

An overriding theme among the participants was the need for forest scientists to amplify their voices, in addition to activities and voices of community members and activists. In the absence of scientists, the experiences of community members are often relegated as 'outcry'. The panelists also prescribed that without a comprehensive Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA), a more inclusive adaptation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). An ESIA, when properly done, will not determine economic viability of any project but will ascertain all forms of environmental and social risks involved in the project. The forest is more than just a collection of trees.

In Dr. Amadi's words, "the biodiversity of the forest cannot be replaced by planting trees." Studies indicate that even after decades, a planted forest cannot compare to a primary forest.

In summary, any successful community effort will require proper sensitization, mobilization and empowerment. The entry protocol will include identification of the power structures in the community, individually sensitize the opinion leaders, organize collective community dialogues and connect the community with resources to exercise their human rights provided according to the law. This will enable the community negotiate appropriate compensations, where necessary. When there is a desecration of the environment, several communities suffer the impact. It is imperative for communities to come together, work in solidarity and ensure that they combine efforts to get their voices heard.

FOREST TOWN HALL RESOLUTIONS

Health of Mother Earth Foundation held a Forest Town Hall Meeting on Monday – June 5, 2017 in commemoration of World Environment Day, at Apo Apartments in Abuja.

The meeting was attended by 150 people including representatives from forest communities, CSOs, government and the media. At the meeting, it was resolved that we will continue to demand for justice for our environment and communities. The following are the outcomes:

1. Clarification of the Funding Source of Ekuri Community Forest

The following questions need to be answered clearly and transparently: where are the funds for the Ekuri Superhighway coming from, what are the conditions attached to the funds and what are the implications for the economic autonomy of the community and state?

2. Community Sensitization, Mobilization and Empowerment

Any successful community effort will require proper sensitization, mobilization and empowerment. The entry protocol will include identification of the power structures in the community, individually sensitize the opinion leaders, organize collective community dialogues and connect the community with resources to exercise their human rights provided according to the law. This will enable the community negotiate appropriate compensations, where necessary.

3. Land Belongs to the People

A key bone of contention in environmental issues comes about from the lack of clarity (or wrong awareness) of the ownership of land. It was brought to light that land belongs to the people, according to combined interpretation of the Land Use Act as well as the Constitution of Nigeria. The government is a 'keeper' of the land and cannot carry out activities that will infringe on the rights of the people, without

their consent.

4. Regard for the Forest

The forest is more than a collection of trees. The town hall meeting resolved to demand a holistic regard for the forest and the intricate values it provides ecologically, socio-culturally, and economically. A plantation of trees cannot be used to replace a forest and the dependent communities that have existed for hundreds of generations.

5. The Super Highway is Unlawful and Unwanted

The community representative expressed severally that while they are in need of good roads to serve their needs, they require a repair / upgrade of the currently existing road which was abandoned by the previous governments, instead of an unjustifiable 'Super Highway.'

6. Sustained peaceful protests and campaigns

HOMEF and all its partners believe solely in peaceful methods to creating change, including the use of all forms of media. Sustained protest and campaigns will continue to create the pressure required for the government to pay attention to the needs, voices and rights of stakeholder communities.

7. Community Organizing

When there is a desecration of the environment, several communities suffer the impact. It is imperative for communities to come together, work in solidarity and ensure that they combine efforts to get their voices heard.

Right Livelihood Lecture and Peace Day

2017 RIGHT LIVELIHOOD LECTURE & WOMEN FOR PEACE AND DISARMAMENT

Alyn Ware, Director of the Basel Peace Office, was invited to deliver the 2017 Right Livelihood lecture, Peace and Nuclear Power in Times of Conflict, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria on May 25, at an event organised by the Right Livelihood College, the Centre for Conflict and Gender Development Studies and Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF).

Alyn's presentation focused on the radiation and climatic consequences to Africa of the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world, international efforts to ban nuclear weapons, the campaigns to move nuclear weapons budgets to instead fund economic and social needs including the SDGs, the risks of nuclear energy and the feasibility of renewable energy alternatives in West Africa. There was considerable media interest in the presentation, especially as Nigeria is planning to build two nuclear power plants and there has been very little public dialogue about this.

