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## [Nigeria: Oil-in-soil and much more](#)

In November 2009, 117 Nigerian organisations signed on to a statement to the government with a challenging message: leave oil in the ground. They expressed they were “united in our opposition to new oil blocs and call on all progressive-minded peoples and organizations to support our call that new oil finds be left in the ground and bitumen left in the soil.”

In the last fifty years Nigeria became the largest producer of crude oil. It has based its economy on oil extraction mainly by foreign big corporations in the Niger Delta. However, the crucial question is: has the country seen any positive impacts from it?

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Environment organised in Rivers State the Second National Consultation on the Environment under the theme “Envisioning a post-Petroleum Nigeria”.

The aim of the event was to stimulate broad-based national discourse on the state of the environment. The urgency of “a wakeup call to all stakeholders in the Nigerian project, to address the devastating effects of crude oil on the economy and environment as well as the central need of planning for a post-oil economy” is quite timely in the current era of climate change.

Civil leaders, community-based organizations, civil society organizations, development experts, members of the academia, legal practitioners, the media and representatives of government agencies gathered to discuss and examine “the growing impact of fossil fuel extraction on the climate and issues around oil as a sustainable economic backbone for Nigeria”.

The conclusions agreed on the fact that the many years of oil extraction in Nigeria “have not impacted positively on the citizenry and particularly the people of the Niger Delta, whose livelihoods have been eroded because of regular pollution of farmlands and rivers.”

An appalling low life expectancy in the Niger Delta – 41 years – is the result of environmental pollution, matched with severe human rights abuse of women, children and other persons who have been made vulnerable due to resource conflicts. The event concluded that “massive land grabs promoted by agribusinesses and oil corporations erode traditional farming practices on the African continent”, thus undermining Nigerian’s Food Sovereignty.

Death, abuse, hunger: that is what you find when you follow the oil’s trail in Nigeria. And more. Corruption goes hand in hand with the oil industry’s operations leading to violent conflicts and criminality. “Nigeria’s oil industry is still rife with oil theft and inaccuracy in volumes of oil extracted and what is actually made public, and makes a nonsense of governments touted policy on transparency and accountability”, says the declaration.

The report “Building a Post Petroleum Nigeria” by ERA stresses that “Throughout 50 years of oil production, this ecologically productive region has suffered extensive habitat degradation, forest clearing, toxic discharges, dredging and filling, and significant alteration by extensive road and

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pipeline construction from the petroleum industry. Of particular concern in the Niger Delta are the frequent and extensive oil spills that have occurred. Spills are under-reported, but independent estimates are that at least 115,000 barrels (15,000 tons) of oil are spilled into the Delta each year, making the Niger Delta one of the most oil-impacted 2 ecosystems in the world.”

At the top of all of it stands global warming as a result of oil extraction. Continuing gas flaring in the Niger Delta – an illegal activity with a deadly aftermath of leukaemia, bronchitis, asthma, cancers and other diseases – demonstrates “lack of preparedness to committing to reduce the effects of climate change”, denounced the participants.

As a conclusion of the meeting, participants address the Nigerian Federal government strongly recommending that:

“\* All new oil finds must be left in the ground. The planned exploitation of bitumen should be halted as the extraction will inflict unmitigated disaster on communities and raise new levels of conflicts.

\* The Leave Oil in the Ground message should be popularized.

\* Gas flaring is a violation of the rights of Nigerians to life as is enshrined in the constitution and must end today

\* The Federal Government must take steps to ascertain and publish the volumes of oil extracted daily in the nation. As a follow up to this, it must take immediate steps to stop all forms of oil theft.

\* A need exists for mass awareness and mobilization of local communities to resist gas flaring and other unfriendly environmental practices in the Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria where resource conflicts are a growing reality.

\* The authentic Petroleum Industry Bill must address genuine concerns of the oil-bearing communities by seeking their endorsement on environmental management plans. It must also proffer sufficient penalties for infringement of the provisions.

\* Any provision in the Petroleum Industry Bill that is aimed at expropriating land and resources from the people must be abrogated.

\* Political leadership of the Niger Delta must judiciously use the resources of the region for development.

\* The amnesty programme of the Federal Government should address the real issues of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta and open channels for genuine reconciliation of all aggrieved people of the region.

\* The Nigerian state must fund qualitative education and indigenous research to address challenges of development.

\* Women and the vulnerable in the society must be protected from the fallouts of resource conflicts while identified cases of violation of their rights must be adequately redressed.

\* All stakeholders-communities, civil society groups, government agencies, the media, among others, must work collaboratively to expose unsound environmental practices and mobilize for laws that will

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reverse the trend.”

Oil has become the main source of energy of the present globalised world -at the expense of climate and human rights. It's high time for the world to look for new paths of energy, development and ways of living together. The Nigerian demand goes in that direction and we feel it should be strongly backed and replicated all over the world as a true basis for a real solution to climate change. No more tricks, no more delays, no more future cuts. Stop extracting oil or else we won't have any future.

Article based on information from: Communiqué issued at the end of the Second National Consultation on the Environment held in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 25 - 26 November 2009m, disseminated by Climate Justice Now!