

DON'T LET AFRICA **BURN!**



Friends of
the Earth
Africa
OCTOBER 2022

A Friends of the Earth Africa position paper on gas exploitation in Africa



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Gas Flare site, Rumuekpe, Rivers state, Nigeria © Babawale Obayanju

INTRODUCTION

Before the world witnessed the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine, many European countries were at least pretending to make plans for an energy transition. Today, some of those countries, such as Germany and Italy, are romancing African governments to push forward new oil and gas infrastructures. These projects would lead the continent, and the world, into irreversible climate disaster.

This craving for gas in Africa is not a long-term solution but it is only a short-term winner for European countries, looking for alternative gas supplies to recoup their shortage following Russia's unjust attack on Ukraine. It is 'business as usual' for oil and gas corporations, looking to make huge profits from new projects. African gas will be used to power the European economy while the African continent continues to burn.

Communities across Africa, and the world, are already experiencing the damaging impacts of the climate crisis. Weather events have become more frequent and extreme due to climate change. We are facing more droughts, floods, cyclones, and hurricanes, which threaten our food supplies, infrastructure, lives, and livelihoods of communities who may not have the resources to rebuild or relocate. The African continent is warming the fastest among the other continents and has the fewest resources to adapt¹

UNFCCC: INACTION AND THE IMPACTS ON AFRICAN PEOPLES

Despite the many pledges and efforts by governments to tackle the causes of global warming, CO₂ emissions from energy and industry have increased by 60% since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate (UNFCCC) was signed in 1992².

BOX 1: THE TALES OF WOES FROM NIGERIA

For several decades, oil and gas have been extracted in many countries on the African continent, leaving behind a trail of pollution and despair. Nigeria's Niger Delta has experienced one of the worst forms of pollution - crude oil spills and gas flares - with several millions of tons of CO₂ released into the atmosphere between 1971 and 2016⁴.

Nigeria's National Oil spill detection and Response Agency, NOSDRA, said "that 1.8 billion standard cubic feet (SCF) per day of gas was flared in the last nine years"⁵ In 2020 alone, natural gas valued at \$1.24 billion was burned by oil companies, one which could generate the annual electricity use of 804 thousand Nigerian citizens⁶.

About 60% of the entire shipment of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Nigeria is exported to Europe⁷.

In 2016, Friends of the Earth International's "Decade Zero"³ report stated that we have entered the last few years in which we can still tackle climate change, only if governments and corporations take actions with urgency, based on equity and justice.

Six years down the line, many governments, including African leaders, are still in bed with the fossil fuel industry and agribusinesses on the pathway of increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

They push false solutions like “Net Zero” pledges, offsetting, and “Nature-Based Solutions”, as well as now the latest push for African gas for export to Europe.

In April 2022, the people of Durban in KwaZulu Natal province of South Africa were hit by devastating flash floods, which destroyed homes and livelihoods. 443 people died, and several roads were washed away.

BOX 2: “NET ZERO”: A GREENWASHING TACTIC OF DELAY AND DENIAL

We do not need false solutions like net zero and “nature-based solutions” to pretend to cover up the damage and destruction fossil fuels have and are causing

Lumumba Di-Aping, Sudanese negotiator for Africa said in 2009 that “2°C global average temperature rise would be a suicide pact for Africa¹¹. The big focus must be on quickly phasing out fossil fuels (oil, gas, and coal) and nuclear and other dirty and harmful energy while seeking community-based safe, clean renewable energy options such as wind and solar power.”

Countries and companies use “net zero” claims in an attempt to avoid scrutiny while continuing to burn fossil fuels or pursue heavy emissions activities. The “net zero” or neutrality claim relies on an assumption that emissions can be ‘balanced’ out, by reducing or avoiding emissions elsewhere, or by removing carbon from the atmosphere. Actors can now buy this ‘balancing’ by purchasing carbon offset credits, rather than taking any action to reduce emissions at source.

The vast number of corporate “net zero” pledges alone would require impossible amounts of land, often to plant monoculture tree plantations for offsetting¹². This spells a rush of land-grabbing and enclosures in the Global South, with devastating impacts on local biodiversity and livelihoods. Grabbing of lands and forests in Africa would push the continent and its peoples into an even more precarious state.

This is just one example of the extreme weather impacts that climate change has on the continent and the reason why climate justice activists in Africa are demanding that world leaders must act on their promises in the lead-up to the COP27 climate talks in Egypt in November 2022. If people and the planet truly matter to these decision-makers, no new fossil fuel extraction projects should be approved in Africa. We need support for a just, equitable, and feminist transition to renewable energy, keeping in mind the common but differentiated responsibility of the countries. Wealthy countries of the Global North most responsible for historic and current emissions must move very fast to halt the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG), while paying their fair share⁸ to the least contributing nations to aid their transition to a just and clean energy system.

AFRICA: LEAST POLLUTING BUT WORST HIT

Africa is the most vulnerable continent to the ravages of climate impacts, whilst having the least responsibility for emissions.

