

## Geoist Ecovillage Planned in Nigeria

**G**ordon Abiama of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, recently took a few moments out of his busy schedule to acquaint GJ readers with plans for Odi Ecovillage, an exciting project that has grown out of his work in Georgist education, sustainable development, and the Niger Delta Fund Initiative.

**GJ:** Clearly you intend the Odi Ecovillage to serve as an educational resource for Nigeria and beyond. What are the important lessons and services that you envision it providing?

**Gordon Abiama:** The Living and Learning Centre is the beginning phase of the Odi ecovillage project. Planned as an educational resource for Nigeria and beyond, its aim will be to promote and assist holistic sustainable development programs while serving as a point of attraction for the wider society. We envision a two-way learning system where the locals can learn about appropriate technology like renewable energy, information technology (computer repairs/servicing, internet usage) appropriate building materials application, new aquaculture techniques, environmental restoration and conservation, permaculture, ecotourism development and micro-enterprise and employment from experts both local and abroad.

There is much those from developed countries can learn from our traditional wisdom. Our rich culture, art and health practices, to name a few, are centuries old.

The Centre will offer classes on Geoclassical Economics in collaboration with the Henry George Institute. Courses will include Fundamental Economics, Land Value Recapture and use of GIS (Geographic Indicator Systems) technology. The Centre will also provide numerous opportunities for skill development, adult and girl child literacy and education.

As the Centre develops ecobuildings, permaculture design and human ecology, Ecovillage Training program will come into focus. In partnership with colleges and universities, the ETP will help students and their sponsoring institutions develop societal models that help restore healthy relationships to our earth and to each other. The program will be augmented



*Gordon (standing) addresses the Ecovillage team*

with distance learning courses and internet linkages among students and ecovillages around the world. Already, a local university, the Niger Delta University is waiting in the wings to be part of this dynamic project.

*GJ: How many people are involved in the project so far, and what is its state of development?*

**Gordon Abiama:** Right now, the Odi Ecovillage team is composed of thirteen local environmentalists supported by a core group of project consultants which form an International Advisory Council. The King of Odi Town and his Council have thrown their weight behind the project. We also have the support of the Odi Local Government Council as well as a host of local NGOs.

We have been able to secure a land space of about one hectare with a fish pond measuring approximately 100 x 80 meters. The group is currently engaged in site clearing (by hand) as well as observing the site's soil composition, hydrology and wild life. We have just entered the rainy season,



which gives us an opportunity to study the flood channels. Also we are embarking upon fencing the site round with bamboos against possible encroachment by other developers in the site area.

*GJ: What improvements have been made to the site, and what resources are needed, in order to begin operations?*

**Gordon Abiama:** Work on the site now is a gradual bush clearing by hand, sacrificing our work hours to get it done. Of course using heavy duty earth-moving equipment would be much faster and easier, but we are concerned about the possibility of rooting up important trees and other vegetation. Part of the plan is to establish a forest glade in addition to other features.

Before operations will begin, we must erect a number of structures. The first will house the main office, internet centre, lecture rooms, library, and quiet or meditation rooms. The second structure will house up to ten private living units. The third will be the kitchen, restaurant or dining room, the pantry and the work centre for such activities as carpentry, engineering and others. All these structures will use local materials, like earth bricks for walls and coconut fibers mixed with cement for roofing.

In addition to the fish pond, we intend to operate *(continued on page 46)*

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an open air cafe under trees, demonstration permaculture garden, animal field (chickens, goats and ducks), walkways, park benches and woodland glade. These will allow visitors to enjoy the ecovillage ambiance. All these remain to be funded — and we are hoping to raise funds both locally and from international organizations that will identify with our ideals as well as be sympathetic to a historical community that is trying to recover from the devastation of war, ecological catastrophe and economic collapse.

*GJ: What have been your influences and inspirations in designing this project?*

**Gordon Abiama:** Alanna Hartzok, Annie Goeke, Heather Remoff, and Henry George have been of great influence to me in designing this project. I have watched with awe the alarming gradual disintegration of our supportive socio-cultural structures and the upsurge of our destructive environmental practices that threaten to drown us. And then when I see what others in different parts of the world like in Findhorn, Scotland, Centre for Alternative Technology, Wales, and in Senegal are doing to salvage their society from imminent collapse, I am moved to do the same for my community as well.

*GJ: What activities will be going on in the first stage of a successful establishment of the Ecovillage?*

**Gordon Abiama:** Our work plan is in three stages. The first year is for site preparation for permaculture landscape and design and the construction of the buildings for the Living and Learning Centre. The second year work plan will focus on training, capacity building and fully developing the various commissions. There are ten commissions for the Centre and they are: Renewable Energy, Permaculture, Water Management, Micro-Enterprise, Aquaculture, Ecotourism, Information Technology, Educational Dimensions, Holistic Health and Environmental Restoration and Conservation. The third year work plan will be fine-tuning our model ecovillage, total project evaluation, and strategy and planning for next phase of Odi Green City project and for possible replication in other communities around the state and the country.

The Odi Ecovillage and Green City Project is affiliated with the Niger Delta Fund Initiative, an NGO partnership registered with the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. NDFI is working to establish institutions which will capture resource rent of oil and other natural resources for building environmentally sustainable communities in the Niger Delta region. And I wish to use this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to all Georgists who have contributed financially to this NDFI project! **GJ**