



**Submitted to: Rafto Foundation (Ocean and Human Rights Platform)**  
**Organization Name: Health of Mother Earth Foundation**  
**Project Title: Oceans, Coastal Economies, and Human Rights in Africa**  
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## **1.0 Introduction**

The ocean covers more than 70% of our planet – Mother Earth’s surface and at the same time, supplies approximately the same percentage of oxygen that ensures continuity of life on earth. A source of oxygen, food, water, and transportation, etc. Our oceans are what make life here possible! All over the world, over 1 billion people rely on fish as their main source of protein and far more than 200 million depend on fishing for their livelihoods.

The worlds’ oceans, particularly the Atlantic Ocean and its associated estuaries, lagoons and creeks have become hotspots for pollution and unsustainable practices. This is because there is astronomical increase in exploration and exploitation activities both for minerals offshore and mindless plunder of other ocean goods and services; resulting in pollution, overfishing and illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing; while also being responsible in part, for human rights abuses against the populations who live on coastlines and others whose economies are connected to the ocean. Those at the centre of these crises in the maritime environment include local fishers, fish processors, boat drivers and other maritime workers.

The project - Oceans, Coastal Economies, and Human Rights in Africa, was apt in x-raying some of these challenges as the project helped bring stakeholders from communities, government, labour union, health sector and maritime union together to interrogate and identify areas of cooperation and needed actions.

What the project has done was to provide the knowledge of rights to local maritime workers and fishers citing national and international documents with which they can exercise those rights. This is evident as some of the community fishers who attended the meeting are opposing the dredging and reclamation work in Makoko waterfront - with the possibilities of resorting to legal action against the project.

The project also created a platform form for knowledge exchange between community people, academics, media, public health professional and the UNODC.

## **2.0 Activities**

### **2.1 Stakeholder Mapping and Team Building**



The project started with stakeholders mapping in which coastal community members, relevant civil society organizations, academics and other local actors were identified.

This was followed by a Team Building meeting in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State where all stakeholders gathered to discuss the project aim, objectives and proposed outcomes, and implementation strategies.

This meeting took place on Tuesday 27 September 2022. Specifically, discussions were guided by the following themes: Overview of the Ocean and Human Rights Platform, Aim, Structure and Partners; Introducing the Project: Oceans, Coastal Economies and Human Rights in Africa; Discussion on Expected Outcomes of the Project and Strategy; Strategic Direction for the Coming Year – Livelihoods, Energy and Rights.

At the end of the meeting, stakeholders agreed to work together in a way that foster knowledge sharing, cooperation and capacity strengthening – identifying other key actors that will add value to the project.

## **2.2 Capacity Building Workshop for Fishers and Other Stakeholders in Nigeria**

Impacts of climate change are visible and dire, and unfortunately, coastal communities are worst hit. These communities also fall within the extractive belts in Nigeria and are simultaneously faced with an avalanche of shallow and deep-water extractive-activities related issues. The issues have inundated and overwhelmed these littoral communities! These

challenges have presented multi-pronged and dynamic problems – caught in-between the impacts of climate change, coastal erosion, sea encroachment, pollution from extractive industries, unwholesome fishing practices by trawling vessels and an overwhelming security challenge at sea or near shore.



Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), and her partners organized a capacity building workshop at Okoro-Utip community townhall in Ibeno local government area of Akwa Ibom State. The community is a riverine community inhabited by traditional fisherfolks who are losing their livelihoods to pollution and climate change related challenges like coastal erosion, storms and sea-level rise, amidst security challenges at sea. The meeting held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2022 and brought together fishers, representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries department, media, CSOs and other local maritime workers, to discuss these issues and build capacity in popular environmental monitoring and understanding of their rights.

Part of the objectives was to promote knowledge of rights; to let the fisherfolk know that HOMEF and her partners are in solidarity with them (fisherfolks) in their times of despair; and to train community people on environmental monitoring and to work together with all stakeholders, including government officials and civil society organisations, to have the rights of fisherfolks enforced.

The first session was on: *Common Challenges around Fishing and Livelihoods and Impacts on Women*. “Discussing challenges around fisherwomen is best done by hearing from the horse’s mouth” the moderator said. The session was interactive as participants bared their minds and revealed their afflictions in relation to impacts of climate change, oil exploration, ocean level rise which are ravaging their lives and livelihood (fishing).

