

UCLA African Studies Center and Earth Rights Institute present...

# AFRICA'S READINESS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE (ARCC) FORUM 2021

April 19-23, 2021

Zoom Webinar

Registration to attend ARCC is now open: [RSVP HERE](#)

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## Keynote Speakers

Nnimmo Bassey

Ousmane Aly Pame

HE Ambassador Sidique Abou-Bakarr Wai

Elizabeth Wathuti

# About Africa's Readiness for Climate Change (ARCC)

Virtual Forum, April 19-23, 2021

The UCLA African Studies Center and the Earth Rights Institute invite you to engage with us in the 2021 virtual ARCC Forum. The inaugural forum will expand an integrated vision of “Green Development” in Africa that is both ecologically and economically sustainable, emphasizing local solutions to climate change developed by African stakeholders in urban and rural communities. ARCC 2021 will assemble interdisciplinary panels of scholars, scientists, industry leaders, climate change innovators, youth activists, and policy-makers to discuss cutting-edge research and the most successful sustainable development projects unfolding on the ground. Participants will identify priorities for research and implementation and collaboratively develop a five-year action plan.

## Co-Sponsors

Nurit Katz, UCLA Chief Sustainability Officer

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Robin Derby, International Institute, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisor

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Nnimmo Bassey



Director of Health of Mother  
Earth Foundation, Nigeria

Director of Nigeria-based ecological think-tank, the Health of Mother Earth Foundation, 2010 Right Livelihood Laureate, and Time Magazine's Hero of the Environment, Bassey will speak on environmental activism in Africa.



Ousmane Aly Pame

President of Global Ecovillage Network  
Africa and REDES, Senegal



President of Global Ecovillage Network Africa and Network for Ecovillage Emergence and Development in the Sahel, Pame will speak on solutions for climate refugees and regenerative programs for communities.





## His Excellency Ambassador Abou-Bakarr Sidique Wai

Sierra Leone Ambassador to  
the United States



Founder of the United African Congress, UN delegate, diplomat, and Secretary General of ECOWAS, His Excellency Ambassador Wai will speak on emerging economic opportunities for a green Africa.



## Elizabeth Wathuti

Founder of Green Generation Initiative and Head  
of Campaigns at Wangari Maathai Foundation,  
Kenya



Environmentalism, climate activist, and a recipient of the Wangari Maathai Scholarship, Wathuti will speak on African youth mobilization for climate action and conservation.

# VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

## FEATURING...

- Panel discussions with local and international experts
- African regenerative initiatives (eco-cities and ecovillages)
- Climate adaptation and global impact on public health
- Virtual exhibitors hall showcasing innovative solutions
- Breakout rooms for Design Thinking Jam Sessions



## Opportunities for Students

- Dialogue with leading experts on climate change in Africa
- Collaboration with U.S. and African students on climate action strategies
- Networking with representatives from African institutions addressing climate resilience
- Work and research opportunities in African Regenerative Sites
- Carbon reduction innovation exchange/data collection training
- Rapid prototyping workshop



# Nnimmo Bassey on "Inspiring radical desire to protect the environment from toxic oil contamination in Nigeria"

Boyce Buchanan, UC Berkeley

Nnimmo Bassey, founder of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation, HOMEf, and speaker at the upcoming Africa's Readiness for Climate Change forum hosted by the UCLA African Studies Center and the Earth Rights Institute (ERI) from April 19 - 23, found himself "radicalized" at an early age, drawn into Nigeria's human rights movement. Now, he hopes that young people, in Nigeria and around the world, will pick up his torch and continue the fight toward a better future.

"Young people have to be loud calling for a ... halting of the extraction [of fossil fuels], and then a clean up of the pollution. Otherwise, the future is extremely dangerous and will not support their life," Bassey said. "There's no way [forward] if action is not taken now, not taken today, not taken tomorrow."

For much of Bassey's formative years, Nigeria was under a military dictatorship. He read every piece of liberation literature he could get his hands on and quickly joined the fight for democracy and an end to oppression. But it was not until he learned more about the atrocities faced by communities living in Nigeria's oil fields, that Bassey — now a member of the steering committee for Oil Watch International and recipient of the 2010 Right Livelihood Award — really established himself as a leading figure in human rights advocacy in Nigeria and around the globe.

