
[Africa: Oilwatch network strengthened in Lagos](#)

Oil is a big problem at the global level, where its use is resulting in climate change through the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. At the same time oil is an even bigger immediate problem in the areas where it is extracted, particularly in the tropics. In these regions, oil exploration and exploitation impact heavily on local peoples, whose lives and livelihoods are destroyed through deforestation, forest degradation and coastal ecosystem destruction, all accompanied by widespread human rights violations and impoverishment.

Within that scenario, a very important meeting was held from 1-3 March in Lagos, Nigeria, convened by Oilwatch–Africa: the “Conference on Oil, Resource Conflicts and Livelihoods in Africa”. The meeting was attended by representatives of NGOs, academia, media and legislators from Cameroon, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Sudan, as well as from Latin America, North America and Europe. The WRM was present at the conference.

Asume Osuoka, coordinator of Oilwatch-Africa, opened the meeting expressing the symbolic importance of holding the conference in Nigeria, because Nigeria, more than any other country, presents the best example of the paradox of oil and gas. “While transnational companies go away with mega profits and the national government gets huge revenues from the sale of crude oil to the world markets”, he said, “the people of Nigeria are among the poorest in the world. Power generation and supply is woeful, as most Nigerians don't have access to electricity. Social infrastructures are fast collapsing even as the government makes over \$20billion annually from the sale of oil. The lack of accountability and transparency in the management of oil and the distortions of the more productive sectors of the economy have led to mass impoverishment and frustration among the population.”

In words of Nnimmo Bassey, chair of Oilwatch-Africa and executive director of the Nigerian NGO Environmental Rights Action (ERA), “the announcement of oil discovery in any territory is comparable to the declaration of war against the territory.” He added that “oil destroys the environment, contaminates water and air and it also contaminates the social structure, destroys forests, destroys life and livelihoods and holds nothing sacred.”

The Lagos conference participants shared their experiences in the different countries represented at the meeting, all of them adding to the broad picture painted above. They also shared their willingness to resist against oil expansion, creating alliances within and outside the continent.

Participants also identified the additional problem resulting from the growing militarization of the Gulf of Guinea by the United States and some European countries –particularly France- “fuelled by their desire to control African oil and gas resources, including their plans to establish military bases in Sao Tome and other African countries”, adding that “the expanded military cooperation with pseudo democratic regimes in Africa constitutes a grave and worrying threat and indeed a declaration of war on the region.”

To address the above, the conference called “on civil society groups on the continent and like

minded groups abroad to strongly condemn this latent American and European aggression in Africa and use all means necessary to assure their complete withdrawal from the region.”

Additionally, participants demanded “a moratorium on exploration and development of new oil and gas fields on the continent as a short term measure, and that efforts should be made to develop alternative energy sources and the long term ban on fossil fuel exploitation.”

Most importantly, the meeting resulted in a strengthened Oilwatch-Africa, which will now have an even stronger voice against the reckless activities of transnational oil and gas companies. As Esperanza Martinez from the Oilwatch International Secretariat said: “Resisting, organizing and struggling is the only way for people and humanity to survive. Sharing experiences and coordinating actions is the best way for achieving that goal. This is what this meeting was about and the active participation of all have made this conference a big success.”

The final declaration of the conference is available at:
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/deforestation/oil/OilwatchAfrica.html>