Chad-Cameroon: the World Bank again shows who it serves

Facing strong opposition from civil society representatives, the World Bank recently approved a controversial oil and pipeline project led by Exxon-Mobil, that will link oil fields in Chad to Cameroon's Atlantic coast. The project sponsors also include Chevron and Petronas, the Malaysian state company. The total cost of the megaproject will reach U$S 3.7 billion and it will be one of the largest of its kind ever undertaken in sub-Saharan Africa.

Even though the Bank argues that the project includes a programme to direct new revenues to support socioeconomic development in Chad and that environmental and social impacts of the project will be especially considered and periodically monitored, environmental and human rights groups emphasise that this megaproject will forcibly displace villagers along the 673-mile length of the pipeline as well as the Chadian villagers living near where the 300 oil wells are to be located, harm forest wildlife in the affected areas and contribute to further corruption at the government level in both countries. An added problem of the project is that it might spark the renewal of armed conflict in the oil-producing region and lead to severe human rights violations. The claim for a two-year moratorium to the project in order for Chad to develop a proper legal framework to handle the revenues and for Cameroon to establish environmental safeguards was ignored.

Taking into account the negative social and environmental performance of the actors involved in the project, as well as the proven effects of this kind of megaprojects undertaken in the South in the name of "progress", the idea enthusiastically expressed by the Bank, according to which the project is "an unprecedented framework to transform oil wealth into direct benefits to the poor, the vulnerable and the environment" is really difficult to believe. Unless the Bank considers oil companies to be poor and vulnerable and that oil exploitation

and transport can in some way benefit the environment. In sum, the Bank has unfortunately once again shown who it serves.

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