In 1990, Umuechem, a village in the Niger Delta where many of Nigeria's oil fields are located, called on Shell to stop its exacerbation of environmental degradation. In retaliation, the Nigerian government sent armed forces into the village and many people lost their lives. Then in 1995, Nigerian environmental activist and peaceful campaigner Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other environmental leaders were murdered by the military junta.

"These were the things that crystallized to me that 'look, this is what you have to focus on in life,'" Bassey said. "This has taken almost virtually all my time and I don't regret it at all, because I just asked myself, 'If nobody spoke up, what would [my country] be like now?'"



Nigeria is the largest producer of oil in Africa, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. As a result, the Niger Delta is one of the most polluted places in the world. Between 2018 and 2019, the Nigerian National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency noted there were 1,300 oil spills in the country. The degradation of the environment in the Delta is so extreme that life expectancy there is only 41 years.

"41 years... Before you grow up, you are gone," Bassey stated. "The national statistic is 56, which is also extremely low, about the fourth lowest in the world, in a country that is very rich in terms of petrol dollars. So [oil money] doesn't translate to 'the good life' or to wellbeing, to living."



Nigerians face the environmental fallout without reaping much of the benefit of the oil's use. Most of the oil harvested in Nigeria, following the colonial economic ideal of extractivism, is exported abroad, which according to Bassey is evident just by looking at the map. "If you look at the infrastructure map of Africa, virtually every major infrastructure starts from the sea ports, and then goes to where resources are being extracted from. And that tells a story on its own..." Flagrantly, as of 2020, only 11% of the polluted land identified in a 2011 UN Environment Programme report centered in the Niger Delta has started to be cleaned up by Shell and the government. This worsening quality of the land is a major reason why Bassey believes in the necessity of grassroots activism that argues for investment in renewable energy, which will benefit the climate and local economies.

Bassey's organization HOMEf advocates for a fast transition away from fossil fuels, analyzes hunger politics, and creates spaces for the sharing of knowledge and experiences between communities. "I've decided to devote the remaining years of my life to work with young people," Bassey stated. "The future belongs to them, and things are not going to get easier in the future....The pollution that is amassed in the oil fields, in the coal fields, in the gas fields is not going to disappear on its own, and if they're not cleaned up, they're going to get worse." Through HOMEf, Bassey and his team help young people produce counternarratives using poetry and storytelling. He wants youth to "bust the myths" that the government and corporations like Shell perpetuate about the importance of oil for Nigeria's economy by sharing their own experiences with oil politics and food sovereignty through writing.



Overall, the Foundation's goal is to uplift and center voices of the communities most affected by severe environmental degradation caused by oil extraction. Although HOMEf is there to support these communities, Bassey insists it is not their job to be the spokespeople for these communities: "communities have to speak for themselves." Bassey urges young people to always question what they hear from those in power:

"Pick out the keywords [from a speech], go to the internet and search for where [your president] got those words from. What is the historical reason for those words?" Bassey instructs. "You can now see whether [you] want to accept the concept he presented, the ideas he presented, or not. Otherwise, we're going to just keep on swallowing stories that are swallowing us up."



# The Sahel Region: Africa's Epicenter of the Climate Crisis

## Ousmane Aly Pame on "Forging a path toward community stability and environmental 'regeneration' in rural Senegal"

Boyce Buchanan, UC Berkeley

The Sahel stretches across Africa, a geological border separating the vast Sahara Desert from the leafy green vegetation of the African Rainforest. It is known as a semi-arid grassland, but the people who live there are worried about its stability. Environmental degradation and climate change are increasing the spread of the desert, shrinking lakes, and making it much more difficult to cultivate and herd successfully in the region. But, a group in northern Senegal, led by Ousmane Aly Pame, a scholar in Dakar and the former mayor of Guédé Chantiers who transformed the town into an ecovillage, is working to reverse the damages done to the environment and bring people back to their village communities.

