



Incorporation of Sacred Forests into the Protected Areas System of Benin

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Introduction

- I. Importance of sacred forests
- II. Threats on sacred forests
- III. Sustainable management of sacred forests
- IV. Incorporation of sacred forests **into** the Protected Areas System of Benin

Conclusion and perspectives

Introduction

- Benin is a country with an area of 122,600 square kilometers located in West Africa and containing approximately 2940 sacred forests covering an area of 18,360 hectares. The size of these forests range from 0.1 to 1600 ha. These forests have not received legal protection status from the State like the official protected forests (protected areas) but were able to maintain the integrity of their resources over years until recently.



Importance of sacred forests

Ecological function:

Protection of water sources, preventing soil erosion, providing a habitat for animals and plants, seed bank, genetic reservoirs, connectivity etc;

socio-economic function:

providing wood for multiple purpose, medicinal plants, food, NTFP, providing places of initiation and blessing



The principle of this method of conservation is based on fear and respect for traditional local beliefs, the strength of traditional authorities, the power of dignitaries and religious leaders

Religious and cultural function :

providing shelter for deities, acting as places of worship, cemetery and rituals or other ceremonies), This function is vital for the protection and conservation of the Natural Resources

They represent a successful model of sustainable traditional management and conservation of biodiversity

Threats on sacred forests

- Lost of traditional authority
- Weak Capacity of Local Authorities

- Lands pressure (agricultural and construction),
- Population growth



- Invasive species
- Wild fires

Uncontrolled and abusive exploitation



Agricultural pressures



Illegal logging

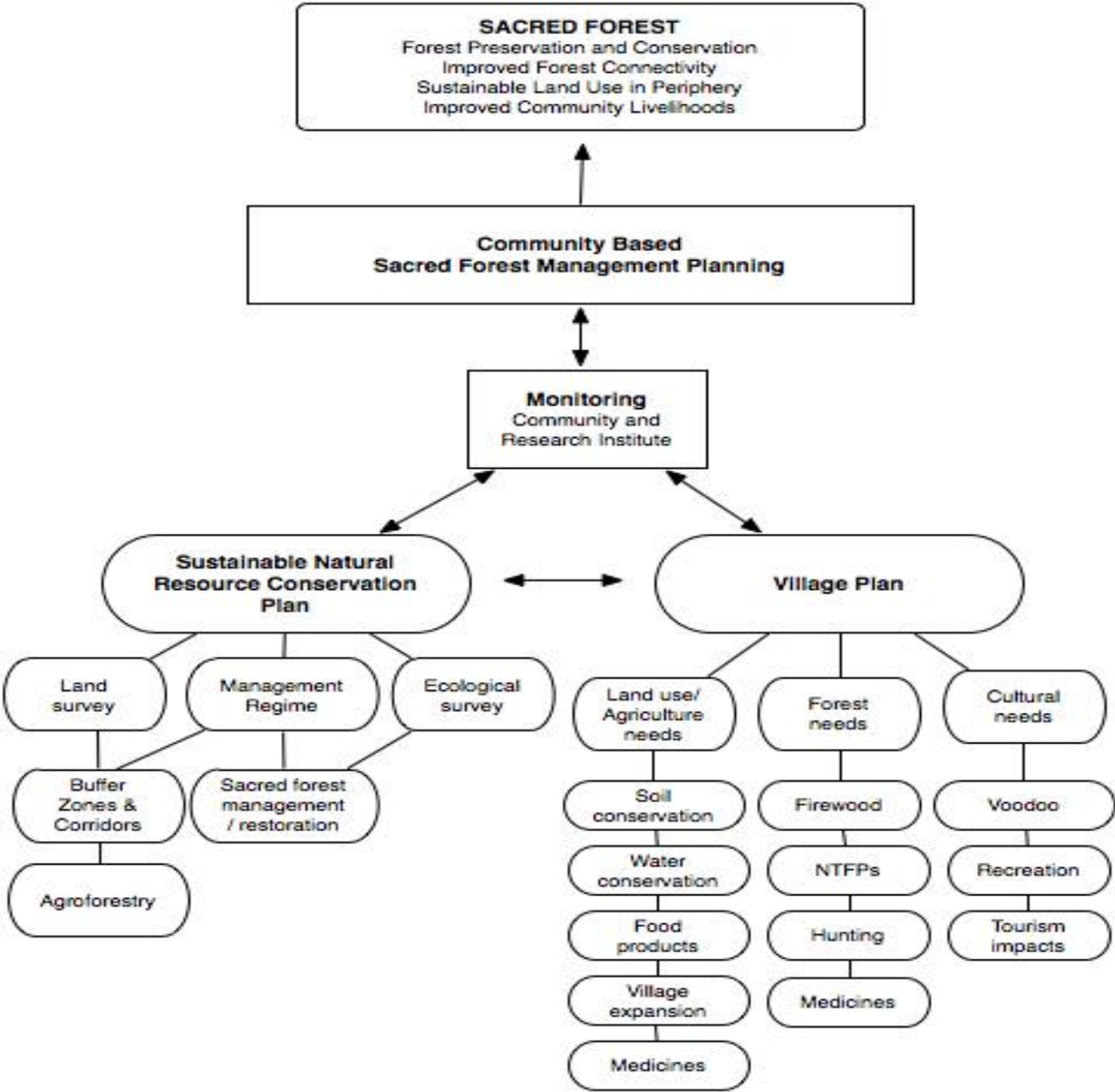


Invasive plants



Wild fires

Sustainable Management of sacred forests



Sustainable Management of sacred forests

At the level of each forest, a Sacred Forests Management Committee (SFMC) is put in place to manage and monitor activities related to the forest. The SFMC is composed of :

