

## Swiss Grant for Africa - Report for 2008

The Swiss Grant Fund for Africa administered by the Ramsar Secretariat is a generous voluntary contribution offered by the Federal Government of Switzerland over and above the annual dues provided to the Convention's core budget. This contribution dates back to 1989 following the establishment of the Secretariat of the Convention in 1988.



The Swiss Grant Fund for Africa is extremely useful in financing suitable activities in needy areas of wetlands conservation and wise use. This contribution is also particularly helpful in promoting the Convention in the Africa region.

The Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention wishes to convey to the Swiss government the sincere appreciation of the African Ramsar Contracting Parties for the valuable support from the Swiss voluntary contribution to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Africa.

We express our gratitude and our encouragement to the Swiss government for this fruitful contribution that opens up opportunities and promising prospects for the conservation and wise use of wetlands in Africa.

The Swiss Grant proposal of the year 2008 differs from the previous ones as it spread resources in countries and/or sub-regions that represent a barometer to measure the level of implementation or non implementation of the Convention if one looks at the national reports submitted for COP10. In addition, this time around, the SGA came as co-financing for the projects.

We are pleased to submit the following summary report on the approved projects for the year 2008.

We would like to note that this time around most of the activities sponsored by the 2008 Swiss Grant for Africa are completed although the funds were disbursed only in December 2008.

### A. 2008 ALLOCATION - UPDATE

#### 2008 Proposal Summary

Initiative/ Activity	Recipient countries/ Institutions	Allocation	Purpose
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Reactivation of the implementation of the Convention	Equatorial Guinea	SFR 20,000	Designation of new sites Establishment of a National Ramsar Committee Rapid wetlands inventory Celebration of 2009 WWD
Implementation of article 3.2 of the Convention	Mozambique	SFR 25,000	Ramsar Advisory Mission for Maromeu Complex Ramsar site
Implementation Of The Convention	Gabon	SFR 27,500	Launching of the UNEP-Ramsar documentary on "Oil Exploration and Wetlands". Handing over ceremony for the designation of the 3 new Ramsar sites. Elaboration and kick off of the National Ramsar Committee activities Celebration of the 2009 WWD Preparation of a project document to be submitted to the Ramsar Evian Danone funds for the regeneration of mangroves in Gabon for carbon sequestration.
National workshop on the impacts of biofuels on wetlands	Côte d'ivoire	SFR 27,500	Implementation of the COP10 Res. 25 on wetlands and biofuels
Communication, Education and Public Awareness / Wise Use of Wetlands	Seychelles	SFR 28,000	Promotion of the wise use of wetlands and ecotourism.
National Wetlands Policy and Action Plan	Niger	SFR 20,000	Preparation of the National Wetlands Policy and action plan of Niger
Administration Fees	10%	SFR 14,800	Administration of the fund, communication and

and contingencies			coordination of fieldwork.
Total	6 initiatives	SFR 162,800	To strengthen and expand the implementation of the Convention in Africa in 2008

In 2008, six activities were supported by the voluntary Swiss contribution to Africa. Most of these activities were initiated in late 2008 and some of them in early 2009 as the funds were disbursed in December 2008.

Six countries (Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger and Seychelles) were granted financial support for the implementations of projects related to (i) designation of new sites, (ii) Ramsar Advisory Mission (iii) wise use of wetlands, (iv) CEPA and (v) the preparation of National Wetlands Policy and Action Plan.

## **B. PROJECT REPORT**

### **1. COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION, AND PUBLIC AWARENESS (CEPA) - PREPARATION OF A DOCUMENTARY ON THE ROLE OF WETLANDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN SEYCHELLES.**

#### **1.1. Background and information.**

Seychelles Wetlands play a very important role in the eco tourism industry of the country which, relies on tourism for incomes generation. Wetlands have formed a part in many of the large hotels on Mahe, Praslin La Digue, and on Silhouette which the main islands of the archipelagos. They are also involved in other such developments in outer and inner islands. As the wetlands are not far away from the beach, and the land mass is very small, the fast flowing rivers ends up in wetlands once they reach the ground level and reaches the sea.

