

The Struggle For Environmental Justice In Africa



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The framework of our civilization is premised on the destruction of the planet.

The struggle for environmental justice in Africa is complex and broad. It is the continuation of the fight for the liberation of the continent and for socio-ecological transformation. It is a fact that the environment is our life: The soil, rivers, and air are not inanimate or lifeless entities. We are rooted and anchored in our environment. Our roots are sunk into our environment and that is where our nourishment comes from. We do not see the Earth and her bountiful gifts as items that must be exploited, transformed, consumed, or wasted. The understanding of the Earth as a living entity and not a dead thing warns that rapacious exploitation that disrupts her regenerative powers are acts of cruelty or ecocide.

We bear in mind that colonialism was erected on the right to subjugate, erase, or diminish the right to life and the right to the unfettered cultural expression of the colonized. In particular, the colonized were dehumanized and transformed into zombies working for the benefit of the colonial powers. Ecological pillage was permitted as long as it benefited the colonizers. This ethos has persisted and manifests in diverse forms. Grand theft by the colonial forces was seen as entrepreneurship. Genocide was overlooked as mere conquest. Slavery was seen as commerce. Extractivism was to be pursued relentlessly as any element left unexploited was considered a waste. What could be wasted with no compunction

was life. So most things had to die. The civilizers were purveyors of death. Death of individuals. Death of ecosystems.

Thus, today, people still ask: What would we do with the crude oil or fossil gas in our soil if we do not exploit them? In other words, how could we end poverty if we do not destroy our environment and grab all it could be forced to yield? We tolerate deforestation, and unregulated industrial fishing, and run a biosafety regulation system that promotes the introduction of needless genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and by doing so, endanger our biodiversity and compromise our environment and food systems.

Plunder is presented as inescapable and desired under the cloak of foreign investment. Political leaders in despoiled regions offer ease of doing business, tax holidays, sundry lax rules, and other neocolonial governance policies.

The reign of exploitation and consumption without responsibility has driven Africa and indeed the world to the brink. The current *civilization of death* seeks ready investment in destruction through warfare and extractivism rather than in building resilience and adapting to the environmental changes that result from corporate and imperial misadventures.

We are in a reign in which condescension is the hallmark of multilateralism. The collective action needed to tackle global warming has been reduced to puny “nationally determined contributions” that add up to nothing. Rather than recognizing and paying a clear climate debt, we expend energy negotiating a *loss and damage* regime to be packaged as a humanitarian gesture. Pray, who negotiates what is offered as charity?

Today, Africa is facing multiple ecological challenges. All of these have resulted from the actions of entities that have seen the continent as a sacrificial zone. While the world has come to the conclusion that there must be an urgent shift from dependence on fossil fuels, we are seeing massive investments for the extraction of petroleum resources on the continent. And we must say that this investment comes with related infrastructure for the export of these resources out of the continent in a crass colonial pattern. A mere 1 percent of the labor force in the extractive sector in Africa are Africans. A mere 5 percent of investment in the sector is in Africa. More than 85 percent of the continent’s fossil gas infrastructure is for export purposes.

The shift to renewable energy brings the same old challenges to Africa. Extraction of critical minerals for renewable energy is done without prior consultation with and consent of our people. The continent's environment is being degraded just as it has been with the extraction of oil, gas, gold, diamond, nickel, cobalt, and other solid minerals. The array of solar panels and wind turbines could well become markers of crime scenes if precautionary measures are not taken now.

Are we against renewable energy? No. They provide the best pathway toward ending the energy deficit on the continent. However, this should be pursued through discrete, autonomous, and socialized ownership schemes.

While the world knows that we must rebuild our biodiversity, what we see is the push towards more deforestation in Africa and for monoculture agriculture, all of which are against our best interest and that of the world. A sore issue, land grabbing has not disappeared with the coming innovations.

As Chinua Achebe writes in his classic 1958 book *Things Fall Apart* about Eneke the bird, "Since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching." For us, until the despoilers of our environment halt their destructive acts, we will intensify our resistance and never give in to their designs. We believe this conference will not only break the yoke of colonialism but will also puncture the hold of coloniality. Our book, [*Politics of Turbulent Waters*](#), is one of the tools toward these ends.

Every African nation should:

- Commit to issuing an annual State of Environment Report to lay out the situation of things in their territories.
- End destructive extraction no matter the appeal of capital.
- Demand climate debt for centuries of ecological exploitation and harm.
- Require remediation, restoration of all degraded territories, and pay reparations to direct victims or their heirs.
- Support and promote food sovereignty including by adopting agroecology.
- Adopt and promote African cultural tools and philosophies for the holistic tackling of ecological challenges and for the healing and well-being of our people and communities.
- Promote and provide renewable energy in a democratized manner.
- Recognize our right to water, treat it as a public good, and halt and reverse its

privatization.

- Recognize the rights of Mother Earth and codify Ecocide as a crime akin to genocide, war crimes, and other unusual crimes.
- Ensure that all Africans enjoy the right to live in a safe and satisfactory environment suitable for their progress as enshrined in the African Charter on Peoples and Human Rights.

Author Bio:

[Nnimmo Bassey](#) is the director of the ecological think tank, [Health of Mother Earth Foundation](#) (HOMEF), and a member steering committee of [Oilwatch International](#).

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