



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES
(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 138 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1328 wetland sites, totaling 111.9 million hectares, designated under the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. The Convention's mission is the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world (Ramsar Conference Of the Parties 8, 2002).

Ramsar in Mali...

Some representatives of the Ramsar Convention will be present in Mali from January, 29th to February, 2nd, celebrating World Wetlands Day (February, 2nd):

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Fact sheet

Inner Niger Delta / Delta Intérieur du Niger (Mali) 4.119.500 ha - the third biggest Ramsar site in the world

Gland, Switzerland, 23 January 2004 (Ramsar Convention Secretariat): On 1 February 2004, to mark World Wetlands Day, Mali will announce the designation of the entire Inner Niger Delta (4,119,500 hectares) as a Ramsar Site. This new site will include within its boundary three existing Ramsar Sites in Mali that were designated in 1987: Lake Horo (18,900 ha), Séri (40,000 ha), Walado Debo/Lac Debo (103,100 ha) as well as the parts of the delta without status until now.

The Inner Niger Delta is a vast floodplain situated in the middle of a Sahelian landscape, rich in natural resources and featuring varied ecosystems (lakes, forest floodplains, flooded grasslands and savannah). It is the largest inland wetland in West Africa and the second largest wetland in Africa, after the Okavanga Delta in Botswana. A most unusual area in the heart of the Sahel, the Inner Niger Delta contains ecosystems of great importance both ecologically and economically. It is a complex ecosystem, partly covering the area of Ségou, the flooded zone of Mopti, and, partially, the area of Tombouctou.

An important area for biodiversity... The Inner Niger Delta has an exceptionally high number of animal and plants species and is thus an important site for biodiversity. It is a refuge for many migratory birds, hosting more than 350 species, with 103 waterfowl species listed between 1998 and 2001. Each year more than 1 million birds come from more than 80 countries to use the delta. The delta is also a gathering place for some Ethiopian species which breed there between migrations.

Once winter is finished one sees in the zone of the delta four aquatic ecosystems: the rivers (Niger and Bani), 19 lakes, ponds (a significant number), and flooded plains (Djenné, Diondiori, Séri). Several watery sites of the Inner Niger Delta are important for the survival of reptiles such as the Sebae or rock python (*Python sebae*), the Nile varan (*Varanus niloticus*), cobras (*Naja sp.*), vipers (*Bitis arietens*) and also many amphibians. With regard to the mammals, the hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) and the manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*), both species registered on the IUCN's Red List of the threatened species, are still extant, although now threatened in the delta.

The richness of fishes in the delta is another important feature. According to some studies, there are 138 species and subspecies of fish among which most important in the delta belong to genera *Alestes*, *Synodontis*, *Hydrocyon*, *Tilapia*, *Labeo*, *Bagrus*, *Mormyrus*, *Citharinus*, etc. At least 24 species are endemic (i.e., their world distribution is limited to the delta) (Daget 1954, Greenwood 1976).

Nearly one million people live on the resources of the delta ecosystems. The Niger delta is a concentration of human activities: agriculture, farming, fishing, crop, navigation, tourism, etc. Hundreds of thousands of cattle, goats and sheep live in the fresh meadows of the delta. The delta plays thus a very important role in promoting sustainable development for Mali, by ensuring food security, water management and development of the inner parts of the country.

Drinking water supplies, for example, are provided directly by the Niger River or indirectly by subterranean sources fed by the waters of the Niger. Water resources of the Niger basin are still largely an unexploited potential. The Inner Delta supplies the major part of the Malian production of rice, the main cereal in the country, greatly enhanced by the Markala dam, irrigating currently 67,000 ha. The delta region contains approximately 20% of the Mali population and has an annual fishing harvest of around 130,000 tons. In the past few years

The delta in numbers...