Wetlands have been included in several hotels and tourist destinations mainly as eco tourism potential and for its aesthetic values.

The main hotels and other tourist infrastructures on Silhouette Island have enclosed a beautiful wetland area as their tourist attraction with nice water features, fountains and with endemic fresh water terrapins, and other wetland plants.

Against this background, we came to the conclusion that wetlands have formed a very important role in almost all the tourism development, and has significant role in the national economy through its goods and services.

In order to develop a strategy for the promotion of the wise use of wetlands through the development of ecotourism in the contracting parties, the Secretariat of Convention and the Government of Seychelles have laid down the foundations to prepare a concept paper and a bilingual documentary (English and French) on the importance of wetlands in the development of ecotourism.

### **1.2. Achievements:**

The Ramsar Secretary General and Senior Advisor for Africa went on mission to Victoria, Seychelles, from 06-11 March, 2009. The objectives of the mission were to: i) meet with the President of Seychelles, ii) to provide technical assistance to the AA for the implementation of the Convention and (iii) to launch an SGA project for the preparation of a documentary on the development of the tourism industry and the management of wetlands in the country.

The visit to the president was very successful and proposed that WWD 2010 is celebrated in Seychelles as an international event during...one week. This will be the first time in the history of the Convention that a country will host the celebration of WWD for one week.

The involvement of the Secretariat in this major event will be discussed in a meeting with those in charge of WWD and those who are interested in the project.

As for the documentary, the visit to Seychelles allowed us to have all the clippings involving the Ramsar Secretary General with the local SBC TV. These clippings would also form part of the documentary which should be released before WWD in February 2010.

### **1.3. The way forward:**

- Production: to be finalised by end of August 2009
- Dissemination: November 2009
- Official launch on the 2nd of February 2010 at Ramsar World Wetlands Week celebration in Seychelles.

Allocated budget: CHF 15,000 in total

## **2. WISE USE OF WETLANDS - DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL WETLANDS POLICY AND ACTION PLAN OF NIGER**

## **2.1. Background and information.**

Niger had already elaborated and implemented the management plans of “*Moyen Niger I*” and “*Complexe Kokorou Namga*” Ramsar sites. They had also prepared a wetlands atlas which describes the wetlands that are important for their ecosystem benefits as recommended by the Convention. The country created on the 27th of September 1999 a National Ramsar Committee through ministerial decree # 71/MHE/DFPP. The preparation of the country NWP has started with the creation of the National Ramsar Committee which elaborated a 2003-2005 work plan submitted to the donors. WWF has accepted to sponsor the first part of the document preparation and the government of Niger has asked the Ramsar Secretariat support for the second phase which mainly about the finalization of the policy document and the preparation of an action plan and a budget which will go together with the policy.

## **2.2. Achievements**

- The consultants to elaborate the National Wetlands Policy and Action Plan were recruited and have started working.

## **2.3. The way forward:**

- Recruitment of the database and web site consultant
- Production of the draft policy document

## **3. ORGANISATION OF A NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE IMPACTS OF BIOFUELS ON WETLANDS**

### **3.1. Background and information.**

A study commissioned by Wetlands International, ‘**Biofuels in Africa: An assessment of risks and benefits for African wetlands**’ indicates that although Africa is expected to produce a relatively small part of the global biofuel demand by the year 2020, this will still be a substantial with millions of hectares likely to be turned into large scale biofuel plantations.

According to the study, the combination of water demands of the main biofuel feedstock and existing rights over agricultural land means that natural wetlands and forests will be a key target for biofuel production, posing a threat to biodiversity.

The study gives a good overview of the potential effects of Biofuels in Africa on wetlands in particular. It is now important to consider specific cases and identify existing and potential threats to wetlands and biodiversity in order to be able to provide directed advice and support to mitigate likely damage.