Pame, who was recently the focus of the documentary [Climate Change Does Not Need a Visa](#), will be one of the keynote speakers at the UCLA African Studies Center and Earth Rights Institute's ARCC forum which will be held virtually from April 19th to the 23rd, 2021. He is president of the Network for Ecovillage Emergence and Development in the Sahel (REDES) which helps transition rural communities into ecovillages by centering traditional cultural practices and combining them with modern ecologically friendly technologies. He believes that the environmental transformation of the land around many of these sustainable villages will bring economic stability to families who have not seen it in decades.

"What REDES is trying to do is -- because we've understood that mass poverty is the root of mass immigration and rural exodus -- we would like to regenerate the landscape in the villages to create wealth, to create sustainable activities so that people can also stay in their own places," Pame said. The group is currently working on a trans-border project that is connecting and transforming 100 villages in the Sahel region of Senegal and Mauritania, 50 on each side of the border, into sustainable ecovillages. It will be the biggest ecovillage hub on Earth.

Drought and few work prospects leads to migration. The Sahel has been in a period of almost constant drought since 1969, although there has been more rainfall in the last decade.

"[Now] you will find in this region, you know, villages that are completely depopulated, or villages where you will only find women, children, and old men," Pame said. "All the people who are aged between 16 and 45 or 50 have gone away and are leaving these villages really without enough labor force, leaving these villages without economic dynamism."

Many young people travel to Dakar, Senegal's capital, and other big cities during the dry season to make money for their families and try to establish a life for themselves, according to Pame. This internal migration is fairly widespread, with working-age people only spending the three month rainy season in their villages planting crops before having to leave for more work. This year immigration out of Senegal has also increased, although it has not reached the levels of 2007 to 2012 when 218,000 and 214,000 people left respectively, according to the World Bank.

"There's a movement, we call it Barsa or Barsakh. Barsa is Barcelona. Barsakh is cemetery, tomb," said Pame. "So the young people here say they need to go to Spain, by any means necessary, whether they will die or not. Some of them walk across the desert, others take camels, and they go. We've got thousands and thousands of people who do that, young people, girls and boys." Restoring the land and spreading education is the path toward a better future.

"We need a model, a development model that is deeply rooted on the African worldview, African values, and also with the realities of our environment," Pame said. "The foundation should be our values, our culture, our environment, our own sensibility, our worldview."

Some of the villages in the transborder ecovillage hub have already begun to transition the arid land around them back into forest areas, and Pame hopes that they will inspire other villages to do the same. Simply by fencing off a portion of land, communities are able to keep animals out. In Lobodu within a decade, a dense and fertile forest had appeared. The animals came back, and since it was near a river, the added nutrients from the greenery brought back fish and fishing birds.

"I think the key strategy here is to educate people. So they understand, fully understand, what's happening to them," Pame said. "It's just completely irrational for a region that is so close to the desert to cut down trees to plant rice... So, people need to understand that if they have no trees, they can't even have good husbandry, no good cattle breeding, and there will [also be] no fish in the river."

REDES has set up numerous education programs in the over 140 villages it has helped transitional. They focus specifically on educating women and young people. In the last year, according to Pame, the organization provided 13 classrooms to different villages, creating access to education for 650 children. Pame and REDES has also helped create seven community orchards and gardens, growing fruits like lemons and mangos, and they plan to expand that program. They have also led workshops in cheese production and trained 115 women from 15 different villages in food processing so that after the rainy season, they can better preserve vegetables. In October alone they also provided 27 wells to different communities.

“We’ve observed in some of the ecovillages... people all year round can find work in these villages... income. So, the result is not only that their population stays, but ... also other people from surrounding villages will come and stay within these villages,” said Pame. “We noticed that the populations are growing because people, even sometimes highly educated people like students with a master's degree, they go back to these villages to find work.”

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*ARCC Keynote lectures will be delivered by four incredible climate champions: Nnimmo Bassey (Nigeria), Ousmane Aly Pame (Senegal), HE Ambassador Sidique Abou-Bakarr Wai (Sierra Leone), and Elizabeth Wathuti (Kenya). This special edition newsletter features articles on Bassey and Pame, written by UC Berkeley student and part of the ARCC organizing team, Boyce Buchanan, based on interviews she conducted. Stay tuned for articles on Wai and Wathuti in the second edition of this special newsletter on Friday March 26th!*