

# Of Jagaban, the Church Rat and Poisoned Holy Communion – The Energy Transition Versus Energy Addition Debate

## PROEM

The clamour for energy transition, especially by the West, has intensified, in the last few years; save for an interim period forced by the energy crises resulting from the Russia/ Ukraine war. For clarity, energy transition is, especially in relation to energy utilization, a shift towards a continuous reduction in the use of fossil fuels to non-fossil sources with the intention to have the World's energy needs ultimately met, primarily, via non-carbon alternatives.

From a purely idealistic environmental point of view, energy transition is altruistic. However, from a global realistic point of view, maybe not; particularly from a developing or less developed country's point of view - countries looking to industrialise, require massive energy especially those who have large deposits of fossil fuels they may use to industrialize.

Part of the what the West has sought to do, is to achieve "net zero greenhouse gas emissions". Net-zero greenhouse gas emissions means the volume of greenhouse gases discharged into the atmosphere would correspond with, or in other words, will be equal to the volume of greenhouse gas emissions being removed or captured from the atmosphere. The International Energy Agency ("IEA"), a purely Western entity, continues to insist that measures such as carbon capture and sequestration will not give the desired result as emissions continue to increase. Rather, in the IEA's view, there should be an immediate and substantial move to renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, and hydro. The foregoing would appear laudable or is it?

### An Altruistic or Self-Serving Plan?

Many may think the push for net-zero greenhouse emissions is altruistic, I say it is self-serving, at best, and you may ask how so? According to the IEA, some of the critical steps for achieving the net-zero greenhouse emissions status include that there should be no new sale of fossil fuel boilers (used for heating, power generation, etc.) after the year 2025; no new investments in new fossil fuel supply (including oil, gas, coal, and bitumen) after the year 2021; and no new internal combustion engine car sale (that is your typical car that uses premium motor spirit or diesel -recall that over 90% of Africans use such vehicles) after the year 2035 and note, this idea is to be a global one.

Added to the foregoing is that 60% of the cars to be sold by 2030 should be electric cars and 50% of heavy truck sales should be electric, from the year 2035. In all, it is expected that for success to be achieved, there must be energy access to all, within seven (7) years, that is, by the year 2030!

These ideas sound quite grandiose when you consider that many African countries are struggling, despite being endowed with enormous fossil fuel deposits and can barely provide sufficient electricity or heating for their populace, let alone the deployment and use of more expensive renewables and increased spending to provide subsidies for renewable energy. With investments needed to achieve the net-zero result being around \$5 trillion annually by the year 2030, the plan would appear a pipe dream. Without international assistance, support and investment, especially in Africa, this will not be achieved. It is also germane to note that, to succeed, such investments cannot be implemented only in reasonably attractive African economies, but the entirety of the continent regardless of the state of the relevant economy.

Also, the writer is of the view that the idea of energy transition (especially its acceleration) is self-serving because much of the Western world achieved industrial growth, economic growth, and development using fossil fuels. Not just fossil fuels, but 'heavy' fossil fuels, at a time where much of the developing world which holds a large percentage of the hydrocarbon deposits was not ready for industrialization. It is clear that fossil fuels fundamentally empowered America and indeed, the Western world to achieve industrial growth during what has been referred to, as the industrial revolution. Fossil fuels like coal, powered technologies, amplified the strength, stamina, and precision of workers in the developed world making the labour force of countries like the United States, amongst the most productive in the World.

According to Sciencing.com, the main resource used to produce energy during the Industrial Revolution was coal. The opportunities for energy utilization in Africa are increasing, driven by industrialization, digitization, and changing expectations of energy consumers mostly comprised of artisans, self-generators, and industrial power utilities all driving towards powering the continent (i.e. Africa) with a population of nearly 1.4 billion people. There is also new infrastructure being built for hydrocarbons, especially gas utilization.



This is the time, Africa is moving towards energy-powered industrialization cum economic growth and development, with factories springing up in places like Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Ghana. Thus, it will be inequitable to expect the same measures around the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to be taken in these countries as may be the case in places like the United States, China or indeed Russia or even India. No African country ranks amongst the top 10 emitters of greenhouse gases and South Africa is the only African country, amongst the top 20 gas emitting countries in the World. According to the United Nations, Africa is the continent worst affected by climate change, despite contributing the least to same.