Based on the results of this study, Ramsar (through the Swiss Grant for Africa) has accepted to consider the case of Côte d'Ivoire as a pilot country which has requested support from the Secretariat to address the issues associated to biofuel production and its impacts on wetlands. In this country, the production of Biofuels has been flagged as a new revenue source for the country and plans are well underway. The objective of the Cote d'ivoire request was to organize a national consultative workshop on the issue and come up with the following outputs: i) proposed legal and institutional framework to deal with biofuel and their impacts on wetlands, (ii) engaging with the research and private sectors on the subject, (iii) raise awareness of the possible negative impacts of biofuels production on wetlands and food security, (iv) discuss the applicability of the Ramsar COP10 resolution on the subject and (iv) serve as a pilot case for Ramsar Contracting Parties that are facing similar challenges.

### **3.2. Achievements**

The University of Abobo-Adjamé in Côte d'Ivoire which is coordinating the project together with the Ramsar Secretariat have achieved the following:

- Identification of experts who will present the case-studies
- Extending the workshop exposure from national to regional with the involvement of experts coming from several countries in West Africa.
- Preparation and approval of the meeting agenda.
- Securing the co-funding from the University of Abobo-Adjamé and FAO Office in Abidjan.
- Successful organization from 11 to 13 of June 2009 of a workshop with about 100 participants.
- Terms of reference of a radio program on the subject in collaboration with the FAO Resident Mission in the country.

### **3.3. The way forward:**

- Workshop report
- Institutional framework for biofuel production management
- Radio programs

#### **4. ORGANISATION OF RAMSAR ADVISORY MISSION FOR MARROMEU COMPLEX RAMSAR SITE OF MOZAMBIQUE.**

##### **4.1 Background and information.**

Mozambique's Marromeu Complex was designated as a Wetland of International Importance in 2004. The Ramsar site comprises the protected Marromeu Buffalo Reserve and four surrounding hunting concessions. It includes a variety of habitats ranging from Zambezi coastal flooded savanna, coastal dunes, grassland, freshwater swamps, dambos associated with miombo forest, mangroves and seagrass beds. It is an important breeding site for White and Pink-backed Pelicans, while the mangrove area harbours a great variety of waterbirds. The Zambezi Delta supports 3-4% of the global Wattle Crane (*Grus carunculatus*) population and may provide a critical refuge for this species during extreme regional droughts, when more than 30% of the global population of Wattle Crane may temporarily occur there. The mangrove crab *Scylla serrata* and other crustaceans are present and exploited by the local population, while prawns spawning in the delta mangroves are of great economic importance as a source of foreign revenue. The Delta is home to thousands of farmers and fishermen who depend on the floodplain for their livelihoods. Threats to site include the cessation of natural flooding processes caused by upstream dams on the Zambezi River as well as by construction of roads, railways and flood protection dykes.

Based on recent information received by the Ramsar Secretariat, the Ramsar Secretary General wrote to the Mozambican Minister of Coordination of Environmental Affairs (MICOA) on 3 September 2008 to express concern about the possible threats to the Marromeu Complex Ramsar site from current and planned oil and gas exploration activities. According to the information received by the Ramsar Secretariat, the exploration activities involve an area known as the "Zambezi Onshore Block" which was awarded to the British American Natural Gas company (BANG) on 29 November 2006. The information provided indicates that a two-year contract, signed on 1 February 2007, allows for reconnaissance work and drilling. The main activities foreseen included road construction, drilling activities and the opening of an area of forest for the development of the activity site and a campsite for workers. An EIA for the proposed drilling site had been completed and submitted to MICOA in April 2008.

In his 3 September 2008 letter to the Minister of Coordination of Environmental Affairs, the Ramsar Secretary General offered to assist the Government of Mozambique with its obligations under the Ramsar Convention through the services of a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM). Such Missions provide technical assistance towards the management and conservation of sites whose ecological character is threatened.

