
Menacing oil exploitation in Chad and Cameroon

An international consortium consisting of Exxon, Shell and ELF is planning a multi-billion dollar oil exploitation project that will involve territories of Chad and Cameroon. It is feared that the project brings with it very serious environmental and social risks that may create another Ogoniland, Nigeria's oil-producing region marked by environmental devastation and brutal Human Rights violations. The project plans the development of the Doba oil-fields in southern Chad, and a 600 mile pipeline through Cameroon to transport oil to an Atlantic port for its export. Public funding from international development agencies -mainly the World Bank- is needed to realize the project. The WB intends to fund it both with IDA credits -supposed to help the poorest countries- and through the International Finance Corporation, that supports private sector companies directly.

The WB claims that the project will alleviate poverty because revenue from the oil for the Government of Chad and royalties for that of Cameroon for the use of the pipeline would be invested in poverty programmes. However, this strategy has clearly little credibility, since both governments have shown a complete lack of commitment to poverty alleviation and besides are known for their lack of transparency in their financial transactions. So the allocation of aid dollars for these kinds of projects actually diverts scarce resources away from investments for social welfare.

From the environmental point of view perspectives are also negative. The projected pipeline will pass through ecologically fragile rainforest areas, including one that is the home of a Pigmy minority of traditional hunters and gatherers. Deforestation, wildlife poaching and the loss of farmland of local villagers, together with the danger of groundwater contamination and pollution of river systems through the expected leaking of oil from the pipeline itself, are points of grave concern.

Source: Korinna Horta. Environmental Defense Fund. May 1997.