



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Protecting mangroves

Mangroves have benefits ranging from sustaining the regeneration of fish and other marine life to protecting coastal territories from erosion and floods.

With more than 240 kilometers of coastline, Cameroon has made mangrove management a priority for both environmental and an economic reasons.

Most projects to protect mangroves tend to focus on driving down demand for mangrove timber, protecting fragile and biodiversity-rich coastlines and regenerating degraded forests.

However, human actions continue to wipe out the country's mangrove forests, eroding its many benefits and creating new environmental problems in the process. In only 25 years, the country lost a third of its mangroves, says the United Nations Environmental Program.

The Weekly for Cameroon Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The intertwined mangrove problem

Mangrove forests can protect coastal territories from the impact of rising seas and strong tidal waves by forming a natural barrier of interlacing roots, facilitating sedimentation along the coastline and soaking up water.

In spite of this benefit, one study concluded that unsustainable exploitation was depleting Cameroon's mangroves faster than they can regenerate. The country lost 30% of its mangrove cover between 1980 and 2005, according to UNEP, which estimates the annual loss at 2,500 hectares.

Many factors, such as urban development and industrialization, account for

the pressure on mangrove forests. Two researchers at the non-profit Cameroon Ecology concluded that "the illegal logging of timber which is used as fuelwood by 30% of households in the large cities such as Douala and Tiko and the high demand for construction poles" has accelerated the disappearance of mangroves.

In the context of climate change, mangrove depletion is a problem in that it increases the vulnerability of coastal territories. This is significant for Cameroon because more than 30% of the country's population lives in coastal cities and the movement of people to these vulnerable areas is increasing and expected to continue to do so.

Activities for Journalists

Fish smoking – a major activity in the coastal cities of the South West region - is one of the leading sources of demand for mangrove wood.

Smoke from burning mangrove, it is claimed, gives dried fish its golden brown color and a unique taste that wood from other tree species cannot guarantee.

Preference for mangrove in the fish smoking sector is thus a major factor that contributes to their exploitation.

The energy inefficiency of traditional smoking barns, which are often made of heat conducting metal bodies and open grills, also means that a large amount of wood is needed to dry a small amount of fish.

Addressing the demand for mangrove by the fish smoking sectors generally involves increasing the energy efficiency of barns, since beliefs that underlie the preference of mangrove, for smoking fish, are difficult to overcome.

This is what the Bio-resources Development and Conservation Program Cameroon, a non-profit based in Yaounde, did in Idenau (west of Limbe) between 2008 and 2010.

In association with the British High Commission in Yaounde and the Idenau Council, the project implementers built a dozen of what they termed modern fish smoking barns across the area.

The new barns maintained the existing designs but replaced the body with baked bricks, which conduct less heat and therefore render barns more energy efficient.

With less wood, beneficiaries reported smoking more fish and spending less time to do so. They also suffered less eye irritations and skin burns.

The goal of the project was to drive down

demand and reduce the pressure on mangroves forests. But this is only one of many options when tackling the exploitation of mangroves.

Here is what you can do:

Contact people in Idenau and talk about how energy-efficient barns are transforming traditional ways of smoking fish.

- Find someone to tell a personal story, highlighting how the new approach has improved their income, reduced health hazards and helped the environment;
- Interview an expert to make the connection between mangrove deforestation and climate change vulnerability;

Useful Links

Contact for Idenau modern fish smoking barn project: Augustine B Njmanshi, Exec Secretary, Bioresources Development and Conservation Program, +237-677 765 230. Email: abnjamnsi@yahoo.com

Mangrove management expert: Cecile Ndjebet, National Coordinator, Cameroon Ecology. Email: cndjebet@yahoo.com

Possible contact to reach project beneficiaries: Thomas Nche, deputy mayor, Idenau Council, West Coast

Coastward migration and threat to mangroves in Cameroon: <http://blog.cifor.org/15383/mangroves-under-threat-as-cameroonians-move-toward-coast>

Possible source for background and useful data: [http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/gef_prj_docs/GEFProjectDocuments/Biodiversity/Cameroon%20-%20\(3821\)%20-%20CBSP%20Sustainable%20Community%20Based%20Management%20and%20Co/10-07-11%20Cameroon%20Mangroves%20ProDoc_Rev%202008-09-2011.pdf](http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/gef_prj_docs/GEFProjectDocuments/Biodiversity/Cameroon%20-%20(3821)%20-%20CBSP%20Sustainable%20Community%20Based%20Management%20and%20Co/10-07-11%20Cameroon%20Mangroves%20ProDoc_Rev%202008-09-2011.pdf)