

## ***Position Paper for the Food and Agriculture Organization***

Water scarcity is a key problem in Africa. Because of its growing population, Nigeria is fully aware of the huge inequalities in water resources and appreciates to debate on the issue. Nigeria expresses deep concerns about water scarcity, which is directly or indirectly an obstacle to social and economic development.

### ***I Water scarcity in Nigeria***

Populations in Nigeria face the issue of water scarcity in different ways. Nigeria is indeed geographically divided into two areas, the extreme North being a part of the Saharan desert while the South has an equatorial climate. The landscape and the vegetation are significantly diverse according to the latitude. There are rain forests in the south, woodland and short grass savanna in the middle and desert in the North. Were the Nigerian population in the South not so important, water would not be such a priority on all the territory. Nigeria is indeed the most populated country in Africa, with more than 140 million inhabitants. Even there shortage could occur in big cities like Lagos. More concerning is the quality of water, which is unhealthy in many places. Nigeria has a frontier with Lake Chad and has two main rivers – namely the Niger and the Benue – which form the biggest delta in the world: the Niger delta.

This disparity in water resources between the north and the south can be a ground for conflicts. Indeed, Nigeria counts more than 250 ethnic groups, among which three are predominant: the Hausas (North), the Yoruba (South West) and the Ibo (South East). The former British colonialists privileged the Ibo ethnic group against the others to rule the country. So, jealousy because of oil resources and power can occur, that was indeed the reason for the Biafra war (1967-1970). The after effects of this civil war still linger. Water can also be a risk for stability in the region, because of the huge inequalities within the country.

### ***II Impact on social development***

Diseases come from poor quality water. According to the National Access to Water Supply and Sanitation Programme, only 30% of the Nigerian population has access to safe drinking water. That results in a high mortality due to diarrhea, cholera and malaria. The government assesses that 55% of the deaths in Nigeria have a direct link to the poor quality of water. Moreover, the education of young girls is neglected because they spend most of their time bringing water home. Nigeria therefore recommends that everyone should have access to water within 2 kilometers, which would help to prevent lots of riots as well as bridge the economic gap between the rural and urban population. That is one of the reasons why the National Water Resources Institute, which was created in 1979, works on sanitation projects in order to increase the quantity of drinking water available to the population.

Water scarcity is also a source of inequalities between the North and the South of the country: given that 60% of the population works in agriculture and that harvests demand high levels of water, water scarcity significantly cuts down the revenue of the major part of the population. Consequently, farmers tend to leave the country for the towns. Such a rural exodus leads to high levels of unemployment and to the development of poverty, with the creation of slums. Such a phenomenon is likely to keep going over the next few years, as the population's growth increases the need for water. Nigeria fears some revolts and "climate refugees".

### ***III Impact on economic development***

Water scarcity is first a hindrance to the development of agriculture, in particular in the North of the country as this is the region the most oriented towards agriculture. Lack of water prevents the country from securing stable harvests and also leads to an underutilization of the land. Nigeria is therefore unable to secure its food self-sufficiency and is highly dependent on imports. That can create lots of problems, as was seen in 2007 with the doubling of the cereals' price due to poor wheat harvest in developed countries and huge investments in biofuels.

The immediate solution to water scarcity seems to be the development of irrigation projects. However, even though such projects do exist – such as in the surroundings of Lake Chad – they do not seem to be enough as they create uncertainties for the near future. For instance, they caused the loss of 75% of the lake's area over the last forty years as they were combined with the ever-increasing population of the region and a low wetness. A solution to this problem may nevertheless lie in the so-called Transaqua project, whose main sponsor is Nigeria, and which aims at diverting a part of the Oubangui River in order to provide Lake Chad with some of its water.

Even though Nigeria benefits from the revenues linked to its oil resources – which allowed the GDP to double in the last years – the providing of water to its population seems the best way to alleviate poverty. Nigeria has got a very high potential economic growth but needs to solve its economic inequalities to achieve it, and finding a solution to water scarcity is fully part of the process.