Cameroon Wildlife Conservation Society

CWCS

CWCS ANNUAL REPORT

RAPPORT Annuel 2025

Mission: Collaborate with Government of Cameroon, indigenous and local communities and other stakeholders, to protect the biodiversity of critical ecosystems and promote sustainable natural resource use through gender inclusive conservation approaches contributing to improved livelihoods of beneficiary communities

CWCS Mission and Vision

Vision: By 2035, biodiversity of threatened and fragile ecosystems are managed equitably and sustainably to safeguard their ecological integrity and improve the livelihoods of indigenous and local communities

Website: https://cameroonwcs.org

Rewriting the future of Cameroon's coastline

The year 2025 will be remembered as the moment when Cameroon finally gave its ocean and mangroves a real future and when communities along the coast stepped forward as co-authors of that future.

For more than two decades, CWCS has worked in the creeks, villages and ministries of this country, often quietly and against the current. This year, that long effort produced something powerful: a legal compass for the sea.

With the approval of national directives for the creation and management of Marine Protected Areas, Cameroon now has clear rules for how to plan, govern and protect its coastal waters. At the same time, a draft decree on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) has reached the Prime Minister's office, opening the door for the state to recognise what communities have safeguarded for generations—sacred forests, traditional fishing zones, mangrove sanctuaries.

Laws alone, however, do not save ecosystems. People do.

Along the Atlantic coast, fishers, women and local leaders are translating these new texts into daily practice. In villages like Mouanko and Yoyo I, improved, fuel-efficient ovens are replacing wood-hungry kilns. Each new oven means fewer mangrove trees cut, less smoke in the lungs of women who work all night, and better-quality fish that earns a higher price. Community initiatives are restoring degraded mangrove stands and turning household waste into compost instead of pollution.

At the same time, our teams and volunteers are literally "taking the pulse" of these landscapes. The 2025 waterbird counts in Douala-Edéa and neighbouring sites tell us where wetlands are still thriving and where pressure is mounting

When Royal Terns and African Skimmers return in large numbers, they confirm what the law and the communities are trying to achieve: living coasts that still work—for nature and for people. This Annual Report celebrates those connections: between policy and pirogue, between prohibition sign and mangrove root, between the voice of a fisherman recorded on a mobile phone and the decisions taken in Yaoundé.

But it is also a reminder that we are only at the beginning. Turning directives into real protection, securing the OECM decree, scaling up forest restoration and alternative livelihoods, none of this will happen without strong partnerships and sustained support.

If 2025 showed anything, it is that when law, science and local leadership pull in the same direction, change is not only possible, but also unstoppable. Together, we can ensure that Cameroon's coasts remain places where mangroves stand tall, birds return, and coastal families can look to the horizon with hope.

Diyouke Eugene
Program Manager, *CWCS*

Réécrire l’avenir du littoral camerounais

L’année 2025 restera comme le moment où le Cameroun a enfin donné un véritable avenir à son océan et à ses mangroves, et où les communautés côtières se sont imposées comme partie prenantes de cet avenir.

Depuis plus de deux décennies, le CWCS travaille dans les criques, les villages et les ministères du pays, souvent discrètement et à contre-courant. Cette année, ce long effort a porté un fruit majeur : une véritable boussole juridique pour la mer.

Avec l’adoption de directives nationales pour la création et la gestion des aires marines protégées, le Cameroun dispose désormais de règles claires pour planifier, gouverner et protéger ses eaux côtières. Parallèlement, un projet de décret sur les « autres mesures de conservation efficaces par zone » (AMCEZ), équivalentes aux OECM, a été transmis au service du Premier ministre, ouvrant la voie à la reconnaissance par l’État de ce que les communautés protègent depuis des générations : forêts sacrées, zones de pêche traditionnelles, sanctuaires de mangroves.

Le long de la côte atlantique, pêcheurs, fumeuses de poisson, groupes de jeunes et leaders locaux traduisent ces nouveaux textes dans la pratique quotidienne. Dans des villages comme Mouanko et Yoyo I, des fours améliorés, plus économes en énergie, remplacent progressivement les anciens fours gourmands en bois. Chaque nouveau four contribue à préserver les mangroves, améliore les conditions de travail des femmes et permet d’obtenir un poisson de meilleure qualité, vendu à un meilleur prix. Des initiatives communautaires restaurent également les mangroves dégradées et transforment les déchets ménagers en compost.

Dans le même temps, nos équipes et volontaires suivent l’évolution de ces paysages. Les comptages d’oiseaux d’eau réalisés en 2025 à Douala-Edéa et sur les sites voisins permettent d’identifier les zones humides en bonne santé et celles soumises à une pression croissante. Le retour en nombre de certaines espèces confirme les progrès engagés vers des côtes vivantes, bénéfiques pour la nature comme pour les populations.

Ce rapport annuel met en lumière les liens entre politiques publiques, pratiques communautaires et décisions nationales.

