



THE GREEN CHARTER

A Local Guideline for Environmental Protection in Cameroon

Adopted unanimously at the close of a 7-day workshop and conference on environmental protection in Buea, Capital City of the South West Region, Cameroon.

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INTRODUCTION

The Green Charter, drafted and adopted during the Green Week at the Alliance Franco-Camerounaise Buea, on Sunday the 14th of April 2013, is intended to serve as a framework and provide guiding principles for environmental protection in Cameroon for governments, corporations, civil society and all other parties. Green Cameroon consulted with national stakeholders, including nonprofit organisations, policy makers, specialists, university lecturers, private companies, members of local delegations, and engaged community members on forest, water, agriculture and waste management to develop this document, hereby called the Green Charter.

For a long time, environmental issues have not been taken seriously, with concern restricted to the scientist or activist communities, and seeming to be limited to a vague threat that could occur in an uncertain future, with no one taking responsibility for the damage being done. Environmental protection remained a topic of minor importance compared to the pressure of the world economy and the race for development.

This state of affairs was the result of two phenomena: on the one hand the orientation of our societies towards maximizing economical benefits in a short space of time, irrespective of the long term destruction such practices induce; and on the other hand the fact that many natural resources were not included as commodities in the economic system, meaning that the rules for access to the resources, and the responsibility and penalties for damaging or over exploiting were undefined and not considered. *The well-known principle of “The tragedy of the Commons”¹ has illustrated the problem of unclear responsibility and conflict of interest between personal profit and common interest, as most of the environmental services were not included in the standard economical system and thus could not be taken into account for individuals’ actions.*

But today environmental problems are catching up to us and we cannot ignore them anymore. It is no longer a question of vague threats; people are being affected now and it’s impacting our economy, our conditions of life and our potential for development.

It is for this reason that Green Cameroon and its partners launched the Green Media Campaign and organised the Green Week event. We wanted to call upon the population to respect and actively protect the environment, as it is put under intense strain by the demand for resources from the growing human population. We believe proper management of the environment is first and foremost a matter of awareness on the environmental aspects on which our prosperity, wellbeing and future depends, and of the many sustainable alternatives available.

The Green Week brought more than 500 souls together, with the main objective of joining forces to reflect and brainstorm on pertinent environmental issues facing our communities. Presentations and deliberations focused on four main areas which were forest, water, agriculture and waste management. The round table discussions delivered the following inspired results.

¹ See G. Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons”. Science 13 December 1968: Vol. 162 no. 3859 pp. 1243-1248

1. WATER MANAGEMENT

1.1. CHALLENGES IN TERMS OF WATER MANAGEMENT

Water governance

- No functional policy framework for water resource management vis-à-vis climate change. This suggests that it is not a priority on the political agenda
- Fragmented and institutional conflict in water resource planning and management
- Political interference affects implementation of existing water resource planning and management tools
- Inadequate institutional mandates and poor data management. Absence of an integrated and holistic approach to water resource management.

Water catchment management and water supply infrastructure

- Absence of mapping and zoning practices or land use planning around the catchment areas leading to illicit and illegal human activities such as agriculture, deforestation, bush fires...
- Cultivation of high water consumption tree species such as Eucalyptus and whispering pines in watersheds, catchments and strategic water recharge areas
- Leakages and misuse of water due to low levels of investment and the use of obsolete infrastructure and asbestos pipes leading to intermittent and/or unreliable water supply
- Acute drop in groundwater or source water capacity during the dry season probably due to unreliable rainfall regimes and poor land use management practices in the catchments
- Poor conception, design, construction of community water schemes as well as non-provision of adequate infrastructure
- Inadequate sensitization and awareness of the population on proper water catchment management practices
- Lack of feasibility studies, forecasting of the population trends vis-à-vis water demand and supply
- Conflicting land uses in water catchments
- Lack of optimization of community water management opportunities based on the concept of integrated water resource management and holistic management of natural resources.

Issues related to water quality and management

- Issues of bottom-up management.
- Issues of water and health related implications (water borne diseases)

- Lack of concrete projects related to water management
- Lack of consensus amongst NGO's dealing with water management
- Forecasting of the population
- Conflicts with land ownership (land tenure system) and dimensions of the catchments
- Use of galvanized asbestos pipes which have expired and leads to oxygenation in water
- Payment of water
- Issues related to climate change

1.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EFFICIENT WATER MANAGEMENT

