

# Communication Strategies and Impacts of OIPR Tree Planting Initiative in the North-East of Ivory Coast for the Nature Conservation

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**Abstract:** *This study as a field of sustainable development, examines the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves (OIPR) communication's efforts in tree planting and environment preservation, particularly in Comoé National Park. Utilizing an integrated model for social change, the study assesses the effectiveness of OIPR's communication strategies in engaging local communities for environmental conservation. The purpose of this article is to analyze the effectiveness of OIPR communication strategies in promoting tree planting and environmental conservation among local communities in the north-east of Ivory coast (the Bounkani region) supervised by OIPR's north-east directorate called DZNE ( Direction de Zone Nord-Est).*

**Keywords:** Communication strategies - tree planting - fight against nature degradation - OIPR- DZNE

## 1. Introduction

Tree planting is introduced to replace certain types of trees that are disappearing due to the deterioration of climatic conditions, but also to preserve the environment. The Environmental Action Plan can be defined as:

A linkage of three factors, inanimate (abiotic) elements such as air, water, soil, climate, atmosphere, then, plant and animal life (biotic) and finally, man-related factors (anthropogenic) such as cities, factories, economy (George P. and Verger F). In other words, the environment refers to "all natural and artificial elements as well as economic, social and cultural factors that promote the existence, transformation and development of the environment, living organisms and human activities" (Environmental Code p5).

Indeed, several factors that are now known are at the origin of the process of degradation of natural resources and desertification of Protected Areas. It is recognized that it is the result of the conjunction of a set of complex factors, the main ones are climatic, successive droughts and irregular rainfall, which are the cause of the weakening of the natural environment and a strong degradation of the forest cover, and anthropogenic growth, and methods of exploitation of the environment that are not adapted to the new conditions.

Other factors include inadequately designed natural resource and forest management policies. They do not take into account the potential of the physical environment, the real needs of the population or the social and economic role of

natural resources. Interventions through state structures prevent reforestation and soil restoration actions from being taken care of at the village level. In addition, these collaborators prevent an extensive sectorization and the failure to take into account all the factors at play and the interaction between the different sectors agriculture, livestock and forestry. The persistence of the process of degradation and desertification and even its increase, the recognition of the failure due to the various interventionist policies carried out for decades have forced governments to and forest services to gradually rethink their rural intervention strategy. Today, most environmental policies or the management of natural and forest resources advocate the participation and commitment of local communities as a basic principle, of which the OIPR is an illustration.

In terms of mobilizing local populations or even mobilizing them in the various actions designed by and for them, very interesting experiments are being carried out by this Structure. They aim to reconsider the various actions and modes of intervention and to closely involve local communities in the concerted and integrated management of natural and forest resources at the local level of the Bounkani region.

These experiments are gradually being formalized in the form of a methodology known as the participatory approach. Through the implementation of a series of steps, the objective of this is precisely to involve and closely associate local populations in the diagnosis, identification, programming, implementation and monitoring of the actions to be carried out at the level of the Bounkani region and to

define the responsibilities of the various partners in the monitoring of natural resource management, especially and above all to minimize climatic hazards. Loura. P (2021).

In addition, this OIPR's tree planting initiative is part of the fight against environmental degradation. Having noted that many species of trees are now becoming rare and that there are practically no trees capable of stopping the strong winds in the region except for the trees of the Comoé National Park, The managers, in partnership with the Water and Forest Service of the said region, organize awareness campaigns on the reforestation of trees to alleviate the problems of climate change. This means that many trees have disappeared, leaving the bare soil unprotected, especially in a savannah region, exposed to wind erosion that washes away the good soil that served as a valuable resource to allow crops to germinate or herbaceous species to grow to serve as livestock feed. It is in this perspective that this awareness campaign on tree planting to conserve the environment is inscribed.

Therefore, the park manager's behaviour change communication strategies guide people to adopt positive behaviours in terms of environmental preservation. The aim of OIPR is to incite local communities to get rid of their habits of environmental degradation or predation on the trees around them and to have conservation and protection behaviours of the plant species that surround them, especially the park. To do so, necessary efforts are organized through awareness campaigns, open days, advertisements, conferences, and panels to sensitize the populations to actively participate in tree planting and to make them ambassadors for the preservation of the environment and the preservation of the Comoé National Park.