“The oil pollution is killing all the fish eggs; its wiping out generations of fishes. When the tides are high because of the extractive industry, the community becomes flooded,” “I used to pay school fees with proceeds from my periwinkles, but now I no longer can; my catch has reduced,” a woman said. “We are also troubled by mighty waves; sometimes our boats and catch gets lost in those waves” “We also have issues of storage; and our goods get spoilt before getting to the market.” These were the lamentations coming straight from the community persons.

The roles of men and women in the community, as regards fishing were explained stating that, when the men go out to sea to fish, the women would stay back to welcome them, when they returned, and then, they go ahead to either sell fresh or they go ahead to process the fish. The women mainly support these activities with periwinkle picking.

The participants were admonished that if they worked together with relevant stakeholders, many of the issues would be resolved. It was that identified that access to information, and networking with people who face similar challenges as Ibeno, as equally key issues that should be taken seriously.

In a training session on Advocacy and Identifying an Issue, it was reiterated that there is a connection between fisherfolks and the ocean and that is why, the ocean must be protected. *“Before you can talk about protecting the environment, you must have observed and identified an issue or anomaly in the environment”*. The participants where guided in ways of identifying some of the issues and anomalies they have observed in their environment. Participants identified various anomalies and changes, including changes in the river volume, mangroves, air, cultural worship system, etc.



“The ocean is yours to enjoy within its limits and is to be preserved for future generations. You ought not be deprived of this right,” said the facilitator. Participants were also endeared to identify when the changes began, with specificity, or at least by estimation; as well as who is responsible for the changes. “All of these will help you shape your advocacy and know who to target with it.”

On ‘Setting Goals and Objectives; and Know Your Rights’ session, participants were taken through modules 3 and 4 of the training manual designed for the purpose. Community people’s understanding of rights was sampled, and it was emphasized that the denominator from all understandings, that is, the fact that Human rights do not discriminate.

The participants were told that they have the right to speak up about what happens in their environment. They were informed about documents that state clearly what their human rights are; for example, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Chapter 4 specifically) and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and some other international instruments.

The modules 5, 6, 7 covered training on preparing message and strategy; determining alliances, targets, and opponents; and taking action and evaluating the process. Participants learned about the different strategies for advocacy as well as different medium of effective messaging.

### **2.3 Media Roundtable on Strengthening Marine Policies, Human and Ocean Rights in Nigeria**

The ocean is more than literal description. It provides humans with a lot of essential services including providing food, supplying oxygen, absorbing carbon from the atmosphere, among other benefits. The ocean has come under intense pressure over the years, bombarding her with a plethora of activities that impede the natural functioning of the ocean. There needs to be collaboration across board to protect and restore the dignity of our ocean. One key stakeholder is the media. To effectively report on issues around the ocean and maritime environment, the media needs to be trained on policies and other rights issues surrounding the aquatic environment.

On 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022, the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) held a Media Round table on Strengthening Ocean and Maritime Policies. The meeting was hosted in Lagos State, being at the heart of maritime activities.



The statistics are frightening! It is projected that the ocean will receive 29 million metric tons of plastic yearly by 2040; there has been an excessive warming of the ocean the last 50 years, leading to melting of the ice which in turn leads to sea rise, floods and storms etc; fish stock to decline by 85% due to overfishing. The Shipping industry, is also occasioning human rights concerns vis-à-vis local communities, workers in direct operations and in value chains, and at-risk groups, including indigenous peoples, women and girls, and human and environmental rights defenders.

Also, respect for human rights in port cities is an essential, often forgotten dimension of social sustainability. Some human rights issues that arise in port cities include : loud soundscape, complicated traffic, unmanaged waste, serious socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by the majority of the population.

Unimaginable volume of crude oil spilled into the ocean during exploration and exploration resulting to destruction of aquatic life, was also cited as a bad omen. “In Nigeria the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) recorded a total of 4,486 cases of oil spill, amounting to 242,193 barrels of oil, from 2015 to 2021.



A professor from the Department of Fishery in the University of Port Harcourt and Coordinator of the Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD), provided a broad analysis on the Health of Niger Delta Coastline and Inland Waters. He iterated that the Niger Delta has four geomorphic zones stretching 853 km. The delta stretches from Benin River to Oporo Channel, at lower reaches of the Imo River, having a chain of 20 barrier islands on its rim, is the third largest delta and home of the fifth largest expanse of mangrove forest globally, used to be the fourth but for loss of mangrove.

