

UPDATES FROM THE SECRETARIAT

It has been a hectic few months at the Secretariat. Much of the background governance and administration work has been completed and the programme activities are getting underway with the State of the Environment project up and running.

Governance and Administration

The Secretariat is pleased to announce that fourteen organisations have now submitted their application, including our first international affiliate, The African Conservation and Development Association. We have also received an application from a potential member in Niger, our first in the GAWA network. The website continues to be updated and two new features have been added. A hit counter has been included that allows us to record the number of times the website is visited and from what country. Having this information will allow us to see what changes

were effective in increasing the use of the website. The majority of the visits are coming from the United States and the scholarship opportunity listed is a result of an internet search.

Programme Activities

The State of the Environment project is underway and has kept the Secretariat staff very busy. A film being produced by One Sky-CSSL with IUCN-NL funding has been integrated into the series and is about to wrap up shooting. The film entitled, 'Life After Diamonds' is documenting the land reclamation efforts occurring in the Kono Region of Sierra Leone. The introductory sequence for the SOTE videos has also been completed and the script for the first film, introducing the SOTE series and the work of GAWA will soon be completed. The first thematic episode of the series is also underway and will focus on Renewable Energy and Energy issues within the

region. Research has begun on this and we will be working with the GAWA members who expressed interest to make this a truly regional GAWA production.

Miscellaneous

One of the Secretariat's functions is to act as a Regional Focal Point for the IUCN-NL small grants programme. Under this role, one of the Secretariat staff is currently on a trip to Guinea to conduct M&E activities for two funded projects. This trip will also bring him to Senegal and Mali to meet with partners and attend the 'Water and Conflict' Conference in Bamako. The MoU between GAWA and the ECOWAS Commission on Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources is still in process. The Secretariat submitted a draft and we have received feedback direct from the Commissioner. A second draft has been sent and we hope will be fully received.

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- ◆ ECOWAS MoU nearing completion
- ◆ New website features
- ◆ Member project updates
- ◆ Scholarship opportunity



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Green actors of west africa



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Featured Organisation - Les Amis de la Terre -Togo

Togo has 83 protected sites and several sacred forests. These represent a great ecosystem importance. In the littoral sacred forests, 220 vegetal species are found, 5 reptile species, 12 mammal species and 46 birds.

The biological wealth of the country is made up of 3752 floral species and 3469 faunal species. Most of which today are threatened of disappearance. Coupled to the variety of ecosystems is a cultural diversity resulting from a co-habitation of 47 ethnic groups.

The local communities have contributed to the conservation of this natural wealth and to the selection of plant species which today, are subject to being patented. This is a judiciary system which denies local communities their rights to access these resources to the profit of multi-nationals.

Moreover, the Togolese actors are not only ignorant of the international and national instruments of biological resources management, but on the sharing of benefices incurred from their exploitation. This situation increases the anarchistic and unsustainable exploitation of biological diversity, and bio-pirate as well.

The NGO 'Les Amis de la Terre-Togo', has therefore organized in December 2007 in Lomé (for the first time in Togo), a workshop of exchange and reflexion on the orientations for the access to genetic resources and sharing of advantages the objective of which was to arise in environment actors reactions for taking measures geared together towards a better management of genetic heritage.

**NEW WEBSITE
LAUNCHED**

WWW.GAWA.NU

Project Update - Environmental Foundation for Africa

The Environmental Foundation for Africa serves as the lead organisation within the GAWA network for issues related to Energy and they have been active in expanding their programme work over the last few months. A partnership with Light Up The World and CAUSE Canada saw the installation of systems at a library, two schools and an office in Kabala, northern Sierra Leone. Funding has also been received to install two other schools in the Tiwai Island area. This funding was received through Global Giving, an organisation that allows other organisations to post projects and receive funding through their site. (<http://www.globalgiving.com/pr/2400/proj2345a.html>). Two EFA staff members have also started teaching Solar Hot Water and Solar Electricity classes at Government Technical Institute in Kissy (eastern Freetown) and the hope is to expand this into a full Alternative Energy programme as part of the standard curriculum.



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Project Update - Benin Ecotourism Concern (Benin)

The Koussoukoingou village is one of the rare tourist attractions listed in the travel guides on West Africa, however the primary accommodation has been closed for three years. The local residents seized the initiative for sustainable community-based ecotourism with the technical support of Eco-Benin. So far, 22 traditional Tata Somba had been inventoried 5 of which were empowered for tourist lodging. The Tata Somba is a traditional architectural style of the Atacora region and the Somba people are known for their special way of construction and their rich traditions.