However, in view of global warming, the advance of the desert continues in most regions of Côte d'Ivoire including that of the Bounkani region, a specific question arises, how have the OIPR-DZNE's awareness campaigns had an impact on changing the behaviour of local communities in terms of tree planting and environmental preservation? The objective of this article is to analyze the communication of the OIPR and the Water and Forests Service to plant trees to preserve the environment to reduce the advance of the desert in the Bounkani region. As a hypothesis, we believe that people plant trees for the preservation of the environment and to reduce climatic hazards when they are involved in environmental preservation activities.

## 2. Study Methodology and Material

### 2.1. Study site

#### 2.1.1. The study area

Our study took place in Bouna, the Bounkani region in the north-east of the country. A town in the department of the same name, capital of the Bounkani region, in the district of Zanzan, with an estimated population of 25,981. The study of this must be added to the Sectors and Cities in which OIPR is located in order to carry out its activities for the preservation of the environment of the park. These sectors and cities (Nassian, Dabakala, Tehini, and Kong) were also the places where our surveys were carried out because of the

missions we carried out for nature conservation activities. In these localities, there are structures and ministries in charge of environmental management and rural issues. These include the Ministry of SODEFOR, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, ANADER, and WATER and FORESTS, which ensure the protection of the environment.

#### 2.1.2. Material: Communication according to the Integrated Model for Social Change and Participative Theory

The Integrated Model for Social Change developed by Reardon in 2003 was used to explain the theme. It focuses on three (3) main points namely, Catalyst/Stimulus, Community Dialogue and Collective Action. The model states that social change describes how social change can occur through a process of community dialogue leading to collective action that affects the well-being of communities as a whole, as well as that of their individual members. The model describes a dynamic and repetitive process that begins with a catalyst/stimulus external or internal to the community. This catalyst leads to dialogue within a community that, when effective, leads to collective action to solve a common problem.

To find solutions to environmental degradation, the OIPR uses dialogue understood as awareness-raising to enable people to plant trees and also to make them aware of the consequences that are increasing in terms of environmental degradation. One of the main challenges of the participatory approach is to make local populations the essential actors in the management of natural resources and more generally of rural space at the level of their terroir. To achieve this, there are suitable communication methods and tools. These should lead in particular to raising awareness and mobilizing the population around the main issues of natural resource management and nature preservation. They also make it possible to convey new ideas, to collect opinions, to identify blockades, to promote or encourage positive initiatives and, above all, to maintain an ongoing dialogue between the various actors or partners and, finally, to compare the ideas and options proposed.

#### 2.1.3. Data Collection Technique

The literature review method formed the initial basis of this study. Indeed, for this study, we have set out to provide information from environmental stakeholders on the planting of trees, the preservation of nature and the involvement of local communities in the conservation project. An important part of this research consisted in taking into account our direct and participant observations during our internship and our field investigations during the realization of the doctoral thesis. In fact, we were interns within the OIPR in which we held the position of Communication Officers. These moments were favourable to observe the actions and communication interventions of environmental actors (OIPR) with the aim of planting trees to face the problems of climate change and the preservation of the Comoé National Park, particularly with the involvement of local communities. To take this study further, we used the Integrated Model for Social Change to adapt to the phenomenon.

### 3. Results

The results collected from our target (OIPR) as part of the change in the behaviour of local populations to plant trees for the preservation of the environment and the Comoé National Park are of several kinds, namely:

#### 3.1 Institutional communication

We have seen that this form of communication is used in the rational management of natural resources, which involves various stakeholders and sectors pursuing specific objectives. Indeed, it plays a key role in ensuring coherent action and harmonising the different approaches. It also promotes the regulation of information flows between the various actors involved and a better coordination of the approaches and programmes of activities carried out by the managers of the Comoé National Park. The places of communication between the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves (OIPR) and its North-East Directorate (DZNE) are often meetings or seminars, study days, reflection or information days, sometimes reflection workshops, organized by the various actors concerned, i.e. the Water and Forests Service, the OIPR. For the most part, the managers use posters, books, leaflets and leaflets during these meetings to facilitate and make more concrete the exchange of information with the local communities of the Comoé area to make them aware of environmental problems and the preservation of the Comoé National Park. In this regard, the video is a particularly interesting tool, as the OIPR uses it to report on the activities of their environmental conservation project, to visualize the progress made, to synthesize the activities spread over long periods in terms of nature preservation. It also provides testimonies from the various actors involved in these activities.

The newsletter is also a communication tool for the managers of the Comoé National Park, which plays several roles in preserving environment and parks. It makes it possible to maintain concrete contact between the various protagonists, to exchange information and experiences between the actors, to convey testimonies on innovative initiatives, to disseminate technical sheets on the different components of the programme, to encourage local populations to join the programme, to plant trees and to ensure the promotion of the programme's activities towards the local populations.