Three delegates from the local Administration,

Two members chosen among traditional authorities (king, village chief, voodoo priest, etc.),

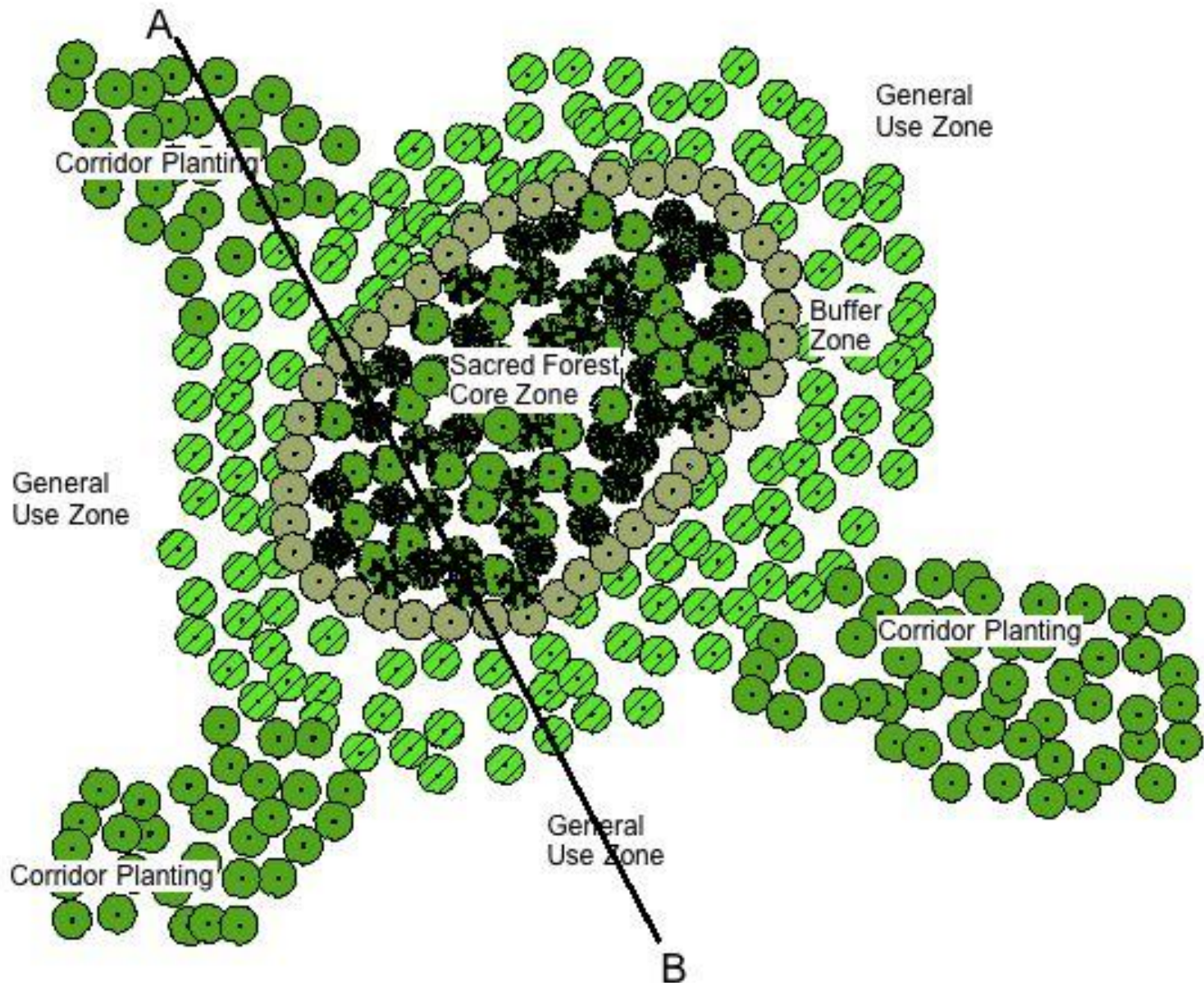
Two members representing trade and producer associations and

Two members representing local organizations, NGOs, farmer cooperatives, women's groups, etc.

Other relevant stakeholders can be invited depending on each case and the socio-cultural and economic context of each sacred forest.

