



NDAC

NIGER DELTA ALTERNATIVES CONVERGENCE

NIGER DELTA MANIFESTO FOR ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE YOUTH EDITION

(ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL COPY OF THE NIGER
DELTA MANIFESTO FOR SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE
BY HEALTH OF MOTHER EARTH FOUNDATION – HOMEF)



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Disclaimer:

This manifesto is an adaptation for learning, advocacy, and mobilization purposes.

The original publication by Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) remains valid and authoritative.
(Find the link to the original copy below)

<https://homef.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ndac-Manifesto-for-website.pdf>

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INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta Alternatives Convergence (NDAC) is a people's platform driven by communities, activists, civil society organizations, and movements working for justice, equity, and ecological survival in the Niger Delta.

For over 60 years, oil extraction has brought destruction, poverty, and insecurity to our region while enriching corporations and elites.

Our forests, rivers, and farmlands have been destroyed; our people displaced and silenced.

The Niger Delta Manifesto for Socio-Ecological Justice, developed by NDAC and first published by the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), is a powerful statement of the struggles and demands of our people.

This Youth Edition was created to make the manifesto accessible to young people, grassroots defenders, and community activists.

It breaks down complex issues into clear language, while keeping the heart of the message intact:

justice, accountability, restoration, and ecological survival.

We dedicate this manifesto to the resilient people of the Niger Delta who continue to defend their land, waters, and future.

WHY THIS MANIFESTO MATTERS

- Because our land and water are our life
- Because our future depends on justice today
- Because our voices must be heard
- Because this is not charity, this is justice

BACKGROUND

We are over 40 million people living in more than 16,000 square kilometres of land, with 321 km of shoreline along the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean.

Our Niger Delta is one of the world's most fragile ecosystems, where damage in one place quickly affects the entire region.

It contains five ecological zones including coastal islands, mangrove swamps, freshwater swamps, lowland rainforests, and high-altitude forests in Obudu, Cross River State.

We have Africa's largest mangrove forest and the world's fourth largest, plus rich biodiversity.

Cross River State also holds the largest remaining rainforest in Nigeria, covering nearly 8,000 km² vital for plants, animals, and our own survival.

Our region is home to over 40 ethnic groups with hundreds of languages, united by centuries of shared trade, culture, and kinship.

We once lived in harmony with nature, farming, fishing, crafting, and trading. Our societies were organized, self-sufficient, and wealthy before European colonization.

In the 15th century, Europeans met thriving kingdoms like those of King Nana of Itsekiri, King Eyo of Old Calabar, and King Jaja of Opobo.

These leaders traded internationally, creating prosperity for our people. But when they tried to trade directly with Europe, the British used military force to stop them, protecting European middlemen and profits.

Kings were arrested, exiled, and their kingdoms destroyed. By the late 1800s, Britain had established the Royal Niger Company to control all trade, taxes, and resources in our region.

They lowered prices for African goods, raised the cost of British imports, banned local manufacturing, and imposed heavy taxes.

This destroyed our thriving agricultural economy, forcing many into low-paid jobs that supported colonial rule. Colonial conquest stripped us of our sovereignty, resources, and dignity.

The British forced our diverse peoples into one Nigerian state for their own benefit, using imported political systems to maintain control. This state became a tool for our exploitation and oppression.

THE AGE OF CRUDE

By the early 1900s, colonial powers shifted their attention to crude oil in the Niger Delta. Companies like Nigeria Bitumen Company (German) and British Colonial Petroleum started exploring in what is now Ondo State and other areas. In 1938, without asking our people or considering the environment, Shell D'Arcy was given oil rights to all of Nigeria.

They entered our farmlands, rivers, and creeks to search for oil. In 1956, Shell drilled Nigeria's first oil well in Oloibiri. By 1958, Nigeria became an oil-exporting country.

Soon, other oil companies rushed in, armed with permits from the government but without the consent of our communities.

Today, the Niger Delta is one huge oil field with over 1,481 oil wells, 275 flow stations, more than 7,000 km of pipelines, over 120 gas flaring sites

Our homeland is now one of the most polluted regions in the world; an environmental time bomb.

