

A socio-ecological assessment aiming at improved forest resource management and sustainable ecotourism development in the mangroves of Tanbi Wetland National Park, The Gambia, West Africa

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Abstract

Although mangroves dominated by *Avicennia germinans* and *Rhizophora mangle* are extending over 6,000 ha in the Tanbi Wetland National Park (TWNP) (The Gambia), their importance for local populations (both peri-urban and urban) is not well documented. For the first time, the present study evaluates the different mangrove resources in and around Banjul (i.e. timber, non-timber, edible and ethnomedicinal products) and their utilization patterns, including the possibility of ecotourism development. The questionnaire-based results have indicated that more than 80% of peri-urban population rely on mangroves for timber and non-timber products and consider them as very important for their livelihoods ($\chi^2 = 7.852$; $P < 0.05$). However, at the same time urban households demonstrate limited knowledge on mangrove species and their ecological/economic benefits. Among others, fishing (including the oyster - *Crassostrea cf. gasar* collection) and tourism are the major income-generating activities found in the TWNP. The age-old practices of agriculture in some parts of the TWNP are linked to land scarcity, increased family size, and alternative sources of income. The recent focus on ecotourism (i.e. boardwalk construction inside the mangroves near Banjul city) received a positive response from the local stakeholders (i.e. users, government and non-government organizations), with their appropriate roles in sharing the revenue, rights and responsibilities of this project. Though the guidelines for conservation and management of the TWNP seem to be compatible, the harmony between local people and sustainable resource utilization should be ascertained.

Keywords

socio-ecology, Tanbi Wetland National Park, resource utilization, participatory methods, The Gambia