In his 12 January 2009 reply, the Deputy Minister of Coordination of Environmental Affairs informed the Ramsar Secretary General that a technical team sent to the area had confirmed that prospecting activities had been carried out in Hunting Concession 12 and that these had found no oil or gas reserves and had posed no ecological threats to the site. However, he informed the Ramsar Secretariat that the second phase of the exploration activities are due to be initiated, possibly in March 2009, and that the Ministry would appreciate technical assistance from the Ramsar Secretariat to 'assess potential harm to the Marromeu Complex, if any, and advise the Government of Mozambique on how to reach a win-win situation, not only for this particular case, but also for future similar cases in the country'.

#### **4.2. Achievements**

- Preparation the Terms of Reference.
- Approval of the Terms of Reference by the Government of Mozambique.
- Preparation and approval of the mission time table.
- Identification of the Mission team.

#### **4.3. The way forward**

- The Mission is scheduled to take place from the 6th to the 11th of July 2009 and we anticipate that the recommendations are implemented right after.

### **5. WISE USE OF WETLANDS - IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION IN GABON**

#### **5.1 Background and information.**

Gabon is among the countries that have been very active in implementing the Convention over the last triennium.

In addition to the country election to the Standing Committee after COP9, it has initiated a series of actions to implement the Convention after an hibernation period of which lasted almost 20 years.

In three years, the country has carried out the following: (i) updating the RISs of sites that had been designated during the accession in 1987, (ii) payment of the country arrears in full, (iii) designation of 3 new Ramsar sites in 2007, (iv) organization of a national workshop on the role of parliamentarians in the implementation of the Convention, (v) preparation of a documentary on

the impacts of extractive industries on Ramsar sites and wetlands, (vi) preparation of the RISs and maps for the designation of more than 1 million hectares as Ramsar sites, (vii) etc.

In order to take stock of the activities carried out over the last 3 to 4 years, the Government of Gabon has submitted a request for financial assistance for the organization of the following activities:

- Launching of the UNEP-Ramsar documentary on “Oil Exploration and Wetlands”.
- Organization of a workshop on the role of the private/business sector in the wise use of wetlands in Africa.
- Handing over ceremony for the designation of the 3 new Ramsar sites.
- Celebration of the 2009 WWD
- Organization of a workshop to harmonize the Congo Basin countries views on merging the two regional initiatives CongoWet and WetCongo.
- Preparation of a project document to be submitted to the Ramsar Evian Danone funds for the regeneration of mangroves in Gabon for carbon sequestration.

## **5.2 Achievements**

- Film launch and designation of 3 new sites

The Office of the Vice-Prime Minister of Gabon organized on April 24, 2009, in Libreville, Gabon, a ceremony to officially launch the Ramsar/ UNEP film “Oil or Gorillas?” and a celebrate the three newly designated Ramsar sites.

The function started with the showing of the short version of the documentary which highlights the correlations that exist between the sustainable management of a Ramsar site (Petit Loango) which is confronted with oil exploration activities.

The film showed how Gabon is trying to conciliate conservation and development concerns through participative management of a park which is both a great ape site and a Ramsar site. It also addresses the emerging environmental issues associated with extractive industries in Africa and their impacts on the wetlands and other natural resources of the continent.

In response to the issues addressed in the film, H.E. Mrs. Georgette Koko, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister in charge of environment and sustainable development of Gabon, explained that while exploiting her natural resources, Gabon will still comply with her international commitments under the Ramsar Convention.

Mr. Ian Redmon, UN Ambassador for the Year of the Gorilla (YoG) who attended the function made a speech on the need to protect the gorillas as they are being threatened. He explained that killing a gorilla to sell it at 50 USD is an environmental and economic non-sense as the same gorilla alive is a tremendous source of incomes for the people and the government. He gave the example of Rwanda where a gorillas' family can provide up to 500 USD a day to the communities living around a protected area hosting gorillas.

It's worth noting that Ramsar/UNEP documentary was nominated among hundred of films at famous *Wildlife, Travel and Culture Festival and Conference* of Durban, South Africa.

