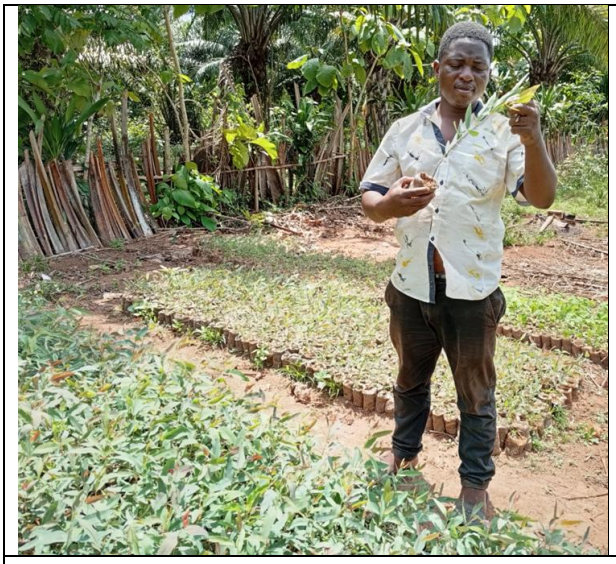
SDM PROJECT 2024
«STRENGTHENING THE RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF FIVE (05) SACRED FORESTS OF THE RAMSAR 1018 SITE IN BENIN»



ACTIVITY REPORT ON THE REFORESTATION WORK IN THE TERRITORY OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES UNDER THE "SDM PROJECT 2024"

"STRENGTHENING THE RESTORATION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF FIVE (05) SACRED FORESTS OF THE RAMSAR SITE 1018 IN BENIN"

November 2025

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1. Introduction

From May 1 to October 30, 2025, a reforestation campaign was conducted in five community lands adjacent to the sacred forests in the Municipality of Zè, located within Ramsar Site 1018 of Benin.

This initiative aims not only to restore degraded lands within the community territories but also to improve the availability of woody resources (timber, service wood, and firewood) in the short and medium term for local communities, in order to reduce pressure on the woody resources of the sacred forests.

This activity was carried out under the SDM Project 2024, entitled *"Strengthening the restoration and sustainable management of five (05) sacred forests of the Ramsar 1018 site in Benin"*, funded by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES). It was implemented by the Local Management Committees of the Sacred Forests (CLFS), with the technical support of the NGO Ce.Sa.Re.N, the training consultant, and the local forestry administration.

This report presents the implementation process of the activity, the methodology used, and the results achieved.

2. Methodology

2.1. Selection of species

The tree species selected for reforestation in the community lands were chosen by the beneficiaries with the support of the members of the Local Management Committees of the Sacred Forests (CLFS).

These choices were guided by the following criteria:

- Their adaptability to the local environment;
- Their rapid growth;
- Their socio-economic uses, particularly for timber, service wood, firewood, and soil restoration.

Thus:

- ***Gmelina arborea*** was selected for its rapid growth and its wood, valued for timber and sawn wood;
- ***Acacia auriculiformis*** was chosen for its resistance, its usefulness as fuelwood, and its capacity for nitrogen fixation and soil improvement;
- ***Tectona grandis*** was selected because it is highly valued for timber and has high commercial value;
- ***Eucalyptus camaldulensis*** was chosen for its tolerance to harsh conditions, its usefulness for fuelwood and fencing. It is also used in traditional medicine to treat certain ailments.

2.2. Sites selection and seedling supply

Private reforestation sites in the community lands adjacent to the sacred forests were selected in a participatory manner with members of the CLFS and traditional authorities. The main selection criteria were:

- Being adjacent to the sacred forests or carrying out activities related to them;
- Possessing a land plot;
- Committing to participate in the monitoring and maintenance operations of the seedlings in the forest;

The seedlings were supplied by a selected local nursery operator who met the following criteria:

- Proven experience in forest seedling production and previous collaboration with Ce.Sa.Re.N NGO;
- Ability to provide vigorous and high-quality seedlings;
- Member of the local community of Zè.

Photo 1: Inspection of forest seedlings intended for the reforestation of territory of local communities by the designated representative of the Local Sacred Forest Management Committees.

2.3. Sites preparation

The Taungya system was used for reforestation in the riparian lands. This approach combines annual agricultural crops with perennial forest species during the first years of establishment. It helps reduce land preparation and maintenance costs while facilitating the growth of woody species, as farmers ensure regular field maintenance.

Subsequently, the sites were demarcated with stakes to clearly mark the position of each seedling, according to the selected species and recommended spacing.

