

## Interview with Fataï AINA

*Executive Director of the Living Lakes partner organisation Amis de l'Afrique Francophone-Bénin (AMAF-BENIN) at Lake Nokoué, Benin*

### 1. Question: Which are the most severe problems and challenges that Lake Nokoué in Benin is facing?

Lake Nokoué faces serious environmental problems and challenges related to the human activities in the region.

There was a dramatic increase of liquid and solid waste dumped directly in the lake coming from the surrounding domestic households and produced by the upstream industry. Furthermore the international market "Dantokpa" held in Cotonou, the biggest city of Benin, is an enormous pollution factor because of its high trades and users number.

Many people live in houses built on stilts in the lake and the lack of a proper sewer system is an important pollution factor.

Moreover, the trade of "kpayo", an adulterated and cheaper fuel coming from Nigeria, is causing serious damage to the environment: to give you an idea, this gas satisfies the 80% of the national need. This trade is partially done by boat using the rivers and the Lake Nokoué itself and causes a big problem because of the gasoline dumped into the lake by the engines and the drop because of accidents of "kpayo" into the water.

### 2. Question: How are humans and nature affected by these problems?

Lake Nokoué is one of the main sources of fish in Benin and its increasing pollution threatens the environment, aquatic fauna and puts human health at risk.

In fact the local population, besides suffering of Malaria, has to face many diseases such as diarrhoea, schistosomiasis, cholera, dysentery and typhus that are caused by this tragic situation. Moreover the consequences of those diseases lead to death an important number of local people every year, especially children below the age of 5.

### 3. Question: Which are the main sources of livelihoods for the local population at Lake Nokoué?

#### **Answer:**

The main livelihoods of the Nokoué Lake populations are fishing, agriculture and fish farming. It should be noted that even this last practice endangers the lake environment: Intensive agriculture in fact, especially in the Ouémé Valley, is done by some farmers using chemical fertilizers although the morphology of the valley is already rich and favourable to agricultural practice. It is therefore necessary to raise awareness and educate communities, especially farmers, about changing practices and behaviour in order to prevent further damage for the ecosystem and the environment.

### 4. Question: Is Lake Nokoué a drinking water resource?

#### **Answer:**

The majority of the inhabitants of the Lake Nokoué municipalities (approximately 300,000 inhabitants) use the lake's water as a source for drinking water and more in general for household purposes.

Even though there are no sewage treatment facilities on Lake Nokoué and on the Cotonou Lagoon, the local population uses the water for cooking after boiling it, wrongly believing that this method is sufficient to disinfect it and make it no longer dangerous for their health.

#### 5. Question: Is the local population aware of problems at Lake Nokoué?

Yes, the local population is aware of Lake Nokoué's problems but given their disadvantage and precarious situation, cannot do anything about it. We could also say that the local population itself is one of the pollution factor: they in fact dump their garbage directly into the water and along with that they have built toilets right on the shore without any wastewater treatment system.

#### 6. Question: What are possible solutions for the challenges at Lake Nokoué?

**Answer:**

In order to solve Lake Nokoué's problems there are several actions that should be taken:

- Restauration of the banks by cleaning them from garbage and putting in place garbage cans.
- Sensitisation of the local communities, including industrial enterprises and traders and users of the international "Dantokpa" market, which dump industrial waste, waste water and waste into the lake.
- Starting a programme of reforestation of the Mangrove forest that will help to stabilise the lake's fragile ecosystem.
- It is necessary to build wastewater treatment plants on Lake Nokoué and other sanitation facilities (toilets, latrines, etc.) for the communities.
- Set up local eco-guards or get the authorities to set up a riverbank surveillance policy.
- The government of Benin must provide for repressive measures and sanctions against lake polluters, etc.

#### 7. Question: Which is the role and what are main activities of AMAF-Benin? Who are other important actors concerning the protection of Lake Nokoué?

**Answer:**

The role of AMAF Benin is to work for the sanitation, protection and conservation of Lake Nokoué.

The main activities already carried out by AMAF Benin are mainly small riverbank clean-up actions, and the sensitisation of the communities that are showing initial positive effects.

AMAF-BENIN also implements other important activities in collaboration with local communities for the conservation and protection of biodiversity and threatened and vulnerable species in particular, with the technical and financial support of Global Nature Fund and Rapunzel Hand in Hand Fund.

It would therefore also be important to reinforce and multiply these actions on a large scale in order to incorporate the desired changes into the behavioural building of Beninese citizens.

The other actors who intervene on Lake Nokoué among others are Nature Tropicale NGO, BEES NGO, CIPCRE NGO, SONAGNON NGO, etc.

**8. Question:** What do you expect from the proclamation of Lake Nokoué as a Threatened Lake of the Year 2019?

**Answer:**

This decision is an opportunity to draw the attention of millions of people to the pollution and degradation of Lake Nokoué ecosystems and to contribute to its restoration and protection. Through the proclamation of Lake Nokoué as Threatened Lake of the Year 2019, we are waiting to direct the eyes of the international community, including the government of Benin and investors' views in the protection of the environment and natural resources in particular, on the degradation situation of Lake Nokoué. To this end, we hope to mobilise significant resources for urgent actions to protect and conserve Lake Nokoué.