STATE REPRESSION AND INSECURITY

Oil from the Niger Delta brings in most of Nigeria's revenue, but it has made the government and oil companies richer while making our people poorer.

To protect oil profits, the government passed laws that:
Took away indigenous land ownership rights.

Allowed the state to give our lands and waters to oil companies without our consent. Oil companies, backed by the government, have destroyed our environment and livelihoods: Forests and farms are cleared.

Creeks and fishing ponds are polluted by oil spills. Air and rainwater are poisoned by gas flaring.

Old and poorly maintained pipelines cause spills and explosions.

For decades, our people have faced ecological and economic warfare, and any attempt to demand justice has been met with violence.

In 1990, when the people of Umuechem, a community where they extracted oil from, peacefully demanded fair treatment but Shell, the government and armed police destroyed the community and killed over 100 people. Nobody was punished.

In Ogoni, peaceful demands for justice led to a military crackdown: thousands were killed, raped, or driven into exile.

POLLUTION AND LIVELIHOOD LOSSES

The major environmental and economic problems in the Niger Delta come from crude oil and gas extraction. One of the deadliest activities is gas flaring.

This continues not because there are no solutions, but because the government and oil companies choose not to stop it.

Oil companies prefer to flare gas because it's cheaper than building proper facilities to manage it. The government has shifted the deadline to end gas flaring at least eight times from 1984 to the latest, 2030.

Even after a 2005 High Court ruling in favour of the people of Iwerekán, declaring gas flaring illegal, the government still allows it, collecting small fines as a “licence to pollute.” Gas flaring causes heart disease, cancer, birth defects, skin damage, lung and breathing problems.

To move oil and gas, thousands of kilometres of old, rusty pipelines run across our lands, swamps, rivers, and even backyards. These pipes often burst, spilling crude oil into our farms and waters, destroying our farmlands, our fishing grounds, our wildlife and ecosystem.

Over the decades, about 13 million barrels of oil have been spilled in the Niger Delta. In 2020 alone, the government's own agency (NOSDRA) recorded at least 370 oil spills and many more go unreported, especially offshore.

A single oil spill can wipe out thousands of fish, leaving entire fishing communities hungry overnight. Mangroves breeding grounds for fish and other life suffocate and die. Our rivers are no longer able to sustain us

If there was ever any doubt about the devastation which oil extraction has done to our people, it was put to rest in 2011 when the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP concluded an assessment of some oil impacted areas in Ogoniland.

The UNEP report detailed irrefutable evidence of the devastating impact oil pollution has had on the lives, livelihood, health and ecosystem of the Niger Delta people. In particular, the assessment report showed:

- Drinking water contaminated with dangerous chemicals
- Communities at serious health risk
- Oil companies failing to clean spills for decades
- “Cleaned” sites still heavily polluted years later
- Life in the Niger Delta now means double suffering:
- Poor health from pollution
- Loss of traditional livelihoods like farming and fishing

Even though Nigeria’s development indicators are already low, the Niger Delta’s are worse, with higher unemployment, deeper poverty, and persistent underdevelopment.

OIL THEFT AND ARTISANAL REFINING

In recent years, Niger Delta communities have faced new threats mainly oil theft and artisanal refining run by armed cartels.

These activities have destroyed remaining farmlands and water bodies, give the government an excuse to criminalize communities, lead to frequent military attacks under the claim of “protecting oil facilities”

In reality, security forces often work in close collaboration with oil thieves.

How It Started

Some people in our communities have been involved in artisanal refining, so they share some blame for environmental damage. But it's important to remember why it began:

- Energy Poverty – In remote riverine areas, fuel costs up to three times more than in other parts of Nigeria.
- Oil Spill Response – When spills occur and companies refuse to clean up, communities have sometimes tried to salvage spilled crude oil and refine it locally.

This local refining started as a survival strategy both to clean the environment and to provide affordable fuel.

How It Changed

What began as small-scale survival tactics has now grown into large-scale operations involving, public officials, security officers, people from other parts of Nigeria setting up illegal refineries in Niger Delta communities.

The Nigerian government and oil companies now use the issue of artisanal refining to blame communities for environmental destruction, while ignoring their own 64-year record of pollution.