#### 3.2 Conducting environmental education meetings

These environmental education meetings are intended to awaken the curiosity of the population, especially the students, about the environmental problems that are specific to them and to lead them to better know, understand, love and protect their environment and to plant trees, so to speak, to be ambassadors of the preservation of nature. They provide them with new knowledge on environmental management techniques and enable them to become relays of the information acquired from their families and villages. These meetings are held in close collaboration with the populations themselves, and with forest service agents and other structures involved in the protection and management of natural resources. These meetings are held in primary and

secondary schools on the outskirts of the Comoé National Park. Each meeting is dedicated to specific awareness-raising actions. The meetings contain many sections, games, thematic files and are very abundantly illustrated, either by a rural facilitator or a forester (sector manager) who is part of the awareness-raising team, or by community leaders or the students themselves. More often, the dissemination of information is done after populations during the events in the Comoé area. These opportunities are an opportunity to discuss the issue of planting trees in communities, to gather feedback from people on how they see it, and then to talk about how it will benefit local communities.

#### 3.3 Advocacy

To raise awareness among the local communities of the Comoé area to plant trees, preserve the environment and the Comoé National Park, the OIPR in collaboration with the Water and Forests Service and opinion leaders give performances or sermons to invite the population to preserve nature by participating in these days. Especially since these people are well listened to in society, leaders launch messages to protect the environment and the park. This way of opinion leaders is often done at religious or cultural events to the presence of managers to launch messages of environmental protection. During this meeting, a religious authority is invited to lead a theme on religion and the environment. All these means are the few used by the managers of the Comoé Park and these collaborators to mobilize local populations to find solutions for the reforestation of trees and the protection of nature.

#### 3.4 Mass communication

This type of communication is used by the OIPR- DZNE to meet general information objectives aimed at the general public by organizing awareness campaigns on the usefulness of the environment, or to convey new ideas, techniques or services. The managers of the Comoé National Park to enable local populations to better understand the importance of nature preservation and also to promote successful experiences in terms of restoration or management of the environment and especially on the conservation of natural resources of the Comoé National Park.

As a result, this strategy used by the managers of the Comoé National Park with these partners and other collaborators is the rise to encourage, for example, the mobilization of local communities on themes of the management of their own environment. However, the use of the OIPR's mass means of communication implies the conclusion of collaboration agreements with local media (Radio Boutourou de Nassian, Radio la Voix de la Savane, Radio Conseil Régional Bounkani), private or associative and the active participation of those responsible for the management of land resources in the design and implementation of information and awareness-raising campaigns organized using the means of communication.

#### 3.5 Proximity or interpersonal communication

The OIPR-DZNE in charge of the Comoé National Park and its partners in collaboration with the Department of the

Environment, Water and Forests use the technique whose purpose is to support and reinforce each of the stages and phases of the approach, through a certain number of information tools, analysis, dialogue, training, management or monitoring, each of which has a specific function in the implementation of the different stages of the participatory approach. The manager of the Comoé National Park goes through dialogue, meets with each of the groups, youth associations and opinion leaders to facilitate an analysis, to allow the acquisition of knowledge or a technique and to evaluate the actions of local communities in the context of the preservation of the environment. Another fact, the OIPR-DZNE authorizes its agents to go to communities to facilitate their understanding of the importance of planting trees to avoid climatic hazards, to avoid degrading their environment and the intrusion of Comoé National Park being the only way in the region to tame natural disasters.

The local communities during these visits to the village manager's word-of-mouth and his partners contribute to a better understanding because they highlight the participation of the local communities of the Comoé area in the network. Local communities and environmental managers work together to propose useful influence schemes to improve the spread of messages in other towns and villages in the Comoé area.

### 3.6 Traditional or community communication

The communities of the Comoé area have traditional communication systems, tools and networks. These are designed and managed directly by the communities to meet their needs for information, education, entertainment, debate and local conflict management. The rules of traditional or communal communication in the Lobi and Koulango countries vary greatly according to the historical and cultural context in which these communities are situated. In fact, the most common events observed by the managers of the Comoé National Park are assemblies, theatre, puppet performances, songs, proverbs, riddles, stories, tales, inter-village visits, etc. This form of communication of the local communities of the Comoé area is used by the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves, the Water and Forests Service to disaggregate information on the usefulness of planting trees in their environment, preserving nature and refraining from the violation of the park's trespassing rights.