There were several trainings which ended with the establishment of 3 itineraries, 10 tours guides, 2 cooks, 4 handicrafts producers and entertaining activities. A website has been created for these services and this is online at www.ecobenin.org/koussoukoingou. Tata Somba owners were trained and empowered to host tourists in their traditional Tata and tour guides were also supported with hiking materials. This activity permitted the whole household to win money from the tourist services with the revenue split between the host family, the Association and the village.

In December 2007, the phase of marketing started and the village hosted 334 tourists in 4 months but the availability of a tourist accommodation constitutes the major problem for the long-term stay of the visitors. So the two parties (community and Eco-Benin) decided to construct a Tata Somba ecolodge with the traditional architecture of the Tata Somba with the fundraising activities for the construction of the ecolodge ongoing. Two Tata Somba dwellings were built in February 2008, whereas these villagers hadn't built a Tata Somba for 30 years.



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Scholarship Opportunity - Brown University

The Watson International Scholars of the Environment program brings mid-career environmental leaders from universities, governments, and nongovernmental organizations throughout Africa to Brown University for advanced training in land-change history, sciences, and policies, providing them with the context to enhance the sustainable development ca-

capacity in their countries. The opportunity offers an intensive program in sustainable land-use studies to provide mastery of critical concepts, relevant tools, and transferable processes necessary for managing land and ecosystems. Supported by a grant from the [Henry Luce Foundation](#) and endorsed by the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#), the pro-

gram offers scholars time away from their daily responsibilities to learn new skills with a community of scholars applying both theoretical and practice approaches to real world environmental issues. A link to all the programme information is available on the GAWA website and the applications are due by April 15, 2009



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Editorial—Who is to blame for Deforestation?

Nearly 100 years ago, when Sierra Leone was under British rule, the colonial office employed two separate ‘experts’ from England to evaluate the state of the forests on the Freetown peninsula. In their reports they lambasted the natives for destroying the forest through their activities of canoe making and shifting agriculture. In contrast, Europeans who were conducting commercial logging activities were given recommendations to expand their activities. Their ultimate solution to this perceived problem of forest destruction was the expelling of the native population living in the peninsula’s forested mountains in order to create the Western Area Peninsula Reserve. Although two settlements, Hill Station and Regent, were spared this eviction process because between them they housed a sizeable European population. While the above no doubt reflects the inherent racism within the colonial government, it also reflects something more subtle: how a powerful actor can create and manipulate blame for environmental problems.

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Since the end of Sierra Leone’s civil war in 2001, there has been an increase in concerns for the preservation of Freetown’s peninsula forest. A number of development projects have been implemented along the peninsula in an attempt to stop the deforestation. These projects have largely been funded by international donors and reflect an increasing trend in combining environmental and developmental concerns. While an increase of environmental concerns in development interventions is no doubt desirable, it can also be problematic. Environmental problems can often be contorted conveniently into development narratives, rather than offering a fundamental challenge to the current orthodoxy.

This is evident with ‘addressing’ deforestation on the Freetown peninsula, whereby development interventions have predominantly focused on ‘sensitising’ or reorganizing the livelihoods of poor communities along the peninsula. The logic behind such interactions is that environmental degradation, such as deforestation, is symptomatic of widespread poverty and the subsequent ignorance that it supposedly breeds, meaning that solutions to environmental problems are ultimately based on intervening into the livelihoods of the poor. By predominantly concentrating solutions on the activities of the poor, we risk mimicking the actions of the colonial government 100 years earlier; placing blame for deforestation on poorer and politically weaker groups, while ignoring more complex problems. The poor make convenient subjects for development interventions, but are they the relevant demographic to focus on for solving environmental problems?

A simple examination of deforestation on the Freetown peninsula suggests that the issue is much more complex than a symptom of poverty. The most widespread areas of deforestation have been caused by rapid urban encroachment, which includes the wealthy structures housing government officials, ex-patriot staff and a number of offices, the land allegedly being sold to them by the Lands Ministry. The main consumers of the wood from the peninsula forest are Freetown urbanites; they use timber to construct their houses, to build their furniture and to cook their food. Meaning that solving the issue of deforestation on the Freetown peninsula is not a question of development interventions, but rather there is a need for a complete redefining of Freetown’s relationship with its surrounding forest. The solution to deforestation therefore lies in alternative forms of urban consumption and government accountability.

By Paul Munro - Paul recently completed an MA in Environment and Development from Kings College London

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