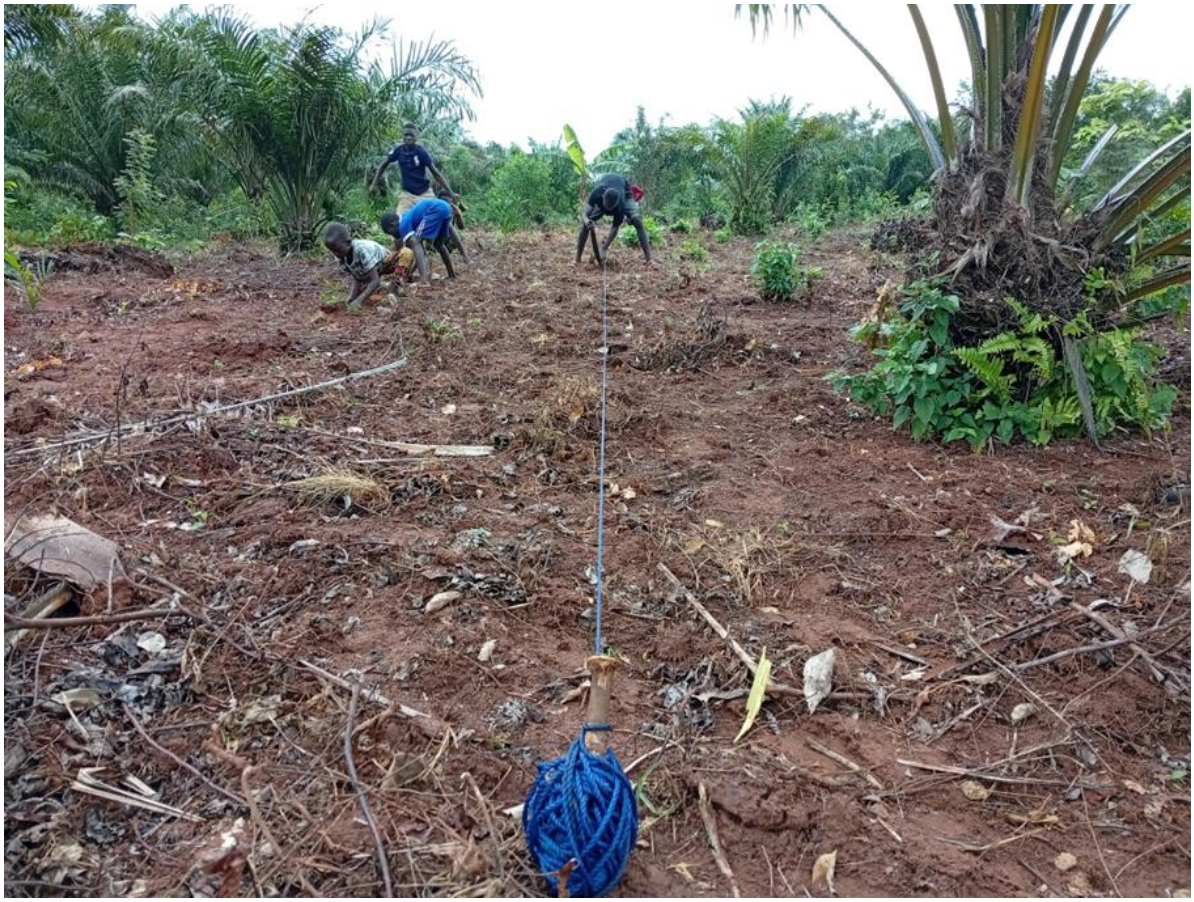

Photo 2: Staking operation on a plantation site in the riparian lands of the Domèzoun Sacred Forest, supported by the CeSaReN facilitator.

2.4. Planting

The seedlings were transported from the nurseries to the sites and placed near the planting holes according to species. Planting was carried out manually while respecting the recommended spacing below:

- *Gmelina arborea*: 3 m × 3 m
- *Acacia auriculiformis:* 3 m × 3 m
- *Tectona grandis*: 3 m × 3 m
- *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*: 2 m × 2 m

Each seedling was planted in a previously loosened hole filled with a mixture of fine soil and organic matter, followed by soil compaction to ensure optimal establishment.

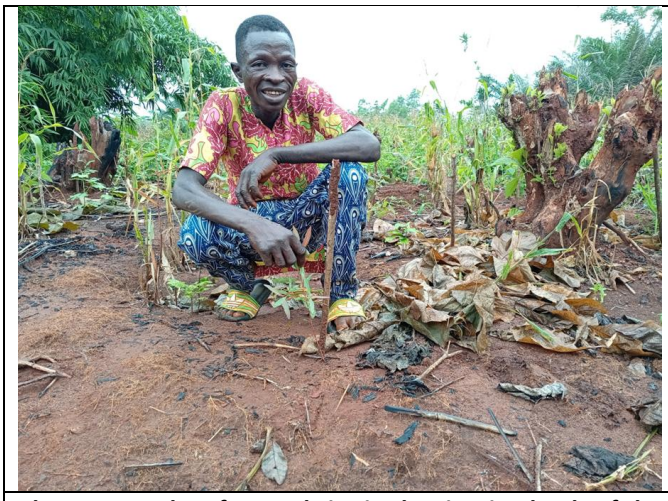

Photo 3: Newly reforested site in the riparian lands of the Houédozoun Sacred Forest with *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (Taungya system)

