

Osun Green Hangout: Recentralizing the Struggle for Climate Justice in the Fight for a Poverty-Free and Sustainable Future

Across Africa, as in several parts of the world, increasing frequency and magnitude of climate related disasters such as flooding, droughts, desertification, et cetera, is being experienced. This, as reports show, is not unconnected to Climate Change. Sadly, those with power continue to respond much slower than the survival of humanity demands. In too many African countries, not much pressure is being put on those with power to spur the kind of commitment which the urgency of the climate crises impels.

What are the latest reports on the state of our climate? What connection can be established between climate crisis, poverty and other crises that we face today? How can those with power be held accountable and pressured to give adequate commitment to resolving the climate crisis? What necessary collaboration must be forged to compel this commitment? These were some of the questions which the #OsunGreenHangout sought to find answers to, and which had prompted the young environmentalist who gathered at the Deutsches Haus, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, on Saturday 24th June , 2021, to come together.

The gathering afforded participants the opportunity to remind themselves that the average global temperature rise is racing towards 1.5 degrees; from the time of the industrial revolution to this point, the average global temperature has risen by well over 1.1 degrees due to human activities, and the new estimates published in the very recent Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shows that "the chances of crossing the global warming level of 1.5 degrees in the next decades."

It was again brought to the fore that at the present level of global warming, we are already witnessing the melting of the polar ice caps, sea level rise, increase in the rate of flooding and other related disasters, increase in biodiversity loss and so forth. And it is becoming more obvious that if we continue to do too little as we currently do, if we - as a global community - continue on the over-consumptive, consumerist path that we are on, what would happen, as many voices of conscience continue to remind us, is that we would land ourselves in the abyss of extinction. We are in a state of 'climate emergency'!

Participants noted that the expression 'climate emergency' is still very strange to the bulk of the people in Nigeria and across Africa. And this is partly because too many have no educational opportunities which would ensure the ability to understand the complexity of the climate crisis. With limited understanding of the crisis and a limited ability to respond, households subjected to poverty are more vulnerable, and are subsequently disproportionately affected, as they suffer the ill-

effects of climate change more – while contributing less. The implication of this is that people who are already forced to live below poverty line sink further into poverty, and groups who suffer more discrimination based on race, gender, et cetera are at greater risk. Thus the conversation brought to the fore again the intersectionality of the different forms of injustices that we experience.

It was also recalled that this Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, in 2019 warned that ‘the impacts of global warming are likely to undermine not only basic rights to life, water and food and housing for hundreds of millions of people, but also democracy and rule of law.’ The phenomenon in which the rich pay to escape the heat and hunger and all of the ill-effects of the climate crisis while others are left to suffer these effects alone has been termed ‘climate apartheid.’ To the gathering, it appears that nowhere else is the phenomenon more observable than in Africa where the increasing frequency of flooding, biodiversity loss, and other climate related disasters has been high despite the continent being the least contributor to global carbon emissions.

The young environmentalists also stressed the need to merge theory with practice in order to forge a meaningful struggle. This, it is observed, is in line with the ATD Fourth World’s ‘Merging of Knowledge Approach’ which brings together academics, practitioners and those subjected to poverty together to reflect on how to eradicate poverty. This approach has been noted to enhance the ability to resolve the crisis being confronted. The need for knowledge curators and activists to be willing to experiment with radically progressive ideas and to raise mass awareness for the advancement of the cause of justice was also highlighted.

Essentially, the participants at the hangout, using different creative means (games, quiz, puzzle), reflected on the exigency of addressing the climate crises, and touched on how to achieve the global goals and to advance the struggle to build a more just future for us as a global community. The hangout, at its end, helped re-establish the urgency of attending to the climate crisis and the disproportionate effect of the crisis on those subjected to poverty and those who face multiple discriminations, while the importance of bridging the gap between theory and practice was equally stressed.