



UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT RIGHT LIVELIHOOD COLLEGE CAMPUS 2019 PUBLIC LECTURES AND SUSTAINABILITY ACADEMY

Report



From right: Dr Ruth Manorama (RLA Laureate, India); Professor R. Montenegro (RLA Laureate, Argentina); Dr Nnimmo . Bassey (ED HOMEF and RLA Laureate, Nigeria); Prof. A. A. Okerengwo (represented the Vice Chancellor, Professor S.E. Lale); Professor P.C. Mmom (Dean FSS) and Dr Fidelis Allen (Associate Professor, Coordinator RLC Campus and Acting Director, CCGS, UNIPORT).

On 28 and 29 May 2019, the University of Port Harcourt Campus of the Right Livelihood College and Health of Mother Earth Foundation held their annual public lectures and 12th Sustainability Academy for the year, at the Ebitimi Banigo Hall of the university. The theme of the lectures, 'Global Environmental Politics, Human Rights and Conflict', which had two sub-themes, namely, Gender, Ecology and Human Rights, and Environmental Rights Denial, Human Rights

Abuses and Systematic Orchestration of Conflicts, aimed at examining the character of global environmental politics and conflict from the perspectives of India and South America, in relation to Africa. The guest lecturers, Dr Ruth Manorama (India) and Professor Raul Montenegro (Argentina) are Laureates of the Right Livelihood Award. Bill McKibben delivered his lectures via a recorded video on the topic *Climate Change- a Ticking Bomb*.

More than 600 persons attended the two-day event. Among them were students - undergraduate, post-graduate diploma, Master of Science and doctorate levels - , lecturers, non-teaching staff, civil society actors and government officials, including the Director of National Orientation Agency (a federal agency) in charge of Rivers State, Barrister Young Ayotamuno.

It started with an opening session. In his welcome address, the coordinator of the Right Livelihood College Campus at the university, and Acting Director of the Centre for Conflict and Gender Studies, Dr Fidelis Allen, welcomed participants and expressed gratitude to the Vice Chancellor of the university for sustaining a relationship he described as *mutually rewarding* between the university on one hand, and the Right Livelihood Award Foundation and Health of Mother Earth Foundation on the other. On behalf of the university, Allen thanked Robert Bosch Stiftung for handling the traveling expenses of our guest lecturers in the last five years.

The Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Professor P.C. Mom, in his opening remarks, also welcomed the guest lecturers and other participants. He resounded the enormous value of the lectures for the university community, commending the Coordinator of the RLC Campus for his role in ensuring the lectures hold annually, for five years, sequentially.

The Vice Chancellor of the university, Professor Ndowa Lale, was represented by the Dean of Graduate School, Professor A.A. Okerengwo. She thanked the Right Livelihood Award Foundation and Health of Mother Earth Foundation for the lectures. As she noted:

The Vice-Chancellor brings his greetings. He had to travel out of the city for a national assignment. Let me join the director of the Centre for Conflict and Gender Studies to welcome every one of you, especially our guest lecturers from Asia and South America...The theme of the lectures, as the director said, was well-chosen.

Reverend Nnimmo Bassey, Executive Director of Health of Mother Earth Foundation, co-host of the lectures, set the tone for the lectures. According to him:

It is a special honour for us at the HOMEF to be associated with the University of

Port Harcourt. I want to let you know that this university is the most vibrant of all the Right Livelihood campuses in the world. With another memorandum of understanding just signed a couple of days ago, we will link students of this university with the other campuses across the world. I was glad to see one of your students at Lund University in Europe chosen by the RLC Campus at Bonn University to attend a capacity building workshop. He performed well in his presentations, which means he was chosen on merit and that the University of Port Harcourt can hold itself up anywhere in the world. One of the things we want to do this year is to bring some doctoral students in African universities to the University of Port Harcourt to brainstorm on how to move the continent forward.



Rev. Nnimmo Bassey

Bassey provided insights into the origin of the RLC, noting that it was to bridge gaps between 'gown' and 'town'. He thanked the Vice Chancellor for his commitment towards the partnership.

Dr Ruth Manorama's presentation highlighted the connection between gender, human rights, and ecology. Ecological systems have faced severe abuse with consequences of for unequal human rights implications for men and women. The quest for gender justice in this context has raised the profile of the global feminist movement. She argues:

The past 50 years of feminist activism, globally and in India, have managed to challenge several centuries of patriarchal order by striking at the root of exploitation and oppression, subjugation and degradation of women by deconstructing covert and overt violence against women in personal and public life, to question

pillars of male domination within the family, kinship networks, organized religion, the media and the state.



Dr Ruth Manorama

Patriarchy lies at the root of women suppression, exploitation, and oppression. This analysis, advanced by Manorama was well-received by participants. It was even more so, with the Niger Delta in mind. This is a region where years of oil industry activities have led to massive destruction of the ecosystem. The implications for economic empowerment of women and gender justice have been wide-ranging.

Raul Montenegro, a Professor of Evolutionary Biology in the Faculty of Psychology, National University of Argentina, began his presentation by highlighting social and environmental realities and the interactive response of communities and universities in South America. This dovetailed into the clarification of environmental rights denial, abuses, and conflict. A key aspect in the dynamics of this conflict, according to him, is the recurring attacks of human rights defenders by the state, for which he called attention of universities and the global civil society to address with analysis and advocacy.



Professor Raul Montenegro

The event formally ended on 29 May, with the 12th Sustainability Academy at the Centre for

Conflict and Gender Studies of the University. What followed the next day, being 30 of May, was an informal and interesting small meeting of post-graduate students of Gender Studies at the centre with Dr Manorama. Manorama's presentation on the state of the feminist movement in India, particularly in relation to the social conditions of her own people (Dalit Women), was quite revealing. The low social standing accorded women in India has continued to receive opposition from the feminist movement with results of a gradual constitutional change in favour of women. Patriarchy still is culturally and religiously resilient against women. The interactive session provoked curiosity, learning and questions and answers that served a great deal of interest and the knowledge-seeking minds of the centre.



A cross-section of the Ebitimi Banigo Hall

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