

Ongoing Projects

Youth-Led Mangrove Restoration and Environmental Justice in Nigeria's Niger Delta

Dr. Udoh is currently leading a transformative educational program that mobilizes secondary school students (ages 13-18) across Nigeria's Niger Delta to become certified ecological restoration practitioners while healing their homeland's degraded ecosystems, comprising mangrove forests, freshwater swamps, and lowland rainforests. This project addresses critical regional needs in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. With environmental justice at its core, the project proposes a decolonial framework that seeks to advocate for ecological knowledge among indigenous populations, impoverished people, and marginalized communities in the Niger Delta - a biodiversity hotspot under siege, characterized by several ecological zones with rich diversity of plant and animal species. This project utilizes an innovative Three-Pillar Learning Model. Pillar 1: Ecological Restoration Science (Hands-On) - where students establish restoration sites across three ecosystem types (mangrove, freshwater, and rainforest). Pillar 2: Environmental Justice & Community Action. Pillar 3: Indigenous (Ecological) Knowledge Integration.

While mangrove restoration projects exist in the Niger Delta, most are adult-focused or externally driven, single-ecosystem targeted (mangroves only), not education-centered or youth-development focused, disconnected from environmental justice advocacy, and limited in addressing oil pollution's root causes. Our project uniquely combines youth education and employment, multi-ecosystem restoration (mangrove, freshwater, and rainforest), environmental justice advocacy, indigenous knowledge preservation, and long-term community stewardship. By aiming to transform environmental devastation into profound learning opportunities, our project fosters youth agency by empowering students as ecological scientists and environmental justice advocates. It utilizes the place-based educational strategy, as it is deeply rooted in Niger Delta's unique ecological and cultural context. It is also driven by systems thinking by connecting ecology, health, justice, economics, and culture, and uses a scalable model, which makes it replicable across other oil-extraction zones globally. It demonstrates an urgent need by targeting one of Africa's most threatened biodiversity hotspots. It is also community-centered by building from existing grassroots movements. The Niger Delta's future depends on its youth. This project makes them the solution.