Africa has had a long history of colonial extractivism, of the lands and the peoples, which has now transformed into neocolonial, corporate, and impunitive extractivism⁹. Fossil fuels are extracted and exported at a large scale across the continent, for burning and making a profit elsewhere. For example in 2019, over one-quarter of Africa’s carbon emissions were serving consumers overseas.¹⁰



Photo: Children walking home in flooded Udaba Ekpehi community, Edo State, Nigeria © Babawale Obayanju

In the past 62 years, GHG emitting activities of the continent have accounted for only 3.3% of global emissions¹³. Meanwhile, the peoples bear the brunt of climate impacts - suffering the impacts of fossil fuel extraction such as crude oil spillages and gas flaring, and also face enormous and unjust energy poverty. Around half of the people living in Africa is said to still lack access to electricity¹⁴.

This energy poverty is the excuse used by some African leaders to open up new gas fields. These huge infrastructure projects will only further entrench poverty because lands and livelihoods will be lost, as is already being experienced in Mozambique, Nigeria, and many parts of the continent. Continuing the false claims that gas is needed for development and to attain economic prosperity would only negate climate science, and the impacts already unfolding, which clearly reveal that more fossil fuels exploration would incinerate and impoverish the continent.

GAS: NOT A CLEAN SOURCE OF ENERGY, NOR A TRANSITION FUEL

Fossil gas - erroneously referred to as “transition fuel” and presented as a clean energy solution - releases methane. Methane, a primary component of fossil gas, is 34 times stronger than CO₂ at trapping heat in the Earth’s atmosphere over a 100-year period and 86 times stronger over 20 years.¹⁵

Its atmospheric concentrations have increased by at least 150% since the Industrial Revolution. Because of its potency, the more of it there is in the air the harder it will be to keep the planet’s temperatures from soaring past global climate goals of staying below 1.5°C warnings.^{16[16]} With the tales of woes from oil fields in places like the Niger Delta, we could be sure that if new gas fields are opened, methane gas leaks may be the order of the day.

Gas is not a clean fuel. Gas is not a transition fuel. Gas is not needed for development. Gas across the world has never been a sustainable energy model owing to the havoc it has wreaked on many developing countries and its contribution to global CO₂ emissions.

BOX 3: THE THREAT OF GAS IN MOZAMBIQUE

Communities in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique have lost their lands and access to the ocean due to the expansion of the gas projects on their shoreline. *They are also recent victims of cyclones and flooding supercharged by a climate crisis they have not created. The ongoing gas exploitation in the region is already turning into a nightmare for the people, with human rights violations, increased conflict, insurgency, and militarization. Communities who once lived well through farming and fishing, are now deprived of their lives and livelihoods.*

The proposed gas extraction and the already existing extractive activities are mainly geared toward export. Three-quarters of all gas produced in Mozambique is exported. Meanwhile, less than 5% of its population uses clean cooking fuels and less than 30% have access to electricity.²⁸ “The reality of gas extraction for people in Africa is devastating”. The increased push for gas is a response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has threatened the energy security of Europe. It is supported by the European Union’s recent vote to re-classify gas projects as “green,” making them eligible for low-cost loans and subsidies. Justiça Ambiental, JA, recently launched a campaign website www.stopmozgas.org as a tool of resistance against the push for gas in Mozambique and on the continent of Africa.



Photo: Fisherfolk in Cabo Delgado who have been affected by gas exploitation @ Justiça Ambiental

We in Africa didn't create the climate crisis, but we do not want fossil fuels in our countries' future either¹⁷. It benefits the elites not the people.

What the world needs now to come out quickly from the climate crisis is to leave the oil and gas in the soil, coal in the hole, and tar sands in the land¹⁸.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) in its recent report (Net Zero by 2050) has already established that if the world is to avoid irreversible catastrophic climate change, no new oil and gas fields should be developed.

Similarly, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres was quoted saying that investing in new fossil fuel infrastructure is "moral and economic madness¹⁹". In spite of these revelations, the Africa Union's technical paper proposes that "in the short to medium term, fossil fuels, especially natural gas, will have to play a crucial role in expanding modern energy access in addition to accelerating the uptake of renewables²⁰".

At the upcoming COP27 (UN Climate Conference) in November this year, the AU technical committee – made up of energy ministers – will be proposing the African Common Position technical paper for adoption by African Heads of State. The paper notes that over 600 million Africans lack access to electricity, and to address this, "Africa will continue to deploy all forms of its abundant energy resources, including renewable and non-renewable energy, to address energy demand"²¹.

But this African Common Position on Energy Access and Transition makes no concrete plans for scaling renewable energy production as part of an energy transition and targeting decentralized energy to 600 million people in Africa that currently lack access. The document only promised an Africa driven by coal, oil & gas extraction despite the threat they pose to development, health, biodiversity, and our climate²².