The linkages between inland waters, the ocean and coastal biodiversity were established, and it was noted that unless the coastal fishes are protected, we are wasting our time with artificial fishery. Artificial fishery cannot save us. More so, there is taste in the diversity of the wild.

Four indicators of aquatic health, to wit: Physical and Chemical Indicators like temperature, dissolved oxygen, nutrients, toxicants such as hydrocarbon, heavy metals, insecticides); Biological Indicators such as species richness, relative abundance, diversity, and biomass; Habitat Indicators including fringing habitat factors; and Flow Indicators. However, waters are highly compromised by human activities and ecosystems are fast degrading with attendant high loss of biodiversity, loss of livelihoods, increasing vulnerability to the impact of climate change, weakening resilience, and driving maladaptation, including oil theft, artisanal refining, and obnoxious fishing practices.

“Over 77% of oil spills in the Niger Delta over the last fifty years were not recovered, with over 2000 oil spill legacy sites. Oil pollution, from operational causes and artisanal mining, are undermining the health of the water bodies. Soot also affects the river system.

On invasive species, the professor said there were 600% spread of nypa palm in the Niger Delta in the past 10 years, while native mangroves reduce by 12% percent. Nypa palm now occupy 11,447 ha of former native mangrove areas.

So, sets of recommendation are as followings:

1. Citizen stewardship
2. Need for investment in taxonomy training and the establishment of at least row natural history museum.
3. EIA should no longer be paper packs.
4. Build capacity in deep sea monitoring research.
5. Urgent need to strengthen the capacity of NOSDRA to monitor and coordinate offshore oil spill response.
6. Urgent need for a strong and effective integrated coastal zone management system.
7. Ecosystem restoration.
8. Sustainable national plan for mangrove conservation,
9. Invest in low-tech, pro-poor utility technologies for nipa palm and water hyacinth to mitigate their spread.

Mr. Francis Omiunu, the National Programme Officer with the Global Marine Crime Programme of the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) and a former staffe with the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), a presentation on Ocean Protection: Engaging Maritime Laws in Nigeria. The importance of the ocean as well as the current threats facing the ocean, were highlighted. The Nigerian state has not done well with regulation. In Nigeria, the regulators are the Federal Ministries of Environment, Agriculture and Transportation. Other regulatory agencies such as NIMASA, NOSDRA and NESREA have respective functions and powers deriving from enabling laws and regulations, both municipal and international.

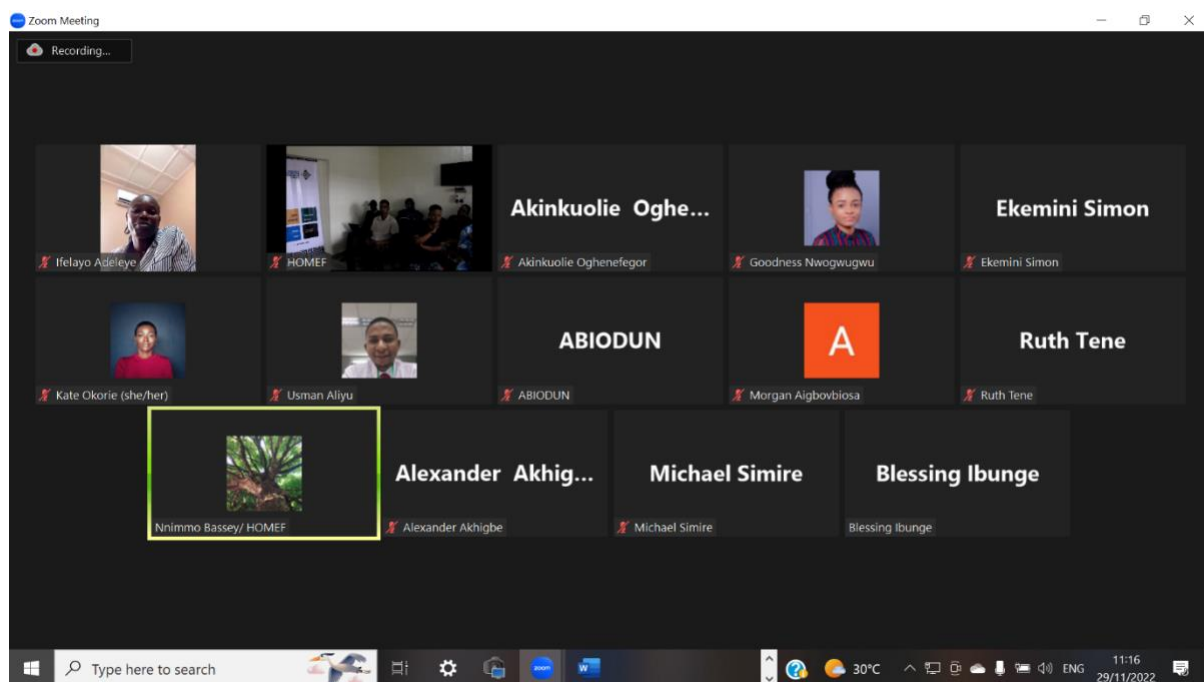
In responding to a question “whether the reforms made in NIMASA by in the past (as documented in the book “Strategic Turnaround” were mere image laundering or sustainable and still part of the NIMASA culture”, he said government is in continuum and one can only do his bit while serving his limited time. “A new government sometimes means a change of policies”.