- Proper protection of watersheds and catchment areas, including both technical actions (accurate mapping of the water resources, revegetation on the edges of the water bodies, reforestation in the recharge areas, water treatment plants, etc...) and appropriate policies (a clear set of rules for land use, improved application of the law, system of fines and subsidies, support to farmers to improve practices and reduce their impacts on water quality, initiatives like Payment for Water Services, etc..)
 - Implement integrated watershed management. The Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) aims at joining the efforts of all stakeholders around a watershed, in a multidisciplinary and participatory approach, leading to a consensus on the use of the water resources and on their preservation.
 - Establish a platform for the exchange of information to stimulate concerted actions and create awareness on the impacts of climate change and poor water management practices on the future sustainability of water resources and humankind who depend on the water.
 - Conduct adequate assessment of water supply and demand based on the various uses of water and the population trend
 - Establish conflict resolution committees to resolve conflicts emanating from improper water resource planning and management
 - Rainwater harvesting. Constant routine checks of water quality assessment
 - Proper mapping and zoning of watersheds and water catchment areas
 - Assign more sanitary inspectors
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2. WASTE MANAGEMENT

2.1. CHALLENGES IN TERMS OF WASTE MANAGEMENT

- The local population has bad habits when it comes to the treatment of their waste. This has many causes and reasons. First of all, they don't realise what the impact is of their actions on the environment. Secondly, due to lack of proper disposal infrastructure (insufficient trash cans, inadequate reliable waste pickups...), they don't have a choice but to just throw it away or burn it in their own backyard.
- The few containers or trash cans that can be found in the cities are too small and are not adapted to the numbers and needs of the citizens that are using them.
- HYSACAM complains about badly maintained material like their trucks and blames the councils for this. Out of this and other discussions, we notice that there clearly is an issue on responsibility division. It is not clear who is responsible for what and it also seems that some responsibilities are lying with the wrong party.
- The bad condition of many roads poses a problem for HYSACAM's trucks. They can only drive on the accessible tar roads but many houses are located on quite some distance from these.
- Organic and inorganic waste is not separated, neither by the population, nor by HYSACAM. The population doesn't know why this should be done and HYSACAM simply doesn't have the necessary infrastructure to perform this separation.
- Composting is a very effective and sustainable way to treat the organic waste. Unfortunately, there isn't enough space for everybody to have their own compost.
- Due to missing Recycling Industry in the Buea region, recycling our waste is not possible.

2.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EFFICIENT WASTE MANAGEMENT

- The local population should be sensitised and educated on how to treat their waste and on how to dispose of it. It's important they see the impact of their own actions on the environment and their own living conditions.
- Creating laws (first locally, afterwards nationally) to restrict littering should be put in place and should be enforced.
- A competition between the quarters of cities can be organised to have the cleanest quarter with a nice incentive for the winner.
- The use of stronger, more durable bags should be encouraged and the selling of these bags could be subsidized by the council. By buying these in bulk and selling them to the vendors at a lower price, the consumer will be encouraged to the acquisition and use of these bags.
- Shopkeepers could be banned from, or fined for, using the extremely feeble and weak bags that tend to break after only one or two uses.
- Construct more accessible tar roads so the trash trucks can reach more houses.

- As a complementary solution, sub-contractors could be hired to get the waste from unreachable houses to the closest road that is used by the trash trucks. It is our belief that people will be willing to pay a small contribution for this service.
 - Next to the public waste containers and trash cans, boxes could be placed where people can drop their plastic bottles and where other people can also come and take plastic bottles. This will improve the reuse of these bottles. Because it is probable that more bottles will be coming in than out, once a month this box will need to be emptied by HYSACAM.
 - On the local markets, people should be encouraged to make more use of more sustainable bags and also to do their groceries with jars or small containers they bring from home so the use of plastic bags is avoided.
 - The Recycling Industry is missing in the Buea region so we should encourage the installation of their infrastructures here. Subsidizing these companies is an investment that will pay itself back in a very short time.
 - Companies should receive incentives when they recycle some of their own waste or organise the recycling of this.
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3. AGRICULTURE

3.1. CHALLENGES RELATED TO AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

- Deforestation. Vast areas of our natural forest have been cleared and the practice of deforestation for agriculture is still ongoing.
- Bush burning in order to have land for cultivation and many people believe this is good for the soil.
- Pests and diseases on crops, especially on vegetables and cereals
- Insufficient water for farmlands
- Increase temperatures in our communities which has an effect on the crops and encourage pests. These pests attack the plants, but also increase the risks of illnesses like malaria.
- Increased use of synthetic chemicals (inorganic fertilizers, pesticides) on crops, causing health concerns, food chain contamination and pollution of soil, water or air pollution.

3.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

- Widespread propagation of the messages on the economic, social and ecological importance of caring for the environment for farmers. We are recommending that the Government provides effective sensitization sessions to the public on environmental protection and sustainable agricultural practices.

