

The botanic garden of Papatia (Northern Benin): Perspectives for sustainable use, biodiversity conservation and preservation of traditional knowledge

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In most west-african regions, phytodiversity is menaced by an increasing human impact. Numerous plant species are sensibly rarefying, and the shortage of species used in traditional medicine is becoming a problem for the local traditional health system. Together with villagers of Papatia (Northern Benin) who are concerned and conscious of this problem, a local botanic garden was initiated in 2001, in order to conserve species richness as well as the traditional knowledge linked to threatened species.

A species-rich savanna area of about 12 ha, including different ecological sites, is protected against every human impact. More than a hundred woody plants and several hundreds of herbaceous species are already inventoried, many of them traditionally used. A tree-nursery has been created in order to multiply rare species, didactic infrastructure for the reception and sensitisation of visitors (pupils, students, tourists, villagers ...) has been installed, knowledge transmission from older to younger generations is encouraged, and monitoring of vegetation dynamics in permanent plots is effected. Up to now, many positive side-effects for the local community, most of all an increasing ecological consciousness in the village and its neighbourhood, can be noticed. This project shows the efficiency of sustainable management measures of natural resources on a local scale.

However, it seems increasingly obvious that on the long run, the garden will only persist in this form if additional income possibilities, derived from the garden activities, are created to ensure not only better environmental conditions in the future, but also some material advantages in the present for the members of the participating communities.