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Contribution of Cameroon : An outlook of Cameroon's coastal zone

Introduction

Like all coastal zones, the cameroonian coast is a complex and diversified environment, controlled by atmospheric, marine and terrestrial phenomena. This diversity is a result of natural changes, human activities, and even the diversity of resources. Coastal zone falls among the most productive ecosystems in the biosphere ; they possess specific attributes from which socio-economic development can either benefit, or suffer. Thus their harmfulness is commensurate with their potentials. In effect, these zones are often subjected to chaotic, and even destructive exploitation which tends generally to off set the ecological equilibria.

Coastal land shape and hydrology

The coastal zone in Cameroon stretches over 402 km from the Nigeria border in the north (latitude 4°40'N) to the equatō guinean border in the south (latitude 2° 20'N). in terms of longitude, it is located between 18°15' E and 9° 30' E.

Cameroon coastal zone is defined as the region stretching from the level of the high tide up to about 60 Km into the continent comprising many paysage style. It's either high and rocky alternating with sandy beaches, dunc and coastal forest or low and swampy characterised by the presence of mangroves, coastal plains, river delta and estuaries, wetlands and the exclusive economic zone (15,400 Km).

The continental boundary is marked by a continuous line linking 3 provinces ; the south-west, the littoral and the south. In some places the coastline is covered with volcanic deposits from active Cameroon mountain (4,100 m). The river network is very dense and many rivers discharge directly into the Atlantic ocean.

Climate and oceanographic conditions

The Coastal hydro-climate is influenced by heavy rains which reach annual values of 11,000 mm in the De-bundscha arca (considered the most wet area in Africa)

Surface salinity is less than 25‰ Water masses at the surface are constantly warm. The circulation of water is slow and this results in a high rate of sedimentation. The tides are of the semi-diurnal type and can reach amplitude of 0.5 to 2.7 m, depending on the location. Generally, tidal currents are observed.



Natural resources

Natural resources in Cameroon's coastal zone include :

- mineral resources : Study of the mineral potential of the Cameroon Coastal zone revealed the existence of several mineral deposits (iron, sand, olivine, lime etc.) and hydrocarbons (petroleum and natural gas)
- Living resources : They consist essentially of :
 - a very diversified fauna : fish and shrimps (more than 40 species exploited) birds, mammals etc...
 - Mangroves : Cameroon mangroves still have enormous potentials, despite the destruction of almost one-third of their total area. They cover 2,700 Km. These mangroves serve as nursery zone and shelter for shrimps and fish.
 - Coastal forest : it contains many species with high economic value e.g. : *Prunus africana* (Rosacea) exploited for its bark which has pharmaceutical properties. Endemic species with ecological importance are also found here.

Socio-Economic Dimension

The coastal zone of Cameroon runs through three provinces (south, Littoral and South - West) and it accommodates about 15 % of the national population. With a growth rate varying between 2 and 6 %, this population was almost doubled between 1987 and 1995. Transport infrastructures in this coastal zone include sea ports, airports, road and railway networks. The road network is about 1,400 Km long, representing an average density of 1 Km per 1,000 inhabitants where as the national average is 3.5 Km per 1,000 inhabitants.

The present economic activities include traditional agriculture, cash crop farming, industrial crop farming, (oil palm, rubber, banana, tea), livestock and fishing, as well as various industries. Tourism is also an important activity within the zone.

Degradation of coastal environment and its resources

The management of the coastal environment and its resources in Cameroon is hampered by number of problems relating to : - Development infrastructure, coastal erosion, depletion of fishery resources and constraints to their development, loss of biodiversity, due to uncontrolled exploitation and pollution.

Existing policies and legal instruments

National goals and objectives in sectorial policies as well as prevailing conservation and repressive measures have been identified. Regulator instruments aimed at preventing, controlling and managing actual and potential damages or threats of pollution, coastal erosion and disaster are equally examined. A new instrument providing policy and strategy guidelines to strengthen the existing regulatory mechanisms is necessary. Considering that coastal ecosystems are transnational in nature, ongoing collective regional and international efforts in adopting management measures are of great importance. Strengthening of bilateral, regional and international cooperation is thus a concern.



Institutional mechanisms

Many institutions and structures are involved in the management of the coastal zone. Their responsibilities and inter relationships are examined to identify gaps and inadequacies at all levels of management. An efficient co-ordination of their activities and a clear definition of their roles and responsibilities will therefore guarantee proper management of the coastal zone.

The participation of coastal stakeholders has not been effective for various reasons : lack of human material and financial resources required to address problems of the coastal zones. Knowledge on critical issues within this zone is inadequate. Local communities, are ignorant on the issues that relate to the coastal environment on which they depend for survival. Building the institutional capacity to manage the coastal area will thus include educating and creating awareness on concepts and practices of sustainable development and on the significance of coastal environmental protection. Training and research needs and dissemination of relevant information to the various sectors involved in the management of the coastal area should also be considered.

Conclusion

In spite of government's effort thus far, which aims at ensuring an effective management of the coastal environment and a sustainable use of its resources, much still remains to be done in developing a conducive policy environment. The hurdles identified need to be overcome for an efficient management of the coastal area. These constraints mainly include the following :

- Insufficient and weak institutional capacity for efficient coordination and management of the coastal environment
- Non conducive policy environment for the conservation of biodiversity and biological resources located in the coastal zone
- Inability to integrate newly instituted environment impact assessment mechanisms into development projects
- Weak regional and international cooperation in managing the threatening processes of the coastal zone which knows no national boundaries
- Unrealistic partnership with the local community and women for participatory management
- Inadequate human and financial, resources required for the implementation of identified management programs and projects
- Incapacity to incorporate monitoring, evaluation and reporting as components that are essential for measuring progress for purposes of reviewing and improving the management of the coastal zone.

Failure to identify number of key issues to address these constraints will lead to increasing pollution and degradation of the coastal environment with a resultant loss of biodiversity and depletion of the invaluable natural resources located in Cameroon's coastal zone and the large marine Ecosystem of the Gulf of Guinea.

For this reason, it is hoped that the information provided in the present conference will help to catalyse action to slow down the rate of degradation and pollution of our coastal environment and lead to the development of collaboration which could enable us set-up some of our project.