Apart from the economic and industrial growth some of these African countries are experiencing, the hydrocarbon-rich ones amongst them, mostly rely on revenue from hydrocarbons to sustain their economies and ensure that the citizenry can live, at least modestly. Sadly, Western governments and multilateral lenders pledged to stop all funding for overseas fossil fuel projects at COP 26 in the year 2022. Things aren't particularly great with many of these countries and things will get much worse, where the plans (especially the pledge at COP 26) are implemented to detail, as these countries do not have the wherewithal to replace, anytime soon, their fossil fuels-based economy and productive activities with renewables. It will mean, in the words of the IEA, a total transformation of the energy systems that underpin the economies of many African countries.

What then convinces one the most about the unrealistic nature of the plan is that for the plan to succeed, there must be universal access to energy by the year 2030 and clearly, as far as Africa is concerned, this is not realistic! Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, cannot guarantee access to energy to even half of their population, let alone universal access to energy. All said, it would appear from a developing country or less developed country point of view, that the net-zero plan is more self-serving than altruistic.

The Russia Ukraine War and its Effects on Decarbonization  
The West has set targets for us to abandon our mainstay, our likely source of industrialization, power, weapon of negotiations- our gas, our crude! Yet, at a little provocation (the Russia-Ukraine war and the threats by Russia) they all-Germany, UK (and some Scandinavians) began looking to go back to 'very dirty coal'! Isn't the Lord good?  
The net-zero, decarbonization and energy transition debate would appear only a conversation around political correctness/ political convenience borne out of self-serving motives! Especially if the same advocates began to look to 'dirty coal' for energy security immediately their security of energy supply was threatened. With the posture taken by the West- especially European countries, in the wake of the threat to their energy security, African countries now need to adopt energy policies which are Afro-centric and somewhat, self-serving and about our interest and not political correctness or desire to please the West that doesn't really care about us or really mean what it touts!

### In Comes Jagaban's Intervention

Speaking at the Arewa Joint Committee's forum in October 2022, Nigeria's next President, fondly referred to as the Jagaban, used the metaphor of "the church rat" and "poisoned holy communion" whilst expressing his views around the climate change debate, in Nigeria. In his words, "It's a question of how do you prevent a church rat from eating poisoned holy communion." Metaphorically, Nigeria is the church rat as 'church rats are generally understood to be poor- similar to Nigeria's present predicament, whilst the poisoned holy communion, is the climate, which has been positioned (damaged) by human productive activities, especially through the release of carbons generated by fossil fuels.

In his Trump-like view, and I think rightly so, he (Jagaban) concludes that the West needs to guarantee our finances and work with us, to reduce carbon emissions together with the attendant greenhouse effect of climate change. If this isn't the case, it will be difficult, if not completely impossible, for Nigeria to comply with the World's decarbonization targets.

One way the rich Western countries can guarantee our finances is by ensuring more funding to developing nations' climate change adaptation, rather than the norm of supporting almost exclusively, renewable energy projects, which are by themselves very good, but only stop at reducing carbon emissions. While renewable energy projects are useful, much more funding is required by Africa, for climate change adaptation. This should particularly be the case, as the continent generates less than three per cent (3%) of the World's carbon emissions. Africa does very frantically require investments in adaptation infrastructure and the retrofitting of what already does exist, to help reduce the impacts of climate change, which include flooding and bush fires, which were aplenty in the year 2022.

To give effect to the foregoing, Western countries should meet their commitments to the \$100 billion dollars fund for climate adaptation and mitigation in the developing world. This is especially pertinent, as the adaptation and mitigation interventions became necessary, due to the harm caused by the activities related to industrialization by the West.

There is also the other matter of the security of both energy supply and demand in Africa. Whilst a number of African countries are base energy rich, they have security of energy supply challenges, as they do not have sufficient infrastructure to refine or convert the energy resources to usable forms or to even transport/ transit same, from where produced, to where same is required. For example, and as NJ Ayuk correctly put it, "Nigeria's priority should be to provide access to electricity to those without electricity, and ensure that those who already have access to electricity enjoy reliable power supply".