The Truth

Oil theft may be as old as the oil industry itself, partly because there's no transparency about how much oil is actually extracted each day.

The problem became worse when it grew to industrial scale, combined with ageing oil facilities that leak and rupture frequently.

Oil companies now use artisanal refining as a public relations cover, falsely blaming it for all Niger Delta pollution while ignoring the real causes, equipment failure and negligence.

DIVESTMENT OR CRIMINAL FLIGHT?

After 64 years of oil extraction that has destroyed our environment, livelihoods, and human rights, the three biggest oil companies in the Niger Delta Shell, ExxonMobil, and Total are now selling their assets and moving into deeper offshore waters, away from communities.

For our host communities, this raises serious fears: after all the damage we have suffered, will we ever get ecological justice?

What's Happening

Oil companies are abandoning onshore oil fields and selling them to national or local companies.

There are no clear rules about who is responsible for cleaning up decades of pollution.

Shell says it wants a “clean break” from Niger Delta assets but that “clean break” is really an escape from accountability for millions of barrels of oil spilled into our swamps, rivers, and farmlands, New owners often deny responsibility for historical damage.

For our communities, divestment means it could become almost impossible to hold companies accountable for past pollution.

The Government's Role

Nigeria has no strong framework to manage oil company divestment.

In 2021, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) promised to create a Comprehensive Divestment Policy to protect the country's strategic interests, but as companies rush to sell and leave, no such policy has been put in place.

Even if one is created, it may ignore key issues like ecological restoration, environmental justice, the rights and concerns of oil-producing communities.

The NNPC has already said its focus will be on abandonment and handover costs, staff severance, contract liabilities, and the competence and finances of the buyer.

Missing completely from their priority list are the decades of environmental devastation suffered by our people.

THE IMPENDING END OF OIL

The world is moving away from fossil fuels. In 2021, the European Union announced big changes including stopping the sale of new petrol and diesel cars within 14 years and making fossil fuels more expensive.

Around the same time, G7 leaders also agreed to push for mostly electric or cleaner vehicles by 2030.

This means Nigeria's oil will face less demand. One thing is certain: there will never be another 60 years of oil drilling in the Niger Delta.

But the danger is not just for oil companies losing profits our communities may become “stranded communities” after the oil era.

We will be left with damaged lands, polluted water, and lost livelihoods, while those responsible walk away.

Sadly, the Nigerian government has done little to prepare for this reality.

THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ACT (PIA) AND COMMUNITIES

After years of debate, Nigeria passed the Petroleum Industry Act in 2021, combining all oil and gas laws into one framework.

Many hoped it would bring justice to oil-producing communities. Unfortunately, it did the opposite instead of protecting communities, the PIA:

Gives oil companies more power over communities, forces communities to protect oil installations or risk being punished and losing benefits, continues gas flaring (burning of gas during oil production) with government approval, allows oil companies to decide which communities count as “host” communities and control how development funds are used.

The Host Communities Fund (3% of oil companies’ operational costs) is controlled by oil companies, not the communities. Communities have little to no say in how the money is used.

Worse, if there’s any oil facility damage, protest, or unrest in a community, the PIA allows the company to deduct repair costs from the community’s funds even though most oil spills are caused by equipment failure, not sabotage by locals (as confirmed by NNPC and the UN).

This unfairly criminalizes communities and hides oil companies' negligence.

In an outrageous demonstration of the criminalization of our communities, the PIA says;

- *“Where in any year, an act of vandalism, sabotage or other civil unrest occurs that causes damage to petroleum and designated facilities or disrupts production activities within the host community, the community shall forfeit its entitlement to the extent of the cost of repairs of the damage that resulted from the activity with respect to the provisions of this Act within that financial year”*

This provision stems directly from the erroneous view which has been peddled by oil companies that communities are responsible for sabotage on pipelines and oil theft.

However, this view has been debunked by the NNPC and even the United Nations Environment Programmer. Both blame equipment failure for majority of spills.

Criminalizing our communities in this regard is unfortunate and a smokescreen to shield oil companies from responsibility for the ongoing ecocide in the region. This provision will most likely result in consistent denial of benefits which would in turn engender regular conflicts.

This law continues colonial-style exploitation, keeping oil companies as rulers and gatekeepers in our own land.

