

17<sup>th</sup> April, 2008

Mr. Helder MUTELA,  
FAO Representative, Nigeria  
P.M.B. 396, Garki,  
Abuja.

Dear Sir,

**ONE WRONG STEP TOO MANY: FAO SUPPORTS UNSUSTAINABLE SHRIMP FARMING AND FOOD INSECURITY INVESTMENTS IN NIGERIA.**

It is with deep sense of commitment that we are endeared to the founding goal of the food and agriculture organization (FAO), **“helping to build a world without hunger”**. Our passion for the FAO policy thrust of eradicating global hunger notwithstanding, to say the least, we are indelibly shocked by the organization’s recent endorsement of Sulalanka Nigeria Limited proposal to establish shrimp farms in Southern Nigeria, especially in the fragile Niger Delta basin.

As reputable as the FAO, and given its repository of technical expertise, one would supposedly expect the world body to situate the proposed shrimp culture project within the context of her primary concern of ensuring rural food security, which convincingly would have led to an outright rejection of the project proposal. Farmed shrimp are never consumed by the poor, but exclusively sold to luxury consumers in domestic and international markets.

With utmost simplification of the highly complicated project, you (FAO) had advocated that farmed shrimp production and export to the north will diversify the Nigerian mono product economy. This position, we believe, you took unilaterally based on foreign exchange earning that will be a preserve of the investor, and as usual, few corrupt officials in the corridors of power. Regrettably, you abandoned the concerns of poor Nigerians, the peoples of the Niger Delta in particular whose soaring hunger FAO brief is to alleviate.

Sustainable diversification of the Nigerian economy can be achieved on balanced development; the intervention initiatives must be compatible with the natural environment. This includes eradicating poverty by empowering the people to use their strengths and assets like the mangrove to improve their livelihoods. This point has been succinctly buttressed by one of your sister organizations, United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP). In her 2006 Niger Delta Human Development Report, UNDP stresses that the environment is very important for the Niger Delta people. "Nearly 60% of the delta Population depends on the natural environment – living and non-living for their livelihoods".

Evidence from Latin America and Asia Points to the fact that shrimp farming is not sustainable, and is very unfriendly to the environment. Sulalanka proposal to farm marine black tiger shrimp is targeting the remaining stands of mangrove in the Niger Delta which the livelihood of the delta people greatly depend on. Like elsewhere around the globe where coastal shrimp aquaculture is practiced, significant mangrove area will be converted to shrimp ponds. The proposal by Sulalanka to establish shrimp culture facilities along inland water courses is bedeviled by more mangrove losses since mangrove predominate in sheltered inland environments. Such overwhelming mangrove wastage which certainly will be associated with the farming project, negates the above pro-poor mechanism of subtle bottom-up community development, and will strip local communities of their age-long livelihood dependency on mangrove. Mangrove is the first line of defense of littoral communities. It protects shoreline against coastal erosion; provide fuel wood, diverse seafood, etc.

It is common knowledge that scientists have estimated that 3/4 of the tropical world's fish catch is dependent on mangrove forests for food or habitat. Mangrove forests serve as nurseries and breeding grounds for both near-shore and off-shore marine species. Specifically, the mangrove of the Niger Delta has been adjudged a key zone for the conservation of the western coast of Africa due to its extraordinary biodiversity. Again, studies have shown that about 60% of the fishes in the Gulf of Guinea breed in the mangrove of the Niger Delta. Does it make sense to plunder wild fisheries that had sustained humanity for ages for the sake of a monolithic, capitalist-driven shrimp culture investment?

Already, Niger Delta mangrove is threatened and gradually shrinking due to oil spill toxicity, over logging, spread of nypa palm, clearance for the passage of oil pipes and seismic lines, swamp reclamation for urban development, etc. Expanding the mangrove loss by converting it to shrimp ponds and the toxic antibiotic-laden wastewater arising therefrom, would, in synergy with other threats outlined above, constitute the proverbial last straw that would break the camel's back. Once the mangrove of the delta dies, the people's livelihoods go with

it! Could the FAO accept such devastating trend, especially given her towering pro-poor, hunger-eradicating posture?

The FAO code of conduct for responsible fisheries, in Article 9, states that aquaculture development should not negatively impact on artisanal fisheries. How do you reconcile the above with the fact that Sulalanka shrimp project will ultimately lead to negative effects on swamp fisheries, inland and coastal wild fisheries.

In the purported "Stakeholders" workshop organized by Sulalanka in Lagos, Nigeria, the FAO was quoted (**see Daily Trust and Thisday Newspapers, 19 March, 2008**) as saying: unemployed youths who take to Okada riding and other tedious manual labour should avail themselves of the opportunity of the new technique for shrimp farming. Again, drawing from experiences in Latin America and Asia, we make bold to say unequivocally that local employment generated by shrimp farms is only temporary, requiring high labour inputs only to construct the ponds. After initial facility development is completed, the shrimp culture industry turns capital-intensive with the hitherto labourers becoming unemployed. Furthermore, representatives of targeted host communities as primary stakeholders did not take part in the Sulalanka-FAO Stakeholders workshop. This conspicuous exclusion of the local people preempts the many disadvantages the shrimp aquaculture project has in store for the former. Worse still, to the best of our knowledge environmental impact assessment studies have not been conducted for the project in line with best practices that the FAO Preach to justify the feasibility of the project in harmony with current principle of sustainable development.

Given the above sacrosanct reasons, we, therefore, ask that the FAO should without delay withdraw her support, which Sulalanka presently enjoys in her bid to further impoverish the people and degrade the environment of the Niger Delta through capitalist-driven shrimp culture.

Many thanks for your anticipated co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

**NENIBARINI ZABBEY**

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