We are opposed to this stand because the compounding climate crises faced by Africans demand a rapid and just transition to clean, decentralized renewable energy sources if we are to stand a chance of survival.

JUST TRANSITION: AFRICA CAN MOVE TO RENEWABLE, DEMOCRATIC, AND PEOPLE-CENTERED ENERGY

It is essential for planetary justice and for Africa's peoples that Africa changes its energy development pathway. We must move away from harmful fossil fuels towards a transformed energy system that is clean, renewable, and democratic and actually serves people. Deploying decentralized renewable solutions to the over 800 million people worldwide lacking electricity, 85% of them who live in rural areas²³, is a better, cheaper option for electrification



than laying new gas pipelines which would grab lands on their right of way, and result in loss of livelihoods.

We should adopt "A Just Recovery Renewable Energy Plan for Africa"²⁴. Recently published by Friends of the Earth Africa, this vision for system change shows that it is not only urgent but entirely possible to reduce emissions, transform the energy system and support a just recovery on the continent. It highlights the fact that the needed transformation to renewable energy based on key principles of energy sufficiency, energy sovereignty,

and seeing energy as a common good rather than a “commodity” is possible.

The **plan** provides an analysis based on the need to prevent the worst impacts of climate change and limit average global temperature rise to 1.5°C over the pre-industrial level. Based on research and modeling, shows that it is feasible and possible to achieve a 100% renewable energy goal for Africa by 2050. Africa has enough renewable energy sources available to support a development path for solving energy poverty, creating jobs for Africans, and also reducing emissions.

African governments must recognize “socially-owned” and controlled renewable energy as a right and ensure that it is prioritized in policy agenda and fiscal budgets. **Energy should not be developed solely for profit but to ensure the dignity of all peoples and reduce energy poverty** so as to catalyze sustainable societies. African governments must work with all people and remove all obstacles that may retard progress and/or detract from attaining this goal.

We must call on the countries of the Global North to repay their climate debt to Africa and the Global South, by supporting us in the development of community-based renewable energy systems²⁵, not systems based on coal, oil and gas. These governments must make good their 100billion USD proposed yearly contribution to the green climate funds that would support adaptation and mitigation efforts of the global south. We demand from polluting industrialized countries an annual climate debt of \$2 trillion being the amount they currently spend on military hardware and warfare annually. This will pay for loss and damage and serve as partial reparations for historical harms.

OUR CALL: STOP FINANCING FOSSIL FUELS!

Parties to the UNFCCC have agreed to phase out financing²⁶ for carbon-intensive energy projects in text, but with no clear timelines allotted to end the support to oil and gas.

With the push for gas and the labeling of gas as “green”, it is very obvious this agreement is only lip service.

Fatih Birol²⁷, the IEA’s executive director and one of the world’s foremost energy economists, told the

Guardian: “If governments are serious about the climate crisis, there can be no new investments in oil, gas, and coal, from now – from this year.”

We demand that rather than clamour for new gas fields to be opened, such finance should be channeled to issues of loss and damage, the payment of climate debts, climate adaptation, and investment in clean, safe renewable energy for the people.

Natural gas exploration is akin to fossil fuel extraction. Natural gas must not be encouraged at this dangerous time when the temperature clock is ticking toward 1.5°C and above.

Governments must urgently begin to cooperate on a coordinated phase-out of fossil fuel production and consumption, with equity at the core.

African governments must leverage the hosting of COP27 this year to demand far-reaching measures on climate adaptation and finance, including emissions cut at the source.

We must accelerate the transformation towards a climate-just world by transforming our energy system, based on principles such as energy sufficiency for all, energy sovereignty, energy democracy, energy as a common good, 100% renewable energy for all, community-owned, low-impact renewable energy.

Gas is not a transition pathway but an impediment to a just energy transition.

Support this call Not to Burn AFRICA! Join the fight to stop every action to open new gas fields in Africa!

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Friends of the Earth Africa groups

Cameroon - The Center for Development and the Environment [CED]

Ghana - Friends of the Earth Ghana

Liberia - Sustainable Development Institute

Mali - Guamina

Mozambique - Justiça Ambiental [Ja!]

Nigeria - Environmental Rights Action

Sierra Leone - Friends of the Earth Sierra Leone

South Africa - groundWork

Tanzania - Lawyers' Environmental Action Team [LEAT]

Togo - Les Amis de la Terre-Togo

Uganda - National Association of Professional Environmentalists [NAPE]

ENDNOTES

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FRIENDS OF THE EARTH AFRICA (FoEA) is a collective of sovereign organizations working with grassroots communities on environmental and rights-based struggles in the African region. We seek to contribute to the strengthening of national groups in Africa by developing collective strategies to understand, expose and dismantle the root causes of the overlapping crises we are facing in the region. Through continent-wide coordination, **FoEA** works to build people power towards a common African agenda for environmental, economic, gender, and social justice.

www.foeafrica.org / www.foei.org

Mobilize resist transform

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