A large portion of the Nigerian population, for example, doesn't have electric power supply, at all as they are not connected to the electricity grid with almost everyone else that is connected to the grid, having incessant power outages. For NJ Ayuk, who I agree with, the talk in Nigeria should be energy addition and not transition as with our abundant energy resources, darkness has mostly been our lot, with either the complete non-availability of electric power or incessant power cuts in areas where same is available.

The above notwithstanding, we cannot leave it all to the West. Steps we need to take to combat the climate change challenge within our resources, include natural methods like wetlands and other nature-based options together with structural engineering measures, such as increasing the height of bridges to counter the effect of rise in sea level, are critical, such that Africa, itself, is not regarded as complicit or non-challant.

### More Altruistic Alternatives anybody?

First, the writer is of the view that we should protect that environment and ultimately the World, for future generations. However, it may not be equitable to expect that countries like China and Ghana, for example, should have the same level of obligations to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Countries in Africa should ultimately reduce same; but should do this, more slowly and have up to three times the period, countries like the United States of America and China do have, considering their population, level of greenhouse gas emissions, and extent of industrialization or development.



What should be done instead is to encourage more carbon capture and sequestration technologies and capabilities. There should be the encouragement of practices that will have countries utilize flare gas or gas that would ordinarily have been flared. There should also be financial incentives to develop technology around concepts such as clean coal and clean coal technology. Then more and more countries should be encouraged to act like Qatar which has placed more emphasis on gas, which is a much cleaner fossil fuel.

For the writer, the question many fossil-rich developing country ought to be asking is, what the West wants them to do with their enormous fossil fuel deposits? Since fossil fuels are finite, the world may need to wait for same to nearly run out first, whilst steps continue to gradually replace fossils with renewables and other clean energy options, but thirty (30) years won't cut it! We cant completely or nearly completely, in Africa, phase-out fossil fuels of fossil fuels- based productive activities or even products like cars.

For a country like Nigeria, whilst seeking to transition, it does make sense for the country to pause at the 'gas bus stop' for a while, before gradually moving to full-on renewables, especially considering that gas is also quite clean and a country like Nigeria does have in abundance. We require energy justice and addition by being allowed to add value and in tune derive value from our abundant natural gas resources.

A number of African countries are rich in gas resources and are newly developing gas infrastructure. Some of them are also looking at gas monetization projects and infrastructural development like the popular AKK project in Nigeria, to achieve gas-centric economic development. A country like Nigeria has declared the years 2021- 2030 as the Decade of Gas to promote the use of resources it does have in abundance. The option for such countries will appear to be to first apply a stop-gap of gas utilization before gradually transiting to renewable energy sources. The writer refers to that, as the concept of a gas bus stop. Also, increasingly, countries like Nigeria are developing programs to utilize what would otherwise have been gas emissions and amongst such programs are the gas flare commercialization program. This is a local Nigerian solution to wastage and environmental pollution. This, thus suggests that local solutions may be found more effective, especially when implemented as collaborative approaches. Same may be more fruitful than what may be considered a somewhat myopic approach, which seeks to keep the developing and under-developed world in energy poverty.

## CONCLUSION

For many of the developing and less developed countries which are rich in fossil fuels, especially natural gas, rather than be dictated to by the West, it does appear to make sense for each country, particularly in Africa, to take steps in reducing emissions; in a manner and at a pace that takes each country's own peculiar municipal or local circumstances, into consideration. Such circumstances include each country's energy needs and use, together with the state of its economy and type of economic growth it requires, without forgetting what is most advantageous for such a country to power its economic growth. Finally, as suggested above, a more realistic, yet collaborative approach, may be more effective, rather than a self-serving one that appears to prefer to keep the developing and under-developed world in energy and economic poverty with a large measure of reliance on Western support.

It is a great idea to have a more robust energy mix, but I don't think it is smart of countries like Nigeria to jump on the bandwagon completely. It is germane, to think self-interest, think energy federalism. We shouldn't let anyone- World power, fleece or as they say on 'Twitter Street', gaslight us. As Ayuk finally stated and the writer agrees, that "we need a just transition and energy additions, not a Western view of transition that has nothing to do with Africa,"

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