AFRICA 02.08.2018 | Nnimmo Bassey

Vulnerable poor communities are the real climate leaders

Alternative Nobel Prize laureate Nnimmo Bassey on global warming, false techno-optimism and the Global South

Read this interview in German.

Later this year, political leaders from all over the world will meet in Poland for COP24, the global UN climate change conference. Around two years after the Paris Agreement, and one year after Trump's withdrawal, the spotlight is on Europe's ability to lead the fight against global warming and set ambitious emission reduction targets.

At the moment, no single European country is on track to reduce carbon emissions to the extent set out by the Paris Agreement. Failure to take more ambitious action could discourage other countries to tackle climate change more seriously and eventually create catastrophic temperature increases, particularly in the so-called Global South.

In this context, Daniel Kopp spoke to Nigerian climate activist and Alternative Nobel Prize laureate Nnimmo Bassey on Europe's role in tackling climate change, the needs of developing nations and the danger of false techno-optimism.

Thinking about COP24 in Poland later this year, do you think that Europe can be a climate leader globally?

> The answer would be yes, if Europe decides to be a climate leader. Right now, climate leaders are the vulnerable poor communities and countries who are doing all they can to withstand the impacts of global warming. But there's room for Europe, for historical reasons and for current realities, to actually raise the ambition to cut emissions at source and stop offsetting pollution by utilising the false mechanisms that are being set up.

What could be done to support those vulnerable communities you are talking about, especially in the so-called Global South?

First of all, stop emissions at home. It's very important because that itself impacts the global climate severely. Then there'll be less challenges for the vulnerable nations and territories.

Secondly, Europe should make climate finance available. The finance is there. It just needs a political decision to make it available for the purpose of increasing the resilience of those territories. The more resilient the communities or the nations are, the better the economy and political conditions will be.

Now, the more we have peace in the world, and a solidarity economy in the world, the more the challenges that certain nations are facing, including some in Europe, would be reduced.

In a 2016 article for IPS, you argued that Africa is stuck in a sort of treadmill called climate conferences which are mostly driven by the petro-military complex. With regards to the upcoming global climate conference COP24 – do you think your assessment still holds true in 2018?

I think the traditions of the COPs have not changed, so Africa is still on that treadmill. But it doesn't have to be that way. The Paris Agreement gave some impetus for nations to take action, but it did not compel anyone to take action. And so, because of that, everyone is avoiding commensurate action. People are making pledges that even if they are accomplished, would not change anything positively.

Looking at an average global temperature increase of two degrees means, on the average, about roughly three degrees for Africa. So, when we talk about two degrees as though it's something that is manageable, we are actually talking about a catastrophic temperature increase for some regions in the world. And so, the COP is still asleep to the realities.

What role do you think that the African group could play at COP24? Do you think they can exert real pressure for binding commitments?

We lost it when the voluntary emission system was introduced at COP15 in 2009. We need to go back to the binding system where emission quotas are located according to the requirements of science. African countries stand on very solid ground to demand this because they can't on their own accomplish needed emissions cuts and because their contribution to global emissions is negligible.

The big polluters have the capacity to meet emission reduction that's required by science. But the rich countries are rather superstitious

because they believe that they can get away with anything. It's not based on any kind of logic because no nation is really ready or capable of withstanding catastrophic global warming.

So far, you've framed the issue of global warming in terms of the North–South divide. But isn't there also something to say for the inequality within countries that hinders progress?

Absolutely! I think right now we have great solidarity between citizens of nations across the world, North or South, East or West.

The lack of passion we're seeing in tackling global warming is caused by invested interest where politicians are the shoe shine boys of industry. Industry politicians are keeping the emissions, they're pursuing profit, they're not seeing the people and don't care what the people are suffering. They have short-term ambitions, four-year or five-year election cycles, and the industry is concerned with what they tell their shareholders.

But citizens, citizens really want climate action. Citizen groups across the world are taking action, they try as much as possible to live within their means, but the system is subverting all these efforts. It comes to a situation where citizens have to examine the oppressive political systems in various countries. They have to bring the linkages needed to overthrow that system and then bring about real passion that would eventually be in the best interest of the planet and the people.

In the context of a lack of political determination, you also often criticise so-called techno-optimism. What do you mean by that?

That's the false logic of COP, because they keep saying that technology is the way to solve this problem. Technology is the cause of the problem and technology is only affording a few people, the 1 per cent, control over the rest of the people in the world. Now they're also trying to control the planet itself with experiments like geo-engineering, gene editing and carbon capture, which engenders experimentation without control. The majority of these technologies are not regulated. Industry and politicians appear not to care about the consequences that may be irreversible in the long run, and are trying to push the false solutions as fast as they can before anyone comes up with how to regulate them.

So, technofixes and looking at technologies related to solve global warming is one big issue because it's a big stumbling block in the mindset of the negotiators and the politicians – to the benefit of speculators and industry.

And the narrative that entrenches this mindset actually needs to be

exposed and confronted because, instead of no action at all, these so-called solutions will raise further problems.



Nnimmo Bassey
Benin City

Nnimmo Bassey is a Nigerian environmental activist and poet.He leads the ecological think-tank *Health of the Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)* and the environmental network *Oil Watch International*.Prior to that, he founded the NGO *Environmental Rights Action* and served as chairman of the environmental organisation *Friends of the Earth* from 2008-2012.For his commitment, he was awarded the Alternative Nobel Prize.

-