Alyn also helped organise a special event the day before (May 24), also at the University of Port Harcourt to commemorate International



Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament. Members of the World Future Council and Right Livelihood Award laureates from around the world used the occasion to release a joint statement Women leading for Peace and Disarmament.

'Involving women in peace and disarmament processes elevates the prospect of their success', according to recipients of the Right Livelihood Award and members of the World Future Council who released the statement 'We highlight the success of peace and disarmament initiatives in which women have played an important role, including in.

Bougainville, Colombia, Iran, Liberia, Mexico, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Philippines, Sierra Leone, and other regions around the world.' Coming just two days after the tragic terrorist bombing in Manchester UK, the statement condemns terrorist acts and any other forms of indiscriminate violence, including the use of nuclear weapons. We express concern over the existential threats to humanity and the planet from climate change and the increased threat of nuclear war – a situation which has moved the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists to move the Doomsday Clock to 2½ minutes to midnight. The threats to our planet – of climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, terrorism and war – can only be overcome by nations and the global community working in cooperation – something not possible while nations maintain large and expensive militaries and threaten to destroy each other, including with nuclear weapons.'

The statement highlights the opportunity for progress on nuclear disarmament provided by the negotiations by non-nuclear States which will take place in June-July this year on a draft agreement to ban nuclear weapons, and the UN High Level Conference on Nuclear

Disarmament which will take place in 2018 and will include nuclear armed and non-nuclear States.

'UN High Level Conferences in recent years have achieved success, including agreements on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, so we hope for similar success on nuclear disarmament at the 2018 UN High Level Conference,' says Alyn Ware, one of the Right Livelihood Laureates endorsing the statement. 'We also support the Women's March to Ban the Bomb being held in New York to promote the UN nuclear ban negotiations.' 'And we highlight the possibilities to invest in peace and sustainable development if we re-allocate just a small portion of the \$1.7 trillion spent globally on the military. As such we call on governments to support the Kazakhstan proposal to reduce national military budgets by at least 1% and reallocate these resources to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.'

This article was first published at <http://www.baselpeaceoffice.org/article/2017-right-livelihood-lecture-women-peace-and-disarmament>



Punch and Counter Punch

BIOTECH AGENCIES NIREC REPORT AND UNPATRIOTIC ACTIVISM

Lagos-based research scientist, Dr. Hannah Nnadi, has expressed concern that some activists may "have taken it upon themselves to smear the integrity of government agencies and individuals working for the good of the country". She believes that "the attitude of these so-called activists to frustrate government agencies must be resisted as their actions are very unpatriotic and misleading." In this piece made available to EnviroNews, she makes reference to statements on NIREC credited to Nnimmo Bassey, director of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), and a staunch anti-GMO campaigner

Professor Lucy Ogbadu, Director General, National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA). Photo credit: economicconfidential.com

Recently, a group representing the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) issued a press release with the intention of misleading the public and pursuing an alien agenda. In the said release, the group, led by anti-GMO activists, listed the names of the Director General/CEO of the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), Dr. Rufus Ebegba, and Prof. Lucy Ogbadu, the Director General, National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), as members of NIREC.

Both agencies reacted to the release and issued statements distancing themselves and their DGs from the purported report. Nnimmo Bassey, one of the architects of the report, in an article published by *EnviroNews*, acknowledged that both agencies and their directors general were not part of the report.

In that publication, Bassey, after shamefully acknowledging that those personalities were not members of NIREC, went further to cast aspersions on the integrity of the agencies with the intention of discrediting them before the public. Bassey has become desperate and personal in his pursued agenda. His actions show a vendetta against these personalities and dragging the public along.

It is therefore important to state the following:

- The NBMA and NABDA are both agencies of government created by law.
- Both agencies were established and given specific mandates by the federal government.