- Encourage the use of organic manure, fertilizers and natural pest repellents through farmers groups.
 - Encourage and support mixed farming practices, crop rotation, alley cropping and agro-forestry for a sustainable management of farmlands.
 - Carry out campaigns to encourage individuals to sort their waste and use organic waste to make compost, while recycling or re-using the waste that can be re-used (e.g. Containers)
 - Encourage and educate farmers groups on the use of sustainable crop association and natural pest repellents (eg. Wood ash on maize), as well as scarecrows.
 - We recommend the government provide waste management infrastructure in the municipality for managing and treating non-biodegradable waste.
 - The Government should subsidise the production of organic manure, pesticides and insecticides so that they should be easily affordable to farmers
 - Provide training sessions on proper organic farming methods to farmers or common initiative groups.
 - The Government should introduce testing of the chemical residues in food crops, including training and providing equipment and personnel to fulfill this task and report on this.
 - The Government or an assigned organization or NGO should introduce a certification system for organic products, to encourage and manage this new industry.
 - We recommend that farmers be encouraged to keep livestock, such that their waste can be used as manure to add soil nutrition. This would provide increased yield and income generation sources.
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4. FOREST MANAGEMENT

4.1. CHALLENGES OF FOREST CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION

- Deforestation. Increasing level of deforestation in the country due to commercial logging, population growth and agricultural expansion.
- Inventory aspect of conservation. Cameroon is missing practical field data about the forests as well as fauna and flora contained in the forests. If we take for example the elephants. The ministry (of Forestry) does not have the exact data of the number of elephants remaining on their territory. Only NGO's, like WWF have figures. So, there is a need for data related to biodiversity level and field investigation work
- The lack of understanding of the importance and the potential (for development, economy, yields etc.) of the forests and of biodiversity protection.
- Lack of training and lack of experts in ecological conservation. When it's done, it's done by westerners or NGO's. Even forest guards are often not well trained.

- Policies are not applied and international laws are not respected. Cameroon has good policies, but they are not applied and very often that is due to a lack of means (both financial and human resources) and lack of political will, or clarity on the desired implementation of such laws.
- It is also linked to a lack of organization within the institutions: the information doesn't circulate properly. This comes from overlapping institutions, a non coherent partitioning of the duties between ministries that leads to lack of clarity on responsibilities, and the lack of effective communication between institutions and towards citizens (eg. websites totally out of date, non existence of databases, information not computerized, etc..) Westerners are often more aware and even in the Cameroon Forestry Schools and studies, many of the students are foreigners.
- International laws on forestry are not respected.
- Conflict with forest communities. When national parks are set up, there is no collaboration with the communities inside the park. Also, the communities continue partaking in activities that are in contradiction with forest preservation and conservation requirements, like hunting. This is due to the fact that there is no dialogue with them, they are not consulted, not involved and not offered any alternative means of livelihood.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EFFICIENT FOREST MANAGEMENT

- Improve the knowledge of biodiversity levels. Local knowledge on ecological conservation, environment and biodiversity should be increased through:
 - Expansion of inventory, monitoring and field investigation activities;
 - Partnerships and networking for development between universities, civil society and governmental instances
 - Increased political will and involvement
 - Training of the local population on performing ecological inventories.
- Development and encouragement of alternative activities. Financial, technical and practical support for alternative activities that are working towards forest conservation and preservation. Such as: Fuel Efficient Stoves, Eco tourism and selling of non timber forest products.
- Investment in national parks and training of the park employees. National parks should be taken care of and employees working for the park should have decent training and salary.
- Apply a participative approach. When setting up national parks and implementing other rules for forest conservation and preservation, communities should be consulted and a participative approach should be followed. So that all stakeholders are involved in the implementation of development projects.
- Increase political will and involvement of local authorities. Involve local and political authorities in environmental events, seminars, demonstrations, debates and activities.

- Improve communication and transmission of information, including up to date databases and inventory results amongst the ministries and to the general population. The protection strategies should also be communicated to the public to allow them to support in some way. Improve collaboration and organization of all involved institutions.
- Facilitate the management of community forests. Facilitate the implementation of Community Forests by providing the necessary financial and technical support to the communities.
- More efficient land planning and governance. Increased coherence in land planning, field research and governance.
- Enforcement of international laws and conventions
- Improve environmental education
 - Add it in syllabus as from primary school with practical lessons on each topic.
 - Develop extra scholar training on environmental issues for other members of the community
 - Invest in environmental education for teachers (teach the teachers)
- Support organizations working on health and family planning. To keep the population growth under control
- Implement, enhance and invest in Agro-Forestry initiatives and afforestation
- Create a multidisciplinary committee to push ideas and initiatives. With members of the universities, civil society, NGO's, local authorities and related ministries
- Value traditional knowledge and field skills, for example medicinal plants
- Facilitate and encourage new initiatives, scientific research and pilot projects, like for example Payment for Ecosystem services.

For questions, remarks or more information, feel free to contact us

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