**Environmental disaster and extractive sector accountability in Africa:**

**Lessons from the Niger Delta and prospects for clean-up**

**Tuesday 2nd July from 6pm until 7.30pm in the Grimond Room, Portcullis House**

**Chair:** Chi Onwurah MP, Chair of the APPG for Africa

**Parliamentarians in attendance:** David Drew MP, Lord Oates, Lord Cameron, Lord Chidgey, Lis McInnes MP & Earl of Mountbatten.

**Chi Onwurah MP**

Chi opened the discussion by pointing out how little has been achieved in the last eight years since the UN Environmental programme called on urgent clean up across the Niger Delta in 2011.

She referred to 2019 as a pivotal year, as the first contractors are set for a long awaited clean-up which will be implemented by the Nigerian Government with the funding coming from the oil companies working in the area.

She warned though that if not handled correctly, the clean-up could be disastrous for the environment and communities in the Niger Delta

**Alexander Sewell - Lead Researcher on Niger Delta at Stakeholder Democracy Network**

Alexander started by giving a background on the Artisanal Oil Refining Industry in the Niger Delta arguing that the industry is being operated by a variety of individuals including criminal groups associated with political interests and with working relations with security agencies.

He said addressing the problem of oil spills in the Niger Delta and inaction on the clean-up should be of regional and international importance. As the international companies are diversifying their onshore assets, they pass on these contracts to less experienced operators who inherit the ongoing environmental problems and the poor infrastructure.

There needs to be alternative policies with the federal government recognising and acknowledging the importance of addressing the problem, and perhaps removing the role of the military in the industry.

He concluded that more investment is needed in alternative economic sectors for the communities relying on artisanal oil mining as their main livelihood.

**Dr Kathryn Nwaijaku Dahou - Independent consultant, Bayelsa Oil & Environmental Commission**

In March 2019 The Bayelsa Oil & Environmental Commission was launched with the mandate to investigate the environmental and human impact of the oil spill in the Bayelsa state. The report will be published in Autumn and outlining the recommendations for community framework which will reveal accountability for the oil spill and suggest appropriate mitigation.

She said the commission will be working under the premise that the high standards of Extractive Sector accountability and liability practiced in Norway, or elsewhere in the world, should also be applied in Nigeria.

The commission hopes to get recommendations which are concrete and doable regarding what a state government could do legislatively and what they can push for internationally to get coherence and support.

**Martyn Day - Senior Partner at law firm Leigh Day**

Martyn said most areas in the Niger Delta are still badly polluted, local fishermen can’t continue to fish and most of them don’t have any other source of income. Leigh Day represented local fisherman in Ogoniland in a class action against the oil company Shell to receive damages for loss of livelihoods.

The only way to achieve success in making extractive companies take responsibility for the environmental damage they cause is by making such behaviour bad for profits i.e. by taking companies to court and forcing them to pay compensation to the affected communities.

Martyn concluded by saying companies operating around the world, should be made to operate in the developing world in the same standards they operate in their own countries. In the recent landmark case against copper mining UK company Vedanta Resources plc the UK Supreme Court ruled that Vedanta has breached its duty of care to ensure that its Zambian subsidiary (Konkola Copper Mines Plc) would not harm the environment and local communities and awarded local communities substantial damages. As such, Martyn is hopeful that more class actions against MNCs and their subsidiaries will see more cases such as this hitting profits and forcing behaviour change.

**Question:**

Is it possible for local politicians to have a key role to play in the clean-up conversation?

**Martyn:**

After Brexit, UK Government has got to take a much more pro-active and robust role to ensure that parent companies are answerable for what they do abroad in the UK courts.

**Question:**

Considering that there have been many commissions before, what is it special about this new commission?

**Kathryn:**

There are some structural issues which impact on local investigations but there is still a need to move forward with commissions investigating the issue. She said she is convinced that the new commission is conscious of the danger of the investigations being just a performative exercise more than something which could lead to real change.

As a result, she said the commission has included many eminent people who care about the Commission’s legacy and are committed to seeing a difference being made from its findings.

**Concluding comment from Lord Chidgey**

The UK government and certainly parliament has a moral obligation to work with the Nigerian MPs to help Nigeria and other countries to keep these issues in the fore front of parliamentary agendas and to also strengthen UK courts ability to hold UK companies to account for actions of its subsidiaries.