- Nnimmo Bassey was an active player in the processes that cumulated in the establishment of the NBMA, so to turn around and say that the Agency is a brain child of NABDA questions his credibility and integrity. Moreover, the National Biosafety Bill passed through two legislative houses from 2009 to 2015. He cannot be more knowledgeable on matters of biological sciences as an architect than the experts on the subject matter.
- There is a difference between activism for personal aggrandisement and activism for national development, Nnimmo of the former.
- Government will not be drawn into the mud by self seeking and see-nothing-good-in-Nigeria activists.
- Paid activists have infiltrated and cornered the objective for setting up NIREC to their own selfish interests. NIREC should be on the watch out so that it will not be dragged to the mud.
- It is a shame that Bassey cannot, till now, differentiate between the National Biosafety Management Agency abbreviated as NBMA and the National Biotechnology Development Agency abbreviated as NABDA.
- NBMA is a government agency that strictly regulates the use of modern biotechnology in Nigeria. NABDA is another government agency charged with the responsibility of promoting the use of modern biotechnology. Because one regulates and the other promotes does not mean, they cannot collaborate or work together.

There is a limit to which individuals seeking their daily bread should go, so running down a government agency that you contributed actively to establish questions your rationale and unnecessary and destructive criticisms.

http://www.environewsnigeria.com/biotech-agencies-nirec-report-unpatriotic-activism/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+EnvironewsNigeria+%28EnviroNews+Nigeria%29

BIOTECHNOLOGY, 'SCIENTISTS', 'EXPERTS', GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND PATRIOTISM

By Nnimmo Bassey

The need to interrogate what patriotism means in the context of the challenges of the push of modern agricultural biotechnology into Nigeria and Africa has been instigated by an [article](#) by a Lagos-based research scientist titled “Biotech agencies NIREC report and unpatriotic activism.” That article opened with this claim: “Recently, a group representing the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) issued a press release with the intention of misleading the public and pursuing an alien agenda.” I have personally not seen the “statement” that was supposedly released by NIREC and probably would not have learned of the [publication in Daily Trust](#), but for the strident responses from the government agencies and their proxies. I also have strong doubts that the Daily Trust publication was a press release “from a group representing the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC).” The source of the story, however, is not our concern here.

Generally, when we speak of patriotism we evoke a sense of 'nationalism' and 'loyalty' to one's nation or group. From the perspective of some commentators, patriotism means endorsing without question anything that a government or government agency suggests or does. Permit me to equate that to the Warrant Chief mentality of the colonial era. The colonial governments would have seen those chiefs as epitomes of patriotism. But we do know that they were loyal to foreign interests rather than the interests of our peoples or nations. We can further say, that the mind-set that holds that government action is always right and must be supported willy-nilly is a very dangerous mind-set.

For an immediate modern day example by which we can examine the puerile claim that government (agency) worship is equal to patriotism, we only need to look at the current resistance to the travel ban proposed by the president of the United States of America. The president proclaimed a ban, the world was aghast, legal challenges were instituted, the government lost and a revised ban was issued.

As we write, a court has blocked that new presidential order. It is our guess that those who object to the travel ban can be labelled unpatriotic, after all the orders were issued by a president. No applause for such logic. We must ask ourselves why biotechnology proponents find it hard to accept that their ideas can be questioned and that they could be wrong, as they often are. The falsehood of the myths of the biotechnology industry have been demonstrated continuously and shown for what they are. Moreover, Nature repeatedly trumps the myths – through super weeds, superbugs, etc..

Let us linger a bit more on criticism as lack of patriotism. What is patriotic about foisting on Nigeria a technology that has failed woefully in Burkina Faso, a neighbouring country? How come we are wishing away the fact that the quantity and quality of cotton harvests in Burkina Faso has picked up since they escaped the GMO hoax?

What is patriotic about forcing down our throats, a system that was sold as revolution for small scale farmers in [Makhathini Flats](#), Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa in 1998 but failed woefully?

We will look at other issues in the article written by the Lagos-based scientist who apparently must be an insider in one or both of the agencies defended in the article. The scientist appears to have the voice of Jacob, but the hands of Esau.

