

GEF Small Grants Programme

Global Support Initiative for Indigenous Peoples and Community-Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCA-GSI)

BENIN

Global Context

With the adoption of the 2010 CBD 2020 Aichi targets, attention has been focused on recognizing and supporting the vital role of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in conserving biodiversity outside the framework of formally-gazetted and managed government protected areas. To this end, the Global Support Initiative for Indigenous Peoples and Community-Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCA-GSI) was formed in 2014 to broaden the diversity and quality of governance types and protected areas (PAs) and conserved areas (CAs) which contribute to the CBD Aichi Targets.



Sacred forests of Ewe in Kouvizoun ICCA

The ICCA-GSI is a multi-partnership initiative delivered by the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) in 26 countries, with \$16.3m funding provided by the Government of Germany, through its Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) International Climate Initiative (IKI). Key partners include the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), Global ICCA Consortium, IUCN's Global Programme on Protected Areas (IUCN GPAP) and the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP WCMC).

Goals

ICCA-GSI's central goal is to improve the recognition, support and overall effectiveness of ICCAs for biodiversity conservation through sustainable livelihoods and self-strengthening of ICCAs. Its work focuses on **Aichi Target 11** (increasing PA coverage), **Aichi Target 14** (safeguarding ecosystems and increasing the effectiveness of its services), and **Aichi Target 18** (Protecting traditional knowledge). ICCA-GSI support is provided at three levels thru:

- (i.) Direct financial and technical support to community-based action and demonstration for the self-strengthening of ICCAs leading to ecosystem protection, legal empowerment, sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction.
- (ii.) National legal, policy and other forms of support to enhance ICCA recognition and conservation, including governance assessments of protected and conserved areas; and
- (iii.) Global and regional networking, knowledge production and exchange support between national CSO initiatives.



IPLC's ritual ceremonies have religious, ethnobotanical and conservation significance.

Country Programme Strategy

Benin's forests cover 47% of the national territory, 20% of which are classified forests. Protected forests cover about 8,796,636 hectares and account for 76% of forest cover. They house almost all ICCAs. ICCAs forests perform a variety of functions, primarily religious, followed by sociocultural and ecological functions, and are under traditional forms of protection. Approximately 80% of the rural population rely on biodiversity and other environmental resources for their vital needs.

Benin has made commendable efforts to better understand its biodiversity with scientific studies increasingly oriented towards the characterization of its

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terrestrial, aquatic and agricultural ecosystems. Moreover, policies and reforms were adopted for the sustainable use of environmental resources with increased levels of participation from civil society and local authorities. Following the 2003 reforms, the management of natural resources was decentralized through shared responsibilities between the State and the communes. In 2009, an inter-ministerial decree was adopted for the creation of sustainable rural fuel wood markets, involving local communities in the participatory management of forest ecosystems while providing income to them. In 2011, a law was adopted to deal with the collection and exploitation of forest and fauna and in 2012, a new Forest Policy to 2025 was adopted and aligned with other national development strategies.

While reforestation efforts have helped slow the rate of degradation of plant cover, forest resources are still threatened. Some pressures and drivers of change to biodiversity identified in Benin's National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) include agricultural expansion, illegal resource exploitation, climate change, land tenure and lack of effective policy implementation.

Benin's ICCAs, while threatened, are still rich in biodiversity. These ICCAs are dominated by sacred forests that provide religious, ethnobotanical and conservation importance. Compared to other areas, these sacred forests have a higher concentration of useful, rare and endangered plants such as *Garcinia kola* and animal species such as *Psittacus erithacus* and *Colobus vellerosus* per unit area (CERF, 2013)¹. However, to date, sacred forests do not have a special status apart from the possibility of municipal recognition offered through the inter-ministerial decree.

In this context, the ICCA-GSI portfolio of projects in Benin aims to increase the recognition and preservation of ICCAs through various initiatives. A country-wide exploratory mission in 2016 enabled the identification of about 30 emblematic ICCAs. In 2017, a national ICCA network was established and continue to work on strengthening the governance of ICCAs and identifying new ICCAs based on the ICCA Consortium's Self-Strengthening Process (SSP). Grants have been provided to NGOs who are implementing emblematic projects that focus on national recognition, strengthening local governance, strengthening preservation modalities, reducing pressures on biodiversity, and capacity building on registering on the Global ICCA registry. A national legal analysis is being undertaken to assess the impact of laws, policies and institutional frameworks on ICCAs.

Project Portfolio

Project Name	Implementation Period
Strengthening the Governance and Sustainable Management of the "Bahazoun, Orozoun and Tedozoun" Community Areas in Southern Benin	November 2017– December 2019
Support for the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage of the Kouvizoun and Igbo Iba forests in the Plateau department	November 2017– December 2019
Conservation and sustainable management of Sacred Forests Sérou, Handouagou and the Pikiré crocodile pond in Benin	November 2017– December 2019
Support for the Development and Management of Aboriginal and Community Heritage Areas and Territories in the Mono and Couffo Departments	November 2017– December 2019
Support for sustainable and participatory management of the sacred forests of Wèwèrè and Affougoussi	November 2017– December 2019
National Legal Analysis and Impact Assessment of Laws, Policies and Institutional Frameworks on Indigenous Peoples and ICCAs	March 2018 – January 2019

¹ Agossa, N., (2013). *Répertoire des Forêts sacrées dans les Départements de l'Ouémé et du Plateau*. Contonou: Centre d'Etudes de Recherches et de Formations Forestières. Available at https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BEN/REPETOIRE_FORETS_SACREES_OUEME_PLATEAU_OCT2013

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