This Committee oversees activities implementation and manages the decision-making at the local level. It also serves as a forum for debate and conflict resolution and mediation

Sustainable Management of sacred forests



Sustainable Management of sacred forests



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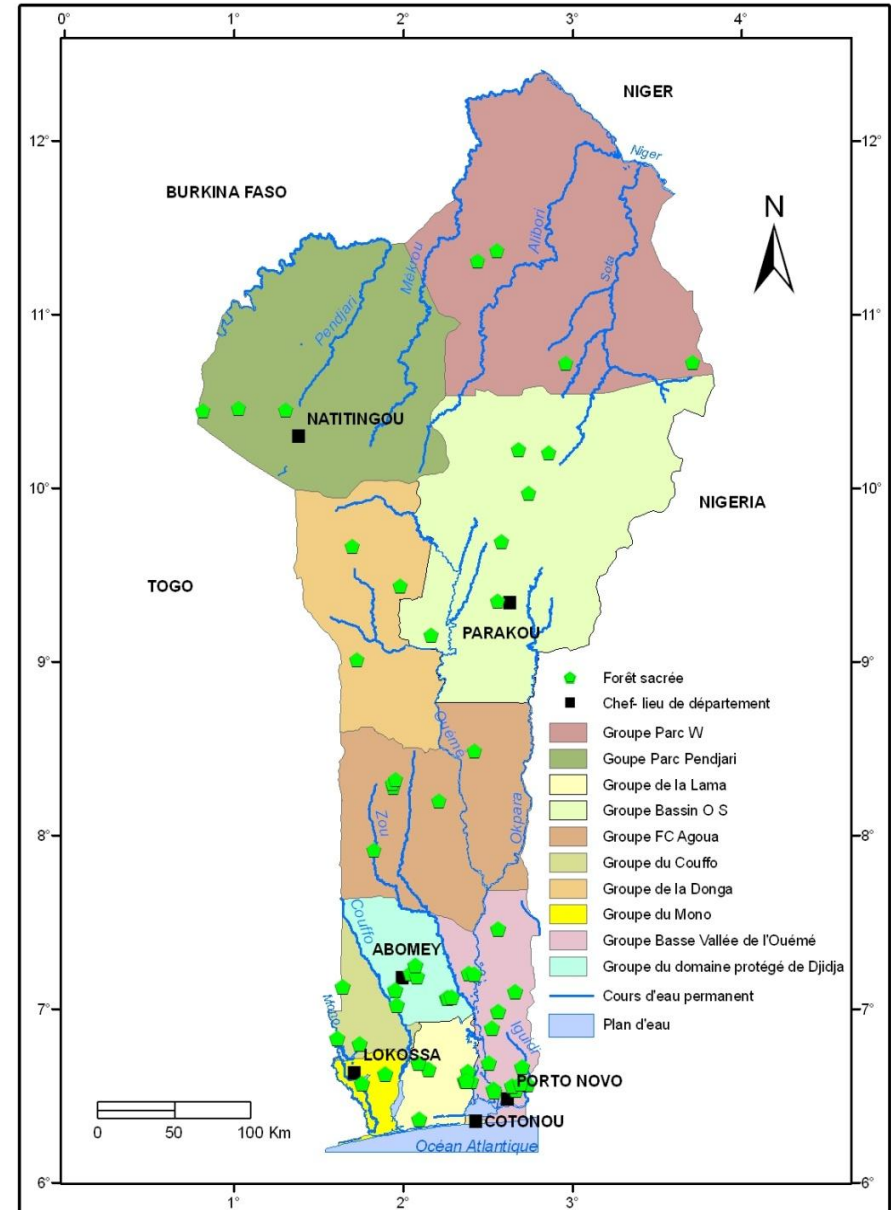


This project is financed by GEF, UNDP, Benin Government and local communities

The Government of Benin through the GDFNR embarked in a comprehensive strategy to conserve these forests as part of its national system of protected areas, for the biodiversity values these sacred forests contain and for their considerable ethno-cultural and religious significance.

The project objective is to promote the sustainable use of Benin's Sacred Forests as a network of community-managed conservation areas incorporated into the national system of protected areas.

Présentation des groupes des forêts sacrées de la phase pilote



Incorporation of Sacred Forests into the Protected Areas System of Benin

This project contributes to the governmental effort to:

- (i) provide protected area status to 10 clusters of 58 sacred forests ecologically important,
- (ii) support management and conservation activities of these forest remnants, by applying specifically designed and participatory management strategies, and
- (iii) promote sustainable uses of natural resources around these forests in order to reduce exploitation pressures on the protected resources, sustain production of medicinal plants and materials, promote cultural and ecotourism activities and most important of all, improve the livelihood of surrounding communities

Conclusion and perspectives

- This investigation shows the importance of sacred forests in the socio-ecological production of the landscapes.
- Only 2% of Benin sacred forests have been taken into account through this project.
- For the conservation of the remaining sacred forests, other Technical and Financial Partners are needed./.



Thank you