The argument that anyone opposing GMOs is doing so for pecuniary reasons, or is acting as someone's stooge, is laughable. That same argument can be extended to those of us opposed to criminal oil pollutions, toxic dumps and the like. The same can be said of those of who fought against military dictatorship in Nigeria, against apartheid in South Africa or slavery in the USA. It is a weak, poor and worthless argument that does not even merit a response. What would the Lagos-based scientist say of the [web of actors and sponsors](#) that are openly funding and pushing for the deployment of GM crops in Africa?

The committee that NIREC set up to review the GMO situation in Nigeria was an advisory one made up of academics, researchers and people of faith.

To my knowledge, apart from secretariat support, members were/are not part of NIREC. The committee invited the two key institutions promoting or overseeing the “deployment” of GMOs in Nigeria.

Finally, the Lagos based scientist stated in the article under reference and we quote: “Nnimmo Bassey was an active player in the processes that cumulated in the establishment of the NBMA, so to turn around and say that the Agency is a brain child of NABDA questions his credibility and integrity.” (our emphasis).

Let us go back to what we wrote in the article that drew the ire of the Lagos-based scientist. Here is it: “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.”

Note that I used the word “purportedly” and then added that I did not imagine that curious supposition. The fact is that the disclosure that NBMA was a brainchild of NABDA was stated by the official that represented one of the agencies when they appeared before the NIREC committee. We do not think it is important to say who among the two made that incredible claim. But if anyone really wants to know the information it can be shared. This writer did not imagine, claim or say it. The revelation unveils the foundational flaw of the GMO scaffold.

In any case, those who promoted the NBMA Bill have their logos printed on the back of the document that was distributed at the Public Hearing on the Biosafety Bill Organised by the Joint Committee on Science and Technology and Agriculture, ABUJA, 9th December 2009, at the National Assembly. To suggest that this writer ever endorsed what was signed into law

by our former president is an incredible distortion of the truth. When we recognise that we have a bad product, two of the ways to respond is dropping it or reviewing it. One of the organisational flyers of NBMA carries the names of individuals, including those from CSOs that are totally opposed to GMOs but attended one of the meetings in the preparatory stages of the bill that has become law.

Why are those names listed on a promotional flyer? To gain credibility? To silence opposition? Did their attendance indicate that they endorsed the bill? Top officials of NBMA and NABDA had in time past been invited to our events, we would never put their names in our flyers or be under any illusion that they are no longer promoting the 'deployment' of GMOs in Nigeria because we invited them to our events. We know they would not flip their script

In conclusion, let us just state that no law is cast in concrete, although even concrete cannot last for ever. No matter what the current GMO promoters say, believe or defend, the fact remains that a defective piece of legislation ultimately will be reviewed or jettisoned. The same will be the terminal point of a technology whose obsolescence is already appearing.

Re-Source Democracy Sustainability Academy and the Marking of International Women's day for Peace and Disarmament

By Joyce Ebebeinwe

The Sustainability Academy marking the International Women's day for Peace and Disarmament was held on 24th May 2017 by the Centre for Conflict and Gender Studies, University of Port Harcourt, in collaboration with Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF).

Women play critical roles in peace and conflict resolution at local, national and international levels. At the same time, women have been the unfortunate victims of crises arising from political and environmental wars. The marking of International Day was backgrounded by a review of resource conflicts that women and communities contend with. Critical attention was also paid to ways by which the concept of Re-Source Democracy could be used in conflict resolution and especially in urging elimination of the abuse of nature's gifts to humankind. The day was also used to recognise some women who have been outstanding amazons in conflict resolution.

The event had in attendance the Vice

Chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt, Deans of Faculties, researchers, staff and students of the centre, representatives from Non-governmental organizations and the Rumuekpe Women Prayer group.

According to the Director of HOMEF, "there is no peace when women are deprived of their right to own and develop lands; when the environment is polluted and livelihoods are destroyed without responsibility and when citizens do not have a say as to what extractive activities are conducted in their communities even though there is no war. Re-source democracy helps us to reconnect to nature in a way will bring about elimination of conflicts, community involvement in re-source governance and ensure a sustainable use of resources in a manner that is fully in consonance with socio-cultural, religious and ethical dictates."