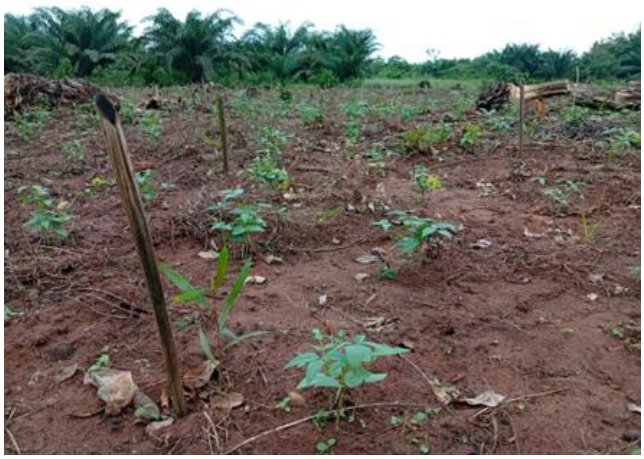

Photo 4: Newly reforested site in the riparian lands of the Hounzoun Sacred Forest with *Acacia auriculiformis* (Taungya system)

2.5. Monitoring and maintenance

Since the reforestation in the riparian lands was carried out using the Taungya system, the seedlings benefited from maintenance activities associated with the annual crops, which promoted their growth.

Replacement of dead seedlings was also carried out by the beneficiary communities.

Due to the density of the annual crops planted (notably maize) in association with the forest seedlings, and to avoid counting biases, no inventory could be conducted immediately to assess the survival rate of the seedlings. The inventory will be conducted before the next rainy season to evaluate the seedlings' resilience after the dry season and to plan the gap-filling activities.

3. Results

In total, 3,600 fast-growing or multi-purpose forest tree seedlings were planted in the riparian lands, covering a total area of 3.24 ha.

Table 1 : Planted species and area covered in the riparian lands of the Sacred Forests.

Planted species	Number of Seedlings	Spacing	Corresponding area
Gmelina arborea	2000	3*3	1,8
Tectona grandis	500	3*3	0,45
Acacia auriculiformis	800	3*3	0,72
Eucalyptus camaldulensis	300	2*2	0,27
Total	3600	-	3,24

This reforestation not only helped restore degraded areas in the community lands but also provided future economic opportunities for local communities (timber, fuelwood), thereby reducing anthropogenic pressures on the forest resources of the sacred forests.

Photo 5: Young *Gmelina arborea* plantation established in the riparian lands of the Zanvozoun Sacred Forest (Taungya system)

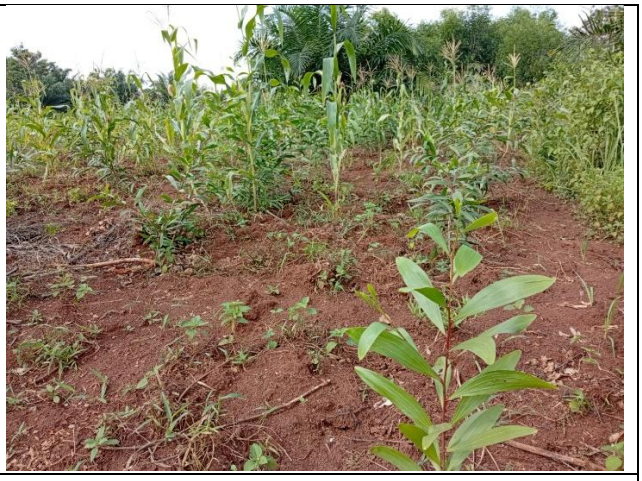

Photo 6: Young *Acacia auriculiformis* plantation established in the riparian lands of the Assanmèzoun Sacred Forest (Taungya system)

4. Conclusion and perspectives

The reforestation campaign in the community lands was successfully carried out and primarily helped improve the availability of woody resources for local communities, thereby reducing pressure on the woody resources of the sacred forests. The selected species will also provide short- and medium-term economic opportunities for the populations, contributing to the strengthening of local ecosystems.

Moreover, it is worth noting the strong involvement and active participation of all age and gender groups (men, women, children, youth, and elders) at every stage of the activities, as illustrated by the photos above.

The future prospects include:

- Establishing firebreaks around the plantations;
- Continuing participatory monitoring of the reforested sites;
- Promoting the future use of timber and fuelwood;
- Expanding reforestation to other community lands in upcoming campaigns.