KEY LESSONS FOR YOUTH COMMUNITY RIGHTS DEFENDERS (NEW INPUT)

1. Prepare for a post-oil future. Communities must plan alternative livelihoods now.
2. Know your rights under the PIA and where it fails to protect communities.
3. Challenge criminalization advocate against blaming communities for oil spills.
4. Demand an end to gas flaring. Push for strict deadlines and community compensation.
5. Organize for stronger laws. Only united community action can force real change.

DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN THE NIGER DELTA

Since the late 1950s, the Niger Delta has been labeled a region that needs “special” development attention.

In 1957, the colonial government set up the Henry Willinks Commission to investigate minority concerns in Nigeria.

The Commission found that the Niger Delta was poor, neglected, and faced unique challenges because people lived in difficult swamp and creek environments. It recommended that the Niger Delta be declared a “special area for development.”

From the 1960s till now, many efforts have been made to bring development, often to calm the anger caused by oil exploitation.

These efforts came through oil company agreements with communities and government agencies such as:

- Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) – 1961
- Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority (NDBRDA) – 1976
- Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) – 1992
- Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) – 1995
- Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) – 2000
- Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs – 2009.

However, these interventions were often just temporary bandages over deep wounds.

They did not solve the root problems caused by over 60 years of destructive oil exploitation, and most have failed.

13% DERIVATION AND LOST OPPORTUNITIES

The 13% derivation formula was first proposed in 1995 during a constitutional conference. It was a response to growing poverty, environmental damage, and feelings of injustice in the Niger Delta.

The idea was to give oil-producing states more money to fix the neglect and damage, since federal spending was ineffective.

In Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, it became law: States like Akwa Ibom, Abia, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers now receive 13% of all oil revenue from crude oil extracted in their areas.

Some states created special commissions to manage this money for oil-producing communities.

However, corruption and mismanagement have prevented these funds from making real change. Between 2009 and 2019, eight Niger Delta states received ₦6.6 trillion from derivation alone with very little to show for it

YOUTH ACTION NOTES

- Understand the history: Development promises are not new and many have failed because they avoided the root causes.
- Demand transparency: The 13% derivation is meant for community benefit; push for public accounting of how it's spent.
- Watch for token projects: Many “special” interventions were short-term and did not address real needs.
- Keep asking: “Where is the money?” and “How is it helping the people who suffer the most?”

THE WEAKNESSES OF THE NIGER DELTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was set up in 2000 to respond to the cries of our people for fair benefits from our resources and to fix environmental damage.

Its mission was clear: to make the Niger Delta economically strong, socially stable, environmentally healthy, and politically peaceful. But over 20 years later, the NDDC has fallen far short of this goal.

By 2021, it had about 13,000 abandoned projects and owed contractors over N1 trillion. Many contractors simply left their work unfinished after being paid to start. Year after year, huge sums are allocated to NDDC, yet corruption and poor management have left little positive impact.

A National Assembly investigation found massive corruption, leading to a forensic audit whose findings are still hidden from the public. Funding problems make things worse. Oil companies are meant to contribute 3% of their annual budget to NDDC, but by 2021 they owed the agency \$4 billion.

The Federal Government also fails to send the full 15% share of allocations by 2018, it already owed NDDC N1.317 trillion. In short, the NDDC was meant to heal the Niger Delta, but it has been weakened by corruption, mismanagement, and underfunding.

MASSIVE DEFORESTATION AND THREATS TO INDIGENOUS LAND AND LIVELIHOOD RIGHTS

In Cross River State home to Nigeria's largest remaining pristine forests indigenous communities have protected these lands for generations. But in 2008, the state government banned all forest activities under the UN-backed REDD+ program.

This ban took away community land rights, criminalized traditional livelihoods like hunting and gathering, and left many once-thriving communities in poverty. With locals sidelined, illegal logging by foreign smugglers and local profiteers surged.

Between 2007 and 2014, Cross River lost about 107,000 hectares of forest. The pace picked up between 2014 and 2017, deepening poverty and questioning the fairness of current forest management strategies. Whether it's oil or timber, the pattern is the same resources are exploited, communities get little benefit, and inequality grows.