Ambassador Nkoyo Toyo, a lawyer and development consultant spoke on Resource Control, Gender and Peace in the Niger Delta. She underscored the need for a new and urgent approach to resource governance in the region.



According to her, “Our ecosystems have become weak and our environment is in a near crisis state. Though there have been several reviews and reforms not much has changed. The region still lacks access to basic amenities despite her possession of enormous resources. Inequitable distribution of wealth has resulted in conflicts and growing incidences of militancy, cultism, crime, violence, hate and unhealthy rivalries.”

According to Nkoyo, “an alternative and more sustainable approach is a nature focussed approach which estimates the proper place of resource exploitation and interprets resources through the prism of communities, species and peoples living in the region who have traditionally seen themselves as supervisors of what they own. Re-source democracy is about stewardship and less about control or regulator rights.” She called for action not only against central governments but within the region, states, communities and among groups of people.

Women were encouraged to participate in decisions that determine access to and enjoyment of nature's resources as well as seeking ways to remove those obstacles erected by the politics of access and power as they are often caught in the cross fire of resource conflicts and are the major victims in impacted communities.

Another speaker at the event, Joy Akate Lale, looked at the relevance of giving equal opportunities to both the male and female children to access quality education. “Education is a critical element for freeing our society from gender blind resource management and use. Most of the development sectors are still dominated by men but resource ownership from the gender perspective advocates for a situation whereby men and women have equal access to resources, whether tangible or intangible” she stated. In his submission, peace activist, Alyn Ware stated that nuclear weapons play an important

role in conflicts around the world and because the conflicts affect both men and women it is important that women are engaged in peace and disarmament initiatives. The fabrication and use of nuclear weapons pose severe threats to humanity. Cancers, malformation in children, environmental degradation, terrorism, war and poverty are some of the risks associated with nuclear arms.

Peace Awards

To highlight the roles played by women in peace building in the Niger Delta, HOMEF singled out two women and a group of women to be honoured for their roles. Those honoured were Ambassador Nkoyo Toyo (general peace efforts), Mrs Joy Akate Lale (for girlchild education) and the Women Prayer Warrior Group (peace building in Rumuekpe community).

Women of Rumuekpe Prayer Warrior Group from Emuoha LGA in Rivers State were recognised for the roles they played in conflict resolution in their community between 2006 and 2010. Women form an integral part of the population and their input cannot be neglected in matters of resource governance, of peace and crisis management. They must continue to reject the culture of silence and confront actions that seek to delegitimise both their voice and contributions. The call for re-source democracy was seen as a vital bridge to connect the people to nature in ways that can sustain both the present and future generations.

In the midst of serious violence that wracked Rumuekpe communities, the women mobilized themselves to intervene and ensure peace returned. They held a weekly prayer meeting in the community despite threats from cultists' activities and went beyond prayers to mediating between warring groups. In November 2010, they marched half naked to the Rivers State House of Assembly and to the Government House protesting against the activities of some key personalities in the local government in fuelling the crisis in their community.



UNPACKING RE-SOURCE DEMOCRACY

Report on Sustainable Academy #09 held in University of Uyo, Awa Ibom State on the 2nd of June 2017 by Cadmus Atake

On the 2nd of June 2017 Health of Mother Earth Foundation HOMEF held the 9th session of her Sustainability Academy in collaboration with the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo (UNIUYO).

In welcoming participants to the event, the Dean of Social Sciences UNIUYO, Prof. (Rev Father) John O. Umoh, expressed the expectation that at the end of the event the output would lead to positives changes in the way we relate to natural resources for the betterment of our nation.

Nnimmo Basse while introducing the instigators for the day stated that the Unpacking of the concept of Re-Source Democracy will not end in UNIUYO but will be interrogated at other Universities in the nation.

Presentation by Prof. G.G. Darah titled Re-Source Democracy in the context of the Niger Delta Region

He began his paper presentation by stating that without the Niger Delta there would be no

Nigeria as the re-resources which Nigeria as a nation relies on today is from the Niger Delta yet the region remains the most impoverished region in the nation.

