

fresh thinking

Niger Delta Fund Endorsement

Nigeria's oil business is in the news again. Discontent among local workers and their neighbours is causing major difficulties for oil companies and their international workforces. Striking workers have siezed four oil rigs, taken Western staff hostage, and even threatened to blow up the rigs.

The main issue of complaint is local peoples' share in the value of the oil under their land - presently being extracted and exported by Western corporations. People in the delta claim they have suffered "environmental degradation of their land, the displacement of their communities, and received no benefit from the trade."

A local initiative aims to put matters right. As previously reported in L&L (see Autumn 2002, p5), the Niger Delta Fund aims to capture resource rentals from oil and distribute them among local people. The initiative is being led by a wide group of partners, including the Nigerian-based Africa Center for Geoclassical Economics and the US-based EarthRights Institute. Partners claim the initiative "would be a model for similar institutions needed in many other regions of the globe."

"Should HGF endorse the Niger Delta Fund?"

A spokesperson for the Initiative said that it was "because oil royalties have not been distributed to the people" that there was "so much restiveness and bloodshed, as well as frequent disruption of drilling activities by vandalizing and oil staff hostage-taking by aggrieved youths of the region."

The spokesperson went on to say that the Fund would "would give greater security for oil production and stimulate the growth of community based economics."

The Initiative is now seeking the endorsement and support of organizations worldwide. Find out more at www.earthrights.net/nigeria

The Land&Liberty Mission Statement

In these times of changing circumstance and new opportunity we need a firm foundation on which to build the ideas of the future. A new Land&Liberty Mission Statement has been drafted by the publishers. The Statement will be the basis of what Land&Liberty does next. Readers' responses would be welcome.

The surrounding community, of people, their activities and infrastructure, is each individual's greatest resource. Land and other commons, such as the radio spectrum are our means of access to it and to essential natural resources that we need to create wealth for ourselves and our communities. This access we hold by right in common with all others and prior to any human permission. It is both the precondition and expression of life and nature.

In an interconnected world all places are community to one another. The market rent of land gives a price to the value of community at any one place and time. Land&Liberty seeks to demonstrate this, and to show how the enhancement of community and its assets ensures the means of survival, gives the greatest freedom and range of choice for individuals, and makes our largest opportunity for the creative satisfaction of human need, as each perceives it.

Land&Liberty urges that community resources and provision should be funded from the land value that community creates, and that allowing - as we currently do on a massive scale - the private unearned appropriation of communally created wealth makes the many dependent on the few and dispossesses them of the earth which sustains them.

It creates a high tax, high debt, poor provision economy and diminishes the rewards of labour, the opportunities of capital and the creativity of communities and individuals. It is an international practice with a long history. It is the worst practice for mutual benefit and democracy and through forced need and unjustifiable greed damages the environment on which we depend. It creates wild fluctuations for work and business in the primary and universal economic factor, land, and provides the spoils for international conflict.