Nigeria: Cross River's forests need your help

Between 70 and 80% of Nigeria's original forests have disappeared and nowadays the area of its territory occupied by forests is reduced to 12%, even if the entire country is located in the humid tropics. All of the country's remaining primary rainforest watersheds, covering about 7,000 km2, are located in Cross River state. This region also contains 1,000 km2 of mangrove and swamp forest, being oil exploitation an important cause of their degradation and destruction (see WRM Bulletin 22).

Commercial logging and hunting of wildlife are important threats to Nigerian primary rainforest and its dependent species. Cross River state is very rich in biodiversity. It harbours several species of primates, migratory and resident birds, and 950 species of butterflies -a quarter of the number to be found in tropical Africa- 100 of which are endemic. Many of Africa's rarest trees, such as mahogany, ironwood, camwood and mimosup, grow in this forest, that is connected to a larger forest area in neighbouring Cameroon. Exports of roundwood of valuable species -such as afzelia (Afzelia africana), ekki, idigbo (Terminalia ivorensis), obeche, and teak (Tectona grandis)- to Europe, the USA and Japan is depleting Cross River's forests.

Social aspects concerning the region are also relevant. NGOCE -a coalition of Cross River conservation groups- is promoting activities for a sustainable use of the forests to the benefit of the local dwellers, as an alternative to the present depredation by foreign actors. Among them: education programmes for the local communities regarding the importance of a healthy forest to their self-sufficient lifestyle, assistance to the communities in developing alternative income-generating projects that will alleviate pressure on the forest, and support to fundraising efforts and provision of technical assistance to NGOs.

Recently Cross River state's new Governor, Mr. Donald Duke, suspended all forest logging concessions that were granted under the previous administration. The cancellation of logging licenses is connected with the reckless manner in which the forest reserves had been exploited and a response to the continuous demands of environmental and social NGOs, as the above named NGOCE.

An international campaign is in course aimed at supporting these conservation efforts. Those interested in contributing to it can address Cross River's Governor, asking him to permanently revoke WEMPCO's forest concessions and wood processing permits, which are currently a major threat to the state's rainforest. Hong Kong-based WEMPCO plans to log and export hundreds of thousands of board-feet of Nigerian lumber. Indicate that sustainable, small-scale, diversified community businesses are far healthier for communities and their economies than cut-and-run export schemes, and that tree monocultures absolutely cannot replace complex and rich forest ecosystems. Your messages are to be send to:

Mr. Donald Duke
Executive Governor of Cross River State

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