“The current situation of resource struggles in the Niger Delta region came into play during the military era which lasted in the nation for about 30 years and this lead to the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa and his colleagues in 1995, following this other resources struggle erupted which brought about the Kaiama declarations in 1998, and also the 13% percent derivation for States

Quoting Prof. Tekeno Tamuno, he said “13% derivation is equal to 80% deprivations in the Niger Delta region” adding that despite the abundance of resources in the region the people are not being given a fair share of the proceeds of the resources from their land.

He noted that Bayelsa State, one of the top oil States in the nation has 8 Local Government Areas and is highly underdeveloped while other states with no oil reserves have much higher numbers of Local Government Areas and have since abandoned her farming because of their dependency on the revenues accrue from the Niger Delta region.



Nigeria is supposed to be operating in a federalism system of government but yet we are not functioning as a federal state he said.

He warned that the South-South region cannot make progress with the 13% derivation sharing formula. He added that every re-source democracy or resource control agitations has been met with violence and massacres. According to him, re-source democracy cannot be attained without intense struggles from the people.



Prof. Darah, made references to the various massacres in the Niger Delta region such as those at Ogoni in the 1990s, the Odi massacre of 1999 during the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo, and also the Jesse fire incident of 1998 which recorded a death toll of 1,016 persons. He attributed all these incidence to struggles for the control of resources.



He advised that for Nigeria to succeed as a nation we must return to true federalism. Prof. Darah went further to suggest that there is need for the creation of more states to ensure that all regions have equal numbers of states with the states being incharge of their police systems. Following the presentation the representative of the Vice Chancellor University of Uyo Prof. Ignatius Uduak was welcomed to give his brief welcome words.

He acknowledged the organizers of the academy explaining that the theme of the Academy was a timely and important one and urged the organizers HOMEF to collaborate with the Centre for Deep Dialogue and Critical Thinking in University of Uyo as this will bring about the desired changes needed to move the nation and the region forward. He also added that the Vice Chancellor is solidly behind HOMEF and the Academy.

Prof Chris Ekong: Economic Roots of Re-Source Democracy

He began his presentation by stressing the fact that the agitation for re-source democracy is going to remain as long as extractive activities are going on in our environment. He linked Re-source democracy to climate change and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region.

Prof Ekong explained that despite the extraction of resources in the region the people are still living in abject poverty because the revenues from the resources are not being seen by the people who own the resources. He regretted that the resource owners are the ones bearing the severe impacts of the extractive industries and environmental degradation in their communities.

He went further to explain that Re-source democracy is an existing process where the people and public are given the opportunities to access information and resources.

He stated that Re-Source Democracy according to HOMEF's definition is a clarion call to protect, defend, and replenish our resources and environment for the common good. It tends to ensure that the present generation enjoys what they have without jeopardizing the interest of future generations.

Prof Ekong linked economics and environment together in this context explaining that the environment is the economy and it is everything in our environment (Resources) that makes up the economy. He sees the environment as the sum total of everything around us that makes up

the economy, including the natural resources.

He characterised economy as a game of greed and saw this as one of the reasons why Donald Trump had to walk out of the Paris agreement based on profit considerations.

A democratic system of governance is the best form of governance system that will tend to address Re-Source Democracy - a system where everyone has access to justice, control of their resources, freedom of expression and information.

Without the freedom to tell the government about their negative activities on our environment we cannot claim to be in a democratic system of government. This lack of access, according to him, is the basis of the resource struggles and conflicts as we see today in the Niger Delta region.

Prof. Ekong gave some brief experiences with the uses of Resources in Nigeria, explaining that most of our resources such as woods, wildlife, are diminishing by the day due to over exploitation and utilization by the people. These are add to environmental degradation besides those generated by oil and gas extraction and mining.

He concluded his presentations by giving some key solutions to tackling the Re-Source challenges we face in Nigeria as:

- Everyone must be encouraged to deepen democracy in Nigeria by rising against any form of government that will trample on human rights of citizens.
- Advocacies should be deepened by civil societies to bring about comprehensive and detailed guidelines on the use of our Re-sources with guidelines on implementation and enforcement.
- Advocacies must also be deepened by civil society groups to bring about press freedom, political rights, and civil liberties in order to improve the performance of its indexes in Nigeria.