Mais il rappelle aussi que le travail ne fait que commencer. Transformer les directives en protection effective, finaliser le décret sur les AMCEZ et renforcer la restauration des écosystèmes nécessiteront des partenariats solides et un appui durable.

Si 2025 nous enseigne quelque chose, c’est que lorsque la loi, la science et le leadership local avancent ensemble, le changement devient possible et durable.

Diyouke Eugene
Program Manager, CWCS

Cameroon sets legal compass for marine protected areas

Days of unregulated and illegal fishing now numbered

Cameroon has taken a major step towards stronger ocean protection with the government's approval of national directives for the creation and management of marine protected areas (MPAs). The new rules give the country a clear framework to plan and manage MPAs and other area-based conservation measures along its Atlantic coast.

This crowns years of work led by the Cameroon Wildlife Conservation Society (CWCS) and its consortium partners, with crucial financial support and strategic guidance from Oceans5. It paves the way to complete the management plan of Douala-Edéa National Park, move ahead with the gazettement of Ndongore and Mayange na Elombo national parks, and clarify marine boundaries for the existing network of protected areas.

The next step is a high-level meeting between CWCS management and the central services of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) to agree how the directives will be put into practice. Clear procedures, roles and timelines will be essential to move quickly from legal text to real change on the water.

In parallel, CWCS field teams, working with the Cameroon Mangrove Network and other partners, will intensify outreach with riverine communities, fishers and local authorities. They will explain the importance of the new MPA directives, what they mean for access and use of marine resources, and how local stakeholders can participate in governance and benefit from better managed fisheries and healthier ecosystems.

At the same time, the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife has submitted a draft decree on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) to the Prime Minister. Once adopted, this will allow Cameroon to recognise and support community-managed and co-managed areas that already deliver strong conservation results, even if they are not formal protected areas.

"It has been a long and difficult road working on these dossiers with government services, but this is a transformative moment for Cameroon's ocean," says Dr Leonard Usongo, National Coordinator of CWCS. "Thanks to the support of Oceans5 and our partners, we now have the legal compass to protect key marine sites like Douala-Edéa, Ndongore and Mayange na Elombo, while empowering coastal communities to be co-guardians of our blue heritage."

WHEN OVENS CHANGE, FORESTS BREATHE:

The Mouanko fish story

In Yoyo 1 village in Mouanko subdivision, a coastal village in the Douala-Edéa landscape of Cameroon's Littoral Region, fish smoking is being transformed to protect both livelihoods and mangrove forests. Women fish processors, supported by partners such as the Cameroon Wildlife Conservation Society (CWCS), are shifting from traditional, wood-hungry kilns to improved, energy-efficient ovens that use less firewood, produce better-quality smoked fish and reduce pressure on fragile mangrove ecosystems.

For generations, smoked fish has been central to Mouanko's economy and food security.
Each day, fishermen return from the Atlantic with canoes full of fish that are cleaned, salted and smoked before being sold in local and distant markets. But this vital activity has come at a high environmental cost.

