

SERIOUS environmental human rights issues are currently being raised on the African Mining Vision (AMV) that was adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2009. Environmental rights advocacy groups being galvanized by Environmental Rights Action (ERA), a foremost environmental rights group in Nigeria, believes that the AMV that was adopted by AU to provide guidance on how extractive sector-mining must be managed in the continent only favours foreign investors to the detriment of the African people, and does not address critical livelihood concerns of local artisans.

ERA, an affiliate of a global federation, Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) is however, re-echoing recommendations of African trade unions, community organisations, women groups, civil society organisations and networks working on environment, development, and economic justice issues, who met in Accra, Ghana, at the recently-concluded 14th Annual Review and Strategy Meeting of the African Initiative of Mining, Environment and Society (AIMES).

At the meeting, participants examined the challenges and opportunities relating to the AMV and observed that while the policy remains important to re-organisation of the political economy of mining on the continent, African governments and national elites have monopolised the relatively minor profits that are left over from what foreign companies exploit, while ordinary people remain joblessness, and poor, and mining-related environmental disasters continue in their communities.

ERA Executive Director, Godwin Ojo, who also doubles as the boss of Friends of the Earth Nigeria (FoEN) told AkanimoReports in an online statement on Thursday: "while we applaud the AMV initiative of the AU for attempting to address mining challenges on the continent, it is doubtful if the policy as currently tailored can deliver on its objective of greater benefits to the people as the status quo promotes the externalisation of production costs and the senseless plunder of the environment without adequate remediation".

According to ERA , "from the text of the policy, obviously the AU is yet to consider looking inwards for value addition. African leaders are still focusing on extraction mainly for export markets in Europe and other parts of the world, thus condemning the African continent to doom and an unequal exchange and use of natural resources. Sadly, this has led to a point where we have over-exploitation in the global South and a corresponding over-consumption in the global north."

Ojo, however, explained that, since the policy only serves as guiding framework for concrete action at national, regional and continental levels, "some of its recommendations should be strengthened".

Continuing, he said, "one critical section is that which relates to communities affected by mining. The policy must address key principles like prior informed consent of mining communities in relation to the commencement of mining operations; prompt, adequate and fair compensation for loss of means of livelihood; protection from negative environmental impacts, and the effective support for communities to participate in mining- related economic activities."

He said concerned environmental rights groups in the continent are of the view that since the AMV lacks mechanisms to address these problems, "it is better that the resources on the African continent are left on the ground, untapped in order to prevent violent conflicts, wastage, plunder, and wanton environmental degradation".

"We are aligning with the position of civil society and community-based groups that, close to a decade of widely-trumpeted dramatic economic growth figures have not translated into significant improvement in the living conditions of the vast majority of the people. Instead, the economic growth has been harvested mainly by the transnational corporations that dominate the extractive sector.

"Our position remains that indigenisation and nationalisation measures that would ensure primacy of local interests and livelihoods are crucial to the delivery of benefits. Unfortunately these are the ingredients missing from the AMV that we want the AU to consider and introduce into the policy for the greater good of the African continent," Ojo insisted.