The roles of the media and civil society organizations were also emphasized on, in the protection of the environment and ocean. Some of these roles that can be played by CSOs and the press are: Campaigning for the change or revision of the policies, plans of action or of the provisions in the legally binding instruments; Organising policy dialogues to come up with or



push for more desirable policies; Monitoring existing instruments' effectiveness and implementation; Calling for improvement of implementation of the policies, plans of action or legally binding instruments; Drawing the attention of the public and concerned authorities to policy or instrument failure or poor performance; Hiring professionals to draft critical reports with robust analysis of evidence gathered through monitoring and events in the environment.; Publishing and widely distributing critical reports of failing policies or poorly implemented ones; Planning and seeking support for projects that demonstrate successful implementation of desired policy to get attention of decision makers, inspire duplication and scaling up of the projects.

As a follow-up to the roundtable meeting with media personnel which held in Lagos State, the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) held another meeting with journalists and pressmen.



This time, the meeting held virtually and was attended by about 15 reporters and journalists from various news houses and papers, was aimed at fostering collaboration between media and other stakeholders to promote human rights and ocean health.

Protecting and defending the ocean and water bodies is a collective responsibility that must not be abandoned; everyone must play their role as the issues not only affect ocean ecosystems but also the humans who depend of the ocean for life support. The event also featured a presentation on protection of human rights in the maritime environment and it was stressed that human rights are not gifts from states or national constitutions but are natural and inherent in all humans simply by virtue of their being human; that violating the ocean equals violating

human rights, particularly the rights to life and livelihood, dignity and healthy environment of fisher folks, fish processors, and other maritime workers.

Pressmen were urged to take up the challenge, collaborate with CSOs and speak up for the ocean by reporting and asking the right questions about the environment. At the end of the virtual meeting, the media practitioners were appreciative of the meeting and committed to better playing their role in amplifying the voices of ocean and human rights defenders henceforth.

#### **2.4 Workshop on Health and Human Rights for Maritime Workers and Other Stakeholders**

On the 16th of November 2022, HOMEF organized a one-day workshop on Workers' Health and Human Rights in Marine Environment. The workshop brought together a broad section of Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Maritime Union, Public Health Professional, civil society organizations, coastal community persons and media, to examine the issues which affects the marine environment, workers health, governance, and human rights in coastal regions of Nigeria.

The challenge of working and earning livelihoods from the ocean in Nigeria are varied and complex. The key factors that give rise to human rights abuses include the level of knowledge of the rights, pollution of all sorts, reduced resource access, incursion of foreign fishing fleets, health issues, militarization of the area and the rise of piracy, kidnapping, robbery, and other violent crimes. Another issue is climate change resulting in loss of coastal land, acidification of the ocean and incursion of salt water into freshwater systems.

Our aquatic ecosystem is inundated with lots of issues. Among these issues are the irregular unregulated and unreported fishing, the issues of dredging, mangrove destruction, pollution by extractive activities and health challenges.

In an interactive session, elder Claudius Akintemehin, a leader from Makoko fishing community gave an insight on the issues going on in his community. He said “what we are facing in Makoko Community both from the lagoon and in the sea is not palatable. Some of our people cannot not buy engine boat on their own but they can manage canoe using paddle for fishing. Now, whether it is Lagos state government or Federal government, as they are doing dredging, if fishers go for fishing, they cannot cash fish up to 1,000 Naira worth of fish. By hearing the noise of the dredging engine inside water, fish will continue to run away. The second aspect in Makoko, is the plan by government to sandfill the whole Makko community along the lagoon side. We are begging government that if they sandfill Makoko the entire community will be flooded as we are already facing flood issues. So, we are appealing with government to stop the sand-filling as we are not ready to battles with another problem. If the government can stop, fish will become abundance again in Makoko”.