The second item of the event was the celebration of the three new Ramsar sites of Gabon: (i) Invindo waterfalls, (ii) Bas ogoué et (iii) Mboundou Badouma and Doumé cascades. The designation of these three sites puts Gabon on top of the whole Congo Basin sub-region in terms of number of Ramsar sites with a total of 9 wetlands added to the Ramsar list of sites of international importance. The other 6 sites are (i) National Akanda Park, (ii) National Poongara Park, (iii) Petit Loango, (iv) Setté Cama, (v) Wongha-Wonghé and (vi) Mounts Birougou.

The Ramsar Senior Advisor for Africa handed over the sites certificates to Gabon Vice-Prime Minister in charge of environment and sustainable development.

According to the local media, in three years, the Ramsar Convention is the MEA that is best known from Gabonese because of the series of actions taken since the last three years by the Administrative Authority to promote Ramsar and the wetlands.

The ceremony was attended by several members of the Government, including the Minister of Tourism, and Ambassadors (China, Germany, Japan, USA, etc) accredited in Gabon.

- Organisation of a roundtable on the role of the private/business sector in the wise of Gabon wetlands.

The Office of the Vice-Prime Minister of Gabon organized on April 24, 2009, in Libreville, Gabon, a roundtable on the role of the business sector in the wise use of wetlands.

The main objective of the workshop was to engage with the Gabon business sector and agree on a strategy which will balance the need for economic and financial growth and the conservation of wetlands which plays an important role in the socio-economic development process of the country.

The specific objectives of the roundtable were to (i) inform the business sector on the content and challenges of the Ramsar Convention, (ii) explain the relevance of this Convention for the country through case-studies, (iii) discuss the possible synergies in the Convention implementation at national level, (iv) discuss the role of the private sector in the implementation and enforcement of the Convention and (v) obtain the commitment of the business sector for the wise use of Gabon wetlands.

The roundtable was attended by companies from various sectors such as (i) oil/gas, (ii) timber, (iii) hydro electricity, (iv) water, (v) mining and other extractives, etc. Several government departments also attended the meeting and called for collaboration between these companies whose activities may have some serious impacts on the country's natural resources.

The discussions also covered over fishing by some fishing companies which have even introduced some foreign species in the country's water courses for fish farming, among these species is the famous fish which is called in the local language "without-a-name" as it was introduced several years back without anybody knowing.

However, the overall impression that one may have is that most of the companies which operate in Gabon and whose activities depend on wetlands are aware of how fragile this ecosystem can be and are committed to comply with the country environmental legal package which makes provision for the wise use of wetlands. Some of them have even requested that the geographical coordinates of the country's Ramsar sites are passed on to them in order to avoid them in their operations.

The participants/companies recognized that it's in their own interest that the wetlands ecological character is preserved so that they can continue playing their role of providing wealth in the country.

It's worth noting that Gabon's economy has been until now fueled by oil which is exploited off and onshore by international companies in compliance with international environmental standards. This roundtable was timely as the government is diversifying its sources of revenues by granting licenses in the forest, energy, fishing and iron ore sectors and would like to make sure that the exploitation of natural resources which are wetlands dependant and which have been untouched in the past does not put the country's wetlands into doubt. The meeting discussed the Ramsar COP10. Res 26 on wetlands and extractive industries and called for its implementation through proper Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment in projects where wetlands are at risk.

The meeting was co-organized by the Government of Gabon, the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and the WWF office in Gabon.

The Gabon experience will serve as pilot case to motivate other countries in the sub region to engage with the private sector to improve corporate social responsibility and governance in the extractive industries sector and offer opportunities to strengthen the conservation and wise use of wetlands, while still realizing economic benefits from the development of extractive industries.

- Preparation of a project document on the *“régénération des mangroves de la baie de la Mondah pour la séquestration du carbone”*

The project document was prepared and sent to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

### **5.3 The way forward**

- Receiving the project final report
- Raising funds for the mangroves’ regeneration project.

## **6. WISE USE OF WETLANDS - Reactivation of the implementation of the Convention in Equatorial Guinea.**

This project has not been implemented yet as the Secretariat has serious difficulties to communicate with the CP National Focal Point. If we don’t hear from him by the end of 2009, a request will be send to FOEN to allocate the resources to another country.