

## Shell in Nigeria

# Biodiversity

## Working with communities to protect forest reserves

The Niger Delta is rich in biodiversity, but a rising population, unsustainable consumption patterns and economic growth threaten its abundant natural resources. In 2006, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) helped local groups including government, forest communities, other energy companies, regulators and NGOs to develop Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) to conserve two forest reserves – Gele-Gele and Urhonigbe, in Edo State.

The Gele-Gele reserve covers 363 square kilometres (sq. km) with a range of habitats varying from freshwater swamp forest to tropical rain forest. The Urhonigbe reserve covers 308 sq. km. Without urgent intervention the Gele-Gele reserve could disappear, largely due to uncontrolled logging – a widespread problem in many of the forests of the Niger Delta. The strict nature reserve – or forest core – of Urhonigbe is still relatively undisturbed. Farmers have encroached on the rest of the reserve however, significantly degrading the land.



SPDC has partnered with the Edo State Government, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and the communities living in and around the reserves to implement the biodiversity action plans. In 2007, the Edo State government passed a biodiversity law – proposed by Shell – to support these efforts. The law made it illegal, for instance, for the government Forestry Department to grant timber concessions to loggers. It also transferred forest management rights and responsibilities to community-based management and grass-root consultative committees established by the Shell BAP.

The success of the plans depends in part on whether local communities see value and decide to take ownership and responsibility for them. In 2007 we worked with all 33 communities in the reserves to establish community-based forest management institutions.

In 2008, these institutions replanted more than 80 hectares of the degraded Urhonigbe reserve with tens of thousands of seedlings of indigenous species of trees including mahogany and teak. In the same year, they also marked out the Urhonigbe reserve boundary, and created fire breaks together with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation. They also delineated the reserve into core, buffer and transitional zones to help control and manage it effectively.

Further work is still needed to convince communities of the importance of preserving the forests. In addition, enforcement of the biodiversity law is weak. As a result, progress with the projects has been slower than we hoped. We have had several meetings with government officials, communities and the forest management committees to discuss the challenges and agree solutions.



One is to help communities develop livelihoods that reduce their dependence on the forest. To do so, SPDC has launched a micro-credit programme, which in 2008 gave \$38,000 of loans to 111 people in 10 communities. Before the loans were given out beneficiaries were trained in how to run small businesses and grow seedlings to replant degraded forests. They have since established a range of small-scale enterprises including trading, snail and rabbit farming and pineapple cultivation.

Despite the challenges, the Gele-Gele and Urhonigbe projects have provided a valuable experience, which we plan to apply in new biodiversity action plans elsewhere in the delta. The government of Akwa Ibom state wants to launch a new plan there.

More information on Shell's operations in Nigeria can be found at [www.shellnigeria.com](http://www.shellnigeria.com)

> Patrick Ekpo-Otu – Deputy Governor, Akwa Ibom State Government

"The Shell biodiversity team visit to Akwa Ibom State is a welcome development. Shell is demonstrating leadership and commitment in the conservation of our natural resources and sustainable development in the Niger Delta. It is very important to raise awareness of the dangers of destroying our forests, ecosystems and the biodiversity of our land. We, the government and people of this state, welcome Shell's initiative and pledge total cooperation from all relevant government departments."

> SPDC runs Nigeria's largest private oil and gas production joint venture on behalf of the government-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (55%), Shell (30%), Total (10%) and Agip (5%).