## 4. Discussion

The Water and Forests service of the OIPR and its partners are very well known. It is almost known by the majority of the local people in terms of nature preservation. In the fight against the degradation of natural resources, the Water and Forestry Department of the OIPR and its partners have been able to achieve performances by planting trees in the localities of the Comoé area, setting up nurseries that will be able to curb wind erosion and provide fodder for animals, especially during difficult lean seasons when rains become scarce, in addition to the preservation of the Comoé National Park.

These behaviour change communication campaigns have resulted in a lot of species being planted. In the future, the

latter will be able to play a fundamental role in the fight against the encroachment of the desert in the said region, in addition to providing fruit to the local population. Many nurseries have been set up, especially on the roads of the different areas of the departments of Bouna, Dabakala, Téhini and Nassian. Many trees have been planted as a result of a strong mobilization of youth presidents and other members of local communities.

Social communication has fostered the expression of all opinions, including those of women and youth, which are not always expressed during formal meetings between communities and promoters of tree planting projects or programmes. This social communication, whose function is to promote the dissemination of information and the awareness of the local population of the Comoé area on themes of general interest, also makes it possible to manage conflicts that may arise within communities on the appropriateness of the actions to be taken and the modalities of implementation. The approach is interactive, i.e. it stimulates and promotes a dialogue between all the actors concerned. It thus creates the conditions for a real debate on the problem of desert encroachment and climate change, the protection of the Comoé National Park and makes it possible to find a consensus, which will lead to concerted decision-making on the main actions to be taken to remedy this problem of environmental degradation.

Such dialogue helps to build trust between the various stakeholders and makes it possible to collect and value traditions, customs and folk knowledge, which are most often ignored or neglected in the field of environmental management. However, experience has shown that this knowledge, which provides simple, realistic and achievable solutions for the population, must instead be valued. However, several weaknesses hinder the proper functioning of the communication actions and strategies of the Ivorian Office of Parks and Reserves and the Water and Forests Service, including communication. There is no office dedicated solely to this purpose, and this often hinders the flow of information. Added to this is the absence of road signs that had to be installed at the entrance and everywhere in the localities of the Bounkani region to give the maximum information on planting trees, a factor of saving its environment and the preservation of nature. We can also add the aspect of ignorance of other means of interpersonal communication such as exchange platforms, websites.

As mentioned above, in order to better involve people in the context of nature conservation and the Comoé National Park, it is necessary to set up a dedicated office in order to pass on information. Appointing groups of people among the Service Officers to do door-to-door communication in localities to better orientate and motivate young people to plant trees could be a commendable action. Thus, this mode of communication will make it possible to better inform the population about the usefulness of trees, without mentioning communication panels that are ways to break down information.

In addition, in order to establish a sustainable management of tree planting in the localities of Bounkani and to raise awareness among the population, information and awareness



sessions must be held for the benefit of the population. Capacity building should include training the population on nursery management and environmental protection techniques and raising awareness on the management of the park.

[5] **Sacquet A.** (2002). Atlas mondial du développement durable(c) édition autrement ,77p.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the OIPRs communication strategies in the north-east zone of Ivory coast have played a significant role in engaging local communities in tree planting and environmental conservation efforts, contributing to the fight against nature deterioration. Through the method of direct observation and participation during our advanced training course within the OIPR-DZNE, we can remember that this work allowed us to know the objectives of it. It should be noted that the communication report also made it possible to know the communication strategies that are used by the OIPR and the Water and Forests Service to raise awareness among local communities to plant trees. Apart from that, this observation tells us about the quality and impact of these means of communication on local populations. These communications made it possible to better understand the area to be studied, to bring together the populations and the agents of the Water and Forestry Service, to discover the realities that exist, but also to push local residents to change their behaviour towards the environment and the actions taken in the Comoé National Park.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has developed a strategy for sustainable development called the Global Strategy for Conservation and Sustainable Living. "This strategy is based on an environmental ethic that can be summarized as 'it is through the modification of values that it is possible to change individual behaviour' (IUCN, Baggins A. (2002) World Atlas of Sustainable Development p6).

However, there are some difficulties that hinder the proper functioning of planting trees. It is important for the OIPR and its collaborators in charge of the preservation of nature by indirectly protecting protected areas to show the importance of preserving the environment to the populations in order to minimize the dangers to the environment. It will also be necessary to allow the populations themselves to take the initiative to plant trees in their locality and the weeded areas around the park and in the park based on awareness on sustainable development.

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