
Nigeria: People protect mangroves against shrimp farming

The Nigerian area of saline mangrove swamps stretches through the coastal states with 504,800 hectares in the Niger Delta and 95,000 hectares in Cross River State. The mangrove forests of Nigeria rank as the largest in Africa and as the third largest in the world.

The Niger Delta has provided the best conditions for the thriving of vegetation on the Nigerian coast. Many of these areas are truly representative of untouched mangrove forests, as well as being reserves that protect unique and threatened valuable species. By some estimates, over 60% of fishes caught between the Gulf of Guinea and Angola breed in the mangrove belt of the Niger delta.

Typically, these are fragile ecosystems which can be easily destroyed by unsustainable human interventions such as oil exploration, exploitation and transportation processes.

The inhabitants of historical settlements in the Niger Delta depend on fish and other mangrove resources for their livelihood. Mangrove wood is still a multi-purpose resource for fish stakes, fish traps, boat building, boat paddles, yam stakes, fencing, carvings, building timber and fuel.

Although there is an institutional framework for the management of forests and wildlife, existing legislation is either obsolete or ineffectively enforced. Some areas have been proposed for wetland conservation but none of the proposals have been implemented.

Current problems for mangrove conservation include urban development, coastal erosion, oil pollution, gas flaring as well as the replacement of native mangroves by the exotic palm *Nypa fruticans*, which has been identified as an ecological disaster deserving urgent attention.

Now, a new menace looms on the Nigerian horizon: industrial shrimp farming. Sponsored by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a branch of the World Bank, the Shell Petroleum Company of Nigeria Contractors will receive funds to develop this activity with the support of the Nigerian President.

The Mangrove Forest Conservation Society of Nigeria, together with other NGOs and CBOs --Rights Action, Friends of the Earth Nigeria, Eni-Owei _OU-Degema, ECO-out reach, Agape is a birth right, Niger Delta Project for Environment, Human rights and Development (NDPEHRD), Civil Liberty organization, Ijaw Council for Human Right (ICHR), Niger Delta Protect League (NDPL), Okoloma Forum and Kalio-Ama Ecological Foundation-- are opposing the project and propose a rejection/moratorium on the IFC Credit Loan facilities to Shell Contractors without consultation. They will also draw up a programme to reverse presidential or any other support for shrimp farming.