

Name of the activity: Sustainable management and conservation of resources and traditional knowledge of sacred forests.

1. Overview of the project

Benin is a country located in the West African containing about 2 940 sacred forests which cover an area of 18,360 hectares, or about 0.18% of the total area of the country. These sacred forests through their ecological functions (protection of water sources, soil against erosion, habitat for sacred animals and plants), religious function (shelter deities, place of worship, rituals or other ceremonies), socioeconomic and cultural function (harvest of deadwood, herbal or dietary, places of initiation, cemetery) play an important role in the local population well being and in the conservation of natural resources. In addition, sacred forests are the sanctuary of the original biodiversity of ecosystems. They represent a successful model of traditional management and biodiversity conservation. These forests have not benefited from legal protection status like classified forests; however they could maintain the integrity of their resources till a recent past. The principle of this method of conservation is based on fear and respect for traditional local beliefs, on the strength of traditional authority, the power of dignitaries and religious leaders. Currently with the weakness of the traditional power and beliefs, prohibitions are more respected, which is most sacred forests are being unreasonable and uncontrolled exploitation and are subject to a disturbing degradation and sacred forest are threatened It's urge to save these traditional laboratories the sacred grooves represent and the endogenous knowledge that the dignitaries hold. The NGO Ce.Sa.Re.N will support a new form of co-management which integrates practices and knowledge of traditional and modern sciences. The NGO Ce.Sa.Re.N will work with municipal governments, traditional authorities, practitioners of traditional medicine and religious leaders in conservation and management of these ecosystems.

General objective: contribute to the sustainable management of forest resources in wet lands areas for improvement of incomes and the living conditions of populations.

Specific objectives:

- support conservation and participatory management based on traditional management model,
- promote the sustainable use of natural resources around these ecosystems in order to reduce the pressures on these resources and increase the income of the poors through improved local production capacity,
- Empower communities on access and sharing fairly and equitably in the benefits derived from the exploitation of genetic resources (ABS) ecosystems involved.

The strategy of the project

The project strategy is to combine traditional practices and endogenous knowledge with of modern sciences methods for the participatory and sustainable management of sacred forests. CeSAReN NGOs will support the establishment of local committees and management

structures with the mandate and ability to ensure adequate protection of biodiversity resources in sacred forests. Development and participatory management plans will be developed. Biodiversity friendly activities will be promoted within sacred forests and surrounding areas through mechanisms and partnerships with community groups, NGOs, religious authorities and traditional and other healers users. Sacred forests and shoreline village food and medicinal species and associated TK will be identified to be valued. For this purpose, the capacity of communities and particularly those of traditional knowledge holders will be strengthened in terms of Access and Benefit Sharing.

Project area and target group

The project will be implemented in the wetlands located south of Benin. Project target group is consisted of different social strata of the population involved in management of these forests namely dignitaries, followers of traditional religions, the tradipractitioners, farmers innovators, women, men and youth who depend on sacred forest. The direct benefit of the project for the target group is to develop sacred forests resources to ensure fully and sustainably the vital functions that they play. This project will also help improve incomes and the livelihood of local population.

Expected results: The main results expected at the end of this project are:

Outcome 1: Forests of the area are equipped with functional participatory management plan

Outcome 2: Income and livelihood are improved in the project areas,

Outcome 3: NTFPs and medicinal species and associated traditional knowledge are more valued in the project area.

2. Budget and duration

The amount needed to implement the project is estimated at US \$ 620,000. The project will be implemented during three (3) years.

3. Clusters to be allocated:

Cluster 1: Knowledge facilitation

Cluster 4: Capacity Building

Cluster 5: On-the-Ground Activities

4. IPSI member organisations involved: International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO)

5. Contact person:

BOSSOU Bienvenu

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