

Project Update: February 2022

Tropical forests are subject to diverse exploitation. These uncontrolled exploitations generate qualitative and quantitative modifications of microclimates, soils, flora, fauna as well as at the fungal level and causes the extension of an unbalanced type of forest. Thus, in the forest dynamic, fungi are largely affected because they live in association with many other organisms. While the partner organisms of the fungi are affected by the changes in the ecosystem, they are also directly or indirectly affected. But do not enjoy any conservation status.

The lack of fungal habitat conservation is a major problem, while fungi play an important role in ecosystems. They facilitate the cycling of nutrients and maintain the dynamics of biosphere. In addition to their ecological benefits, they are widely used in agriculture, medicine and many other human activities. So, fungi are above all beneficial for humans and the environment. For effective conservation of fungi in Benin, we are working on improving and popularising of conservation laws. The aims of this report are: (1) improve law enforcement to curb the destruction of fungal habitats in Benin, and (2) strengthen the knowledge of the local populations about conservation of fungal species through awareness campaigns and popularisation of forest conservation law in Benin.

Methodology

For the sensitisation, the local community such as leaders of environmental NGOs, group leaders, forest officers, loggers, groups of women or children fungi pickers, old people who have knowledge on fungi, and hunters for their good knowledge of forest and farmers were invited. The message of the sensitisation session was focused on the role and utility of fungi in the forest and the need to conserve them in the natural environment. Also, during the sensitisation, the different ecological groups of fungi saprotrophic, ectomycorrhizal and parasitic, were presented, and we insisted that the disappearance of their habitats will also cause the disappearance of the associated fungal species. Benin's forest laws have also been used in these exchanges.

The participants came from the villages, namely Bagre-tamou, Dokonde, Kotamonongou and Kotopounga next to Kota, and Berecingou, Kantaborifa, Koussantigou and Ourbougou next to Koussoucoingou.

Results

In each village, 75 people took part to awareness-raising activities. The focus group method is used for this purpose. The populations are gathered in small groups of 25 people. For this activity, we used:

- A poster on fungal diversity and the degradation of fungal habitats.
- A short movie on good agricultural practices and forest conservation law application in the local language, Dendi and Bariba.

After the presentation of the poster and the documentary, the discussion focused on interactive questions aimed at making the participants interact. Below are some photos taken during the awareness activities.



Photo 1. A-C. Wild fungal warning signs presentation



Photo 2. A-C. Awareness-raising activities

Through this report, we invited local populations to maintain the knowledge acquired during these awareness-raising activities to facilitate fungal conservation in Benin.

Exchange with the local authorities and communities on conservation law application to save fungi

Based on the habitat conservation law in Benin, we discussed with the local authorities of the villages near the two target forests of the project in order to draw their attention to the threats to fungi and conservation emergencies. We have drawn the attention of local populations to some agreements, laws and treaties on the protection of forests and species in Benin such as:

- Law No. 96-012 of July 1, 1996, authorizing the ratification of the International Convention to Combat Desertification in countries seriously affected by drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

- Law No. 93-021 of December 2, 1992, authorizing the ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed on June 13, 1992, in Rio de Janeiro.
- Law No. 93-009 of July 2, 1993, on the forest regime in the Republic of Benin.
- Law No. 87-014 of September 21, 1987, on the regulation of the protection of nature and the practice of hunting in the People's Republic of Benin.
- Order No. 601/MDR/DC/DFRN/SA of August 8, 1993, on the application in the Republic of Benin of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- Law No. 2002-16 of October 18, 2004, on the wildlife regime in the Republic of Benin.

Two laws drew our attention in particular.

(1) Law No. 93-009 of July 2, 1993, on the forest regime. After having exposed this law to the local populations, we recalled with particular attention Title 4 relating to "the search for the observation and the repression of infractions" related to the destruction of forests, Chapter 3 defining the actions and prosecutions Chapter 4 on penalties and Chapter 5 on miscellaneous offences.

(2) Law No. 2002-16 of October 18, 2004, on the wildlife regime in the Republic of Benin, while emphasising the failure to take charge of the threats that weigh directly on fungi by these laws and the need for a fungi conservation law in Benin.

We also analysed their opinion on the importance of placing a fungi conservation law section in the species conservation law in Benin.

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A



B



Photo 3. A-B. Discussion in Kota, C-D. Discussion in Koussoucoingou