According to Bimbo Osobe, member of Nigeria’s Club/Informal Settlement Federation “sand mining also known as Dredging affects a lot of communities. The more dredging the more community are prone to flooding and the more it affects fishing activities. The deeper the water, the further the fishes. For people that paddle to go fishing it’s not easy for them. We have complained and had series of meetings with government that these activities result to flooding and health issues for community people. Our sewage systems are blocked. We are asking the government to stop the sand mining or go further in the ocean instead of dredging close to communities. We also ask the government to intervene in clearing the canal, build embankment and save Makoko community from going under water”.

The one-day workshop highlighted the fragility of the marine environmental, economic, social and political stability as well as health concerns and human rights issues in the coastal region of Nigeria and demanded:

1. That all forms of dredging in Makoko community should stop
2. Community fishers must be consulted and made part of the governance structure in coastal and maritime areas.
3. Government must do all they can to stop trawlers from fishing in no-trawling areas.
4. Fishing and maritime policies must be inclusive in a way that fishers play important roles in the formulation and implementation.

### **3.0 Outcomes**

- a. Coastal communities and workers learnt about available human rights tools for defending their rights.
- b. Human rights defenders learnt multi-dimensional means of better defending their rights and supporting each other. This came about through interactions with labour activists, maritime workers, public health officials and fisher folks.
- c. Trained community persons, workers and media utilize learnings for better health outcomes and in policy advocacy.
- d. Government agencies and security agents are better aligned to defending the human rights of workers and other stakeholders.

### **4.0 Challenges**

Owing to the level of environmental degradation in the communities, expectations of livelihood support was high in the communities. Getting high level policymakers to attend meetings and hear directly from communities and affected persons is difficult.

### **5.0 Media Reports and Links**

- HOMEf Advocates Ocean Rights for Protection of Coastal Areas:  
<https://naturenews.africa/homef-advocates-ocean-rights-for-protection-of-coastal-areas/>

- Oil Pollution: Ibeno fishers lament scarcity of fish: <https://themail.com.ng/oil-pollution-ibeno-fishermen-lament-scarcity-of-fish/>
- At HOMEF Media Roundtable, Experts Raise Alarm Over Depletion of Mangrove Ecosystem, Marine Pollution: <https://cityvoice.ng/at-homef-media-roundtable-experts-raise-alarm-over-depletion-of-mangrove-ecosystem-marine-pollution/>
- Maritime Policy: Group Seeks to Strengthen Maritime Policies, Human and Ocean Rights: <https://youtu.be/qkzRSq33wL8>
- Experts brainstorm, raise alarm over threat to marine and coastal environment: <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/experts-brainstorm-raise-alarm-over-threat-to-marine-and-coastal-environment/>
- Stakeholders Call for Protection of Inland Waters, Coastal Areas: <https://leadership.ng/stakeholders-call-for-protection-of-inland-waters-coastal-areas/>
- Experts brainstorm, raise alarm over threat to marine and coastal environment <https://nigerianewsmark.com/2022/10/07/experts-brainstorm-raise-alarm-over-threat-to-marine-and-coastal-environment/>
- Oil Spill, Piracy Crippling Fish Business – Fishermen Count Losses: <https://dailypost.ng/2022/10/08/oil-spill-piracy-crippling-fish-business-fishermen-count-loss/>
- Experts Raise Alarm over Threat to Marine, Coastal Environment: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/10/09/experts-raise-alarm-over-threat-to-marine-coastal-environment/>
- Oil Theft – Why Oil Operation Should Shut Down Completely – HOMEF: <https://themail.com.ng/oil-theft-why-oil-operations-in-nigeria-should-shut-down-completely-homef/>
- Marine Environment: Stakeholders Seeks to Ways to Address Health, Rights of Workers: <https://youtu.be/AsGEI12G5f8>
- Group Expresses Fear over Consequences of Pollution in Niger Delta: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/11/29/group-expresses-fear-over-consequences-of-pollution-in-niger-delta/>

## 6.0 Financial Report

The financial report is attached as a separate file.