CLIMATE IMPACTS

Niger Delta communities, many of them coastal, face yearly floods that began in 2012. The floods submerge villages, destroy farms, wipe out harvests, and leave fishing and farming families without income for months.

Food insecurity rises, poverty deepens, and migration increases.

The bitter irony is that these are the same communities where fossil fuels are extracted the very fuels driving climate change. Yet government action to protect or support them remains weak and unsustainable.

OUR RESOLUTION

For 64 years, oil has been taken from our lands and rivers yet our people are poorer, less developed, and more insecure than ever. The future looks even more challenging, with:

Increasing pollution of our land and water, a new wave of oil colonialism under the PIA, intensifying climate change impacts, loss of indigenous forests and land rights, failed development programs, criminalization of oil-producing communities, declining global demand for fossil fuels, and oil companies abandoning the region under “divestment” Our communities urgently need action.

The response must be rooted in resource justice and ecological justice holding polluters accountable, restoring what’s been destroyed, and providing reparations for decades of harm. Those who have carried the burden of Nigeria’s oil economy for over six decades do not need charity, They deserve justice.

OUR DEMANDS

As people of the Niger Delta, we stand together to demand the following:

1. Full Environmental Audit and Clean-Up

The 2011 UNEP report on Ogoniland proved massive oil-related pollution and we know this destruction exists across the entire Niger Delta.

We demand:

- An immediate region-wide audit covering environmental, livelihood, health, social, and economic impacts of oil and gas extraction.
- Immediate clean-up, restoration of damaged ecosystems, and reparations for 64 years of harms

2. Accountability Before Oil Companies Leave

Oil companies are selling their assets and leaving without fixing decades of damage.

We demand:

- a. A national divestment framework that requires:
 - A post-extraction impact report on ecology and livelihoods.
 - A health audit of affected communities.
 - A full remediation plan and budget for environmental and health restoration.

3. Address the Root Causes of Artisanal Refining

Illegal refining is a survival strategy caused by poverty, joblessness, and government failure to provide fuel locally.

We demand:

- Immediate action to tackle unemployment and poverty.
- Better pipeline protection strategies.
- Accountability for security forces involved in oil theft and pollution from destroying seized fuel.

4. Fix the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA)

The PIA fails our region, permits gas flaring, and unfairly blames communities for pipeline protection.

We demand:

a. A National Assembly review to:

- Set a firm gas flaring deadline.
- Limit flaring to rare, defined emergencies.
- Remove the Commission's power to permit flaring, give it to the National Assembly.
- Make gas flare fines equal to gas's market value and direct them to host community funds.
- Remove community responsibility for protecting oil installations.
- Remove laws criminalizing community protests.
- Let host communities, not oil companies, control development funds.

b. Guarantee that existing agreements between communities and oil companies stay in place.

5. Reform the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)

Decades of corruption have wasted our resources.

We demand:

- a. Public release of the NDDC forensic audit and prosecution of offenders.
- b. Review the NDDC Act to:
 - Base all projects on community-approved needs assessments.
 - Follow fair and transparent public procurement processes.
 - Prioritize completing abandoned projects over starting new ones.
 - Enforce timely payments by government and oil companies, with penalties for late remittance.
- c. States must create transparent agencies for managing the 13% derivation fund, with full community participation.

6. Stop Deforestation and Protect Land Rights

Forest destruction is wiping out ecosystems and livelihoods.

We demand:

- Restore and protect community land and forest rights, especially in Cross River State.
- Enforce anti-deforestation measures developed with indigenous communities.
- Seek free, prior, and informed community consent before any project that threatens livelihoods or wildlife.

7. Act on Climate Change Threats

Rising seas, erosion, and climate shifts are destroying communities.

We demand:

a. State and federal governments must create climate adaptation plans with community input, including. Flood control and shoreline protection.

- Relocation support where needed.
- Mangrove restoration and control of invasive species like nipa palm.
- Health, social, and economic safety nets for affected people.

8. Secure Our Waters and Fisheries

Piracy, illegal fishing (including by foreign fleets), and poor protection threaten our coastal communities.

We demand:

Stronger security for our waterways, fishing grounds, and maritime transport routes.

NOTE

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