Environmental education should be encouraged and incorporated into our educational curriculum from the primary level to tertiary levels as lack of appropriate knowledge might lead the populace into indulgence or aiding environmental degradation and other crimes against the environment. Following the presentation by Prof. Chris the panel of discussants went straight into analyzing the various issues addressed by the presenters.

Panel Discussion

The panelists faulted the Nigeria constitution Section 44 Subsection 3 which promulgated the 13% derivation law. They highlighted the fact that the Nigeria state is not working at present because the Federal system operated by the Nigeria State is a fraudulent one as the Federal Government takes a whopping 53% of the revenues alone without putting into consideration the States and regions where these resources and revenues are generated from. They added that it's time to discuss the basic principles of the federation or else there may not be a Nigeria tomorrow due to the booby-traps in the system.

Following the Panel discussion various comments and questions were asked by the participants.

In closing Prof. Ekpeyong, the moderator of the panel of discussants, summarized the discussions—explaining that true democracy can be attained by objective unpacking of Re-source Democracy, highlighting the fact that the deliberations and outcomes of the national conference of 2014 should be put into consideration to ensure that the conflicts in Nigeria are addressed through peaceful dialogue.

Prof. Chris Ekong rounded off the academy with a vote of thanks and closing words from the Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation, Nnimmo Bassey who briefly explained HOMEF's view of Re-Source Democracy and thanked the University of Uyo for their support and collaborations. The Academy had 257 persons in attendance which comprised of students, lecturers, non-academic staffs, civil society organisations, media and community persons.

WHAT NATURE HAS CONNECTED

The theme of this year's World Environment Day, Connecting People to Nature, could not have been more apt, considering that humankind has lost the vital connections that make us conscious of our being a part of a community of beings on Earth.

Today we want to particularly look at the disruption of that connection by the politics of infrastructure that is sometimes pursued without recourse to national or even natural laws. We see roads build without drainages and where they are constructed, they are invariably

emptied into streams and rivers without any consideration of the wellbeing of the aquatic life in them and of the people that depend on the water downstream.

I once asked the manager of a phosphate factory dumping toxic effluent into the Atlantic Ocean at Kpeme, near Lome, why such a harmful practice was permitted. The answer was that "you cannot make an omelette without breaking the egg."

If you ask why international oil companies have been routinely flaring gas in the Niger Delta over the past fifty-nine years, they claim it became "industry practice" because there was no market for the product when oil extraction commenced. Can you see how low we can sink?

One of the infrastructural projects that has astonished the world and stunned local communities is the 260 km Superhighway proposed by the Cross River State Government (CRSG) to originate from a "deep sea" port at Esighi in Cross River State and rip through the National Park and community forests to terminate at Katsina Ala in Benue State.

This Town Hall meeting will examine what has been lost due to the commencement of the execution of the project without adequate public consultations, before an approved Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and presumably before any detailed site-specific designs had been made. We will also examine what has been saved by the self-reversal of the order by which the CRSG had grabbed an amazing 10km span of land on either side of the proposed highway. That land uptake would have meant the displacement of several communities, conversion of pristine forests, decimation of wildlife and possibly the extinction of some species.

The idea of shaving pristine and protected forests for the installation of a highway of any form indicates a clear disconnection between people and Nature. The farcical community consultations so far carried out underscores the disconnection between the wielders of power and the citizens.

The struggle waged by the communities to ensure that they are duly consulted and that their free prior informed consent is obtained before any project execution is an indication that a people connected to Nature would not readily allow any force to disconnect them from Nature on which they depend for

livelihoods. This Town Hall will also seek to assure our threatened communities that we are united in the efforts to ensure that they are allowed to live in dignity, enhance their systems of knowledge and that the best interest of all beings is respected.

The forest dependent communities of Cross River State have shown exemplary commitment to protecting and managing their community forests.

In attestation of their excellent performance, the Ekuri people were conferred with the Equator Prize by the United Nations Development Programme in 2004.