- ✓ *The Inner Niger Delta is the third biggest Ramsar site in the world, with more than 4.110.000ha. It's the biggest continental wetland in Western Africa.*
- ✓ *More than 80.000 fishermen live on the delta resources which can be up to 130.000 tons of fish per year.*
- ✓ *5 million cattle graze every year on the dry parts of the delta, particularly the "bourgonnières".*
- ✓ *About 30 ethnics groups occupy the delta.*
- ✓ *Overexploitation and unsuitable fishing techniques are the main threats to the fish populations of the delta.*
- ✓ *Fishing yields haven fallen off regularly to 50.000 tons during the last years.*
- ✓ *Near one million people depend directly or indirectly on the delta for their survival.*
- ✓ *The delta region shelters about 20% of the Mali population and the delta supplies the majority of the country's harvest of rice.*
- ✓ *The Niger delta is historically linked to the emergence of the great empires of the VIIIth to XVIth Centuries (Ghana, Mali, Songhoy), then of the theocratic States of Sékou, Ahmadou and Elhadj Omar Tall.*
- ✓ *The delta also contains 2 sites listed on UNESCO's World Heritage Lists: the city of Djenné (Cultural Heritage) and the cliffs of Bandiagara (Natural Heritage).*
- ✓ *The tourist sector represented approximately 100.000 visitors and CFA 50 billion income in 2001.*
- ✓ *Nautical traffic is estimated to 15.000 passengers and 15.000 tons yearly.*

yields have fallen off, however, because of overexploitation of the delta and unsuitable fishing techniques.

A place for culture and an important tourist and economic potential... The Inner Niger Delta occupies an essential place in the history of Western Africa. It is the source of the emergence of the big empires of the VIIIth to XVIth centuries (Ghana, Mali, Songhoy), then of the theocratic States of Sékou, Ahmadou and Elhadj Omar Tall. Numerous historic cities like Hamdallayi (ancient capital of the Dina), Djenné, Dia and Bandiagara are important economic, political and cultural centers today. It's important to note that the historic city of Djenné and the cliffs of Bandiagara have been respectively listed on UNESCO's World Cultural and Natural Heritage lists since 1989.

Several cultural events are held in the delta, including the running of the local dugouts called "longal" in the Téninkou zone, the beats (battues) in the Dia and Djenné areas, and the collective fishing in most of the ponds and lakes of the delta (areas of Djenné, Dia and Tombouctou). One of the main cultural events in the delta, and also one the biggest tourist attractions in the area, is the Dégal: the moving of cattle to the "bourgoutières" of the Débo Walado, their last grazing area before the rainy season, and their way back to Sahel then covered with meadows and water holes.

Several places of interest in the country are located within the Inner Niger Delta, notably in the Mopti region. This tourism concerns both the flooded area of the delta and the dry areas, notably on the Dogon trays and the Gourma elephant's zone. The tourist sector represented approximately 100,000 visitors and CFA 50 billion income in 2001 and continues to expand.

A threatened ecosystem... The Inner Niger Delta contains unique ecosystems and a huge agro-silvo-pastoral and fishing potential highlighted by various social and occupational groups. But it has also been threatened for several decades by degradation of its resources and reduction of flooded areas, because of natural and human-induced changes. The main threats come from climate change, reduction of the volume and duration of the floods, the sedimentation that is responsible for the non-flooding of the left bank lakes, and the management practices of the Sélingué dam. The building of new dams, still at the stage of projects, may well have some negative impacts on the socio-economic aspects of the ecosystems. Designation of the Inner Niger Delta as a Ramsar Site should help to promote sustainable resource management, and to better conserve this unique and vital area.

The Inner Niger Delta designation ceremony will take place on Sunday February, 1st in Hotel Kanaga at 9:00, in presence of his Excellency Amadou Toumani TOURE, President of the Republic of Mali. The official certificate will be delivered by Mr. Abou Bamba, Senior Regional Adviser for Africa of the Ramsar Convention during this ceremony.