Forests provide a variety of services to humans and other beings. Forests help to cool the Earth, protect our rivers, maintain soil quality, house wildlife. They provide food and medicine for humans and are home to pollinators. While the communities deserve to have good access roads, building any superhighway through the well managed forests would spell disaster of global implications.

Regrettably, Nature has become to many of us "a thing" that is to be appropriated, transformed and traded. We have gone so far from Nature that one sounds ridiculous to insist that we do not need to attach monetary values to Nature before we can protect her. This is the logic that undergirds the concept of Green Economy and promotes market environmentalism.

We have forgotten the intrinsic values of the gifts of Nature and of Nature herself. We believe that all is not lost. We can wake up from the present nightmare and dream of better ways of living, of connecting with Mother Earth.

Today, we have deliberated chosen to mark the World Environment Day by having a Forest Town Hall Meeting. We note that parts of our nation are not being denuded by processes of desertification and the forest regions are rapidly becoming Sahellian.

The transformation cannot be blamed on climate change alone, although it does play a part in the area of desertification. Our disconnection from Nature has permitted us to clear our forests, destroy complex ecosystems, food systems and our social heritage without any reflections on the consequences of our actions. The loss of our forest ecosystems translates to the loss of culture, of ways of life, of possibly irredeemable destruction of species. These losses translate to direct deprivation of livelihoods and the exacerbation of poverty in our forest dependent communities. We are pleased that the Federal Ministry of Environment has stood ready to review Environment Impact Assessment documents presented by the CRSG and that a nod would only be given when it is clear that all requirements of the law are met, including full consultation of the communities that would be impacted by the proposed project. We look forward to hearing thoughts and experiences

from development and environmental experts as well as from representatives of communities threatened by the proposed project.

I and my colleagues took part in an ecological community dialogue in Akpabuyo, one of the already impacted communities, last week. The lament of the people that still rings in my ear is this: "We were not consulted before the superhighway was routed through our communities. We just saw bulldozers mowing down our trees, crops and properties. We insist that we must be consulted and that our consent must be obtained and due compensations paid for what has been destroyed and before any further work here. Our livelihoods depend on our environment. We cannot be treated like slaves in our own land."

What was implied is that we must not be disconnected from our land, from Mother Earth. In other words, what Nature has connected, let no person or government put asunder.

**Remarks made by Nnimmo Bassey, Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), at the Forest Town Hall and World Environment Day meeting held at Apo Apartments, Abuja on June 5, 2017.*





Three New HOMEF Fellows

As is customary with HOMEF, instigators at our Sustainability Academies join the ranks of HOMEF Fellows. Fellows are key knowledge generators and practitioners. They are skilled in sharing complex ideas in a language that is accessible to all social strata. It is our hope that over the years we will build up a critical mass of citizens that speak truth to power based on knowledge, citizens that stand together in solidarity to refuse to be exploited, oppressed and deprived of their dignity. More importantly, our Fellows are helping to build up a citizenry that is ready to chart the pathways to their preferred future.

We are proud to present our Fellows:

- Alyn Ware – Peace activist and Right Livelihood Award laureate
- G. G. Darah – professor, Delta State University, Abraka
- Chris Ekpanyong – Professor, University of Uyo

UPCOMING EVENTS

1. FishNet Dialogue (Fish Not Oil) - **7 July 2017** in Port Harcourt, Nigeria
2. Sustainability Academy (Re-Source Democracy-ownership issues) – **25th September 2017** in Abuja, Nigeria.
Focus will be on pastoralism and land ownership issues. From Lake Turkana, Kenya to Lake Chad, Nigeria.
3. FishNet Dialogue (Fish Not Oil) – at Mbo , Akwa Ibom State on **11th August 2017**
Sustainability Academy (additional) on Re-Source Democracy on **29th October 2017** at Faculty of Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. Theme: Literatures, Popular Culture and Re-Source Democracy.

JOIN THE MARCH AGAINST GMOs MYTHS AND POISON!

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

- Are not safe
- Are not healthy
- Are not natural
- Destroy our biodiversity and agriculture
- Impoverish small scale farmers
- Promote land grab for large monocultures
- Are failed and risky technology