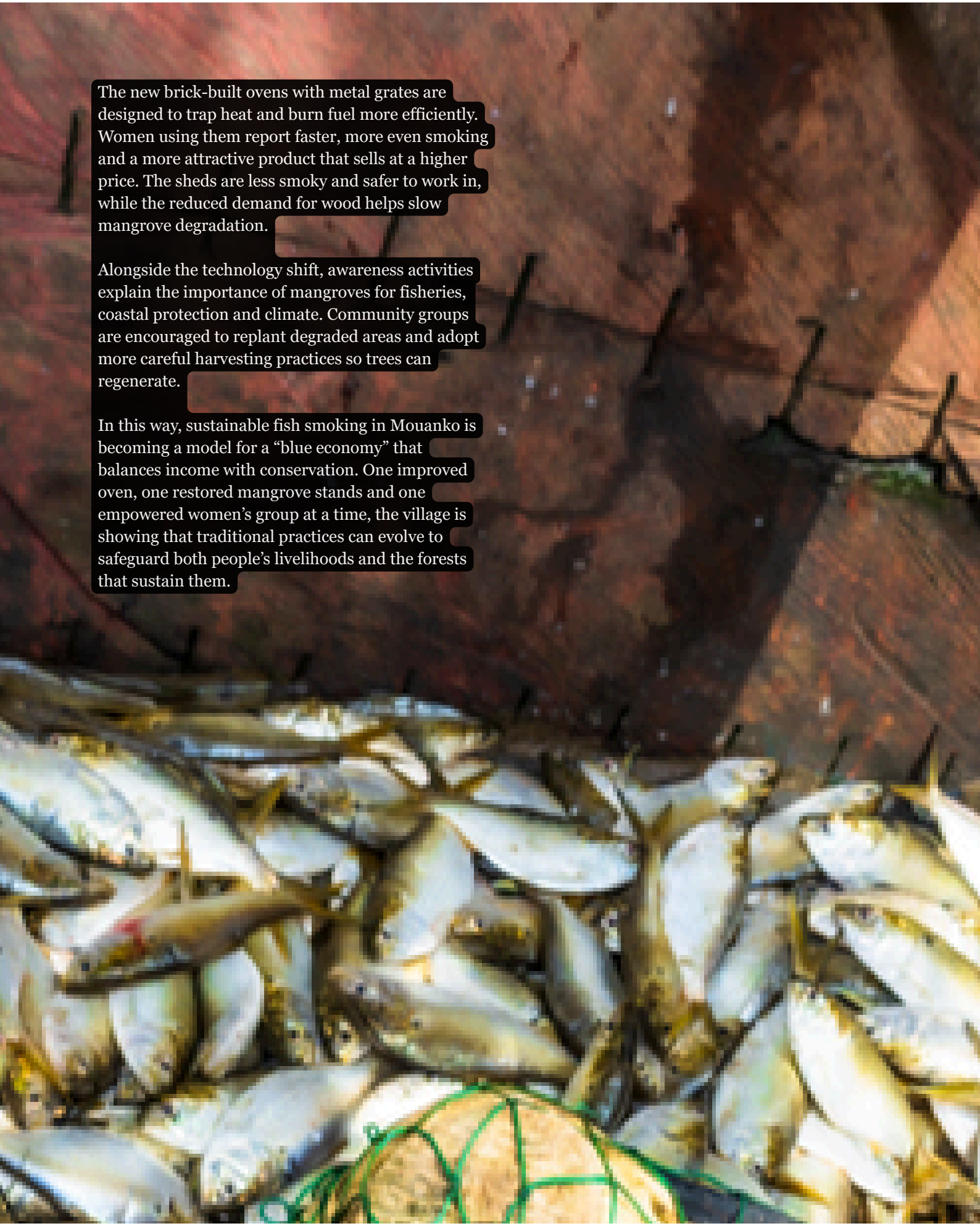
Traditional open kilns consume large amounts of mangrove wood and release thick smoke. As more mangroves are cut, natural fish nurseries disappear, coastlines lose protection from erosion and storms, and carbon stored in mangrove soils is released.

Improved, energy-efficient oven

The new brick-built ovens with metal grates are designed to trap heat and burn fuel more efficiently. Women using them report faster, more even smoking and a more attractive product that sells at a higher price. The sheds are less smoky and safer to work in, while the reduced demand for wood helps slow mangrove degradation.

Alongside the technology shift, awareness activities explain the importance of mangroves for fisheries, coastal protection and climate. Community groups are encouraged to replant degraded areas and adopt more careful harvesting practices so trees can regenerate.

In this way, sustainable fish smoking in Mouanko is becoming a model for a “blue economy” that balances income with conservation. One improved oven, one restored mangrove stands and one empowered women’s group at a time, the village is showing that traditional practices can evolve to safeguard both people’s livelihoods and the forests that sustain them.



Freshly caught from the Atlantic Ocean

How Douala-Edéa's bird census guides our future

In the Douala-Edéa landscape, a team of conservationists, local volunteers, and ornithologists recently completed a vital task: counting the thousands of birds that depend on this critical wetland. In just a few days, they counted 5,170 waterbirds and 215 kingfishers and other birds in four main sites: the Douala-Edéa National Park, the Wouri estuary, the upper Sanaga at Dizangué, and the artificial lake of Dschang.

The Douala-Edéa National Park alone hosted 3,529 waterbirds – about 65.5% of all the waterbirds counted in the country. In all, the teams recorded 50 species of waterbirds and 16 species of kingfishers and other birds.

Why does this count matter?

Because birds are nature's barometers. The presence of species like the African Skimmer and the Royal Tern signals that the wetlands are still healthy and full of life.

By tracking these birds year after year, conservationists can detect changes in the environment, guide protection efforts, and ensure that both wildlife and local communities thrive.

For CWCS, local volunteers and partner ornithologists, each bird is a data point, a story, and a warning signal about the health of one of Cameroon's most important wetlands.

Eugène Diyouke, CWCS Program Manager, sums it up: “When we count birds in Douala-Edéa, we are not just collecting numbers for a report. We are taking the pulse of an entire landscape that feeds families, protects our coast and connects Cameroon to the rest of the world.”

He added, “every Royal Tern, every African Skimmer we record is telling us whether our mangroves are still healthy, whether our rivers still have fish, whether our children will inherit living wetlands or dead water. These counts give us the evidence we need to act, and they remind us that protecting birds is also protecting our own future.”

For decades, CWCS and partners have contributed to waterbird counts along Cameroon’s coast. The information collected has helped shape major conservation decisions. It contributed to the transformation of the former Douala-Edéa Faunal Reserve into a National Park in 2018, with a marine extension covering around half of its total area, including mangrove forests around the Wouri estuary.

The long-term bird monitoring also supported Cameroon’s accession to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) in June 2019 – a landmark step for the country’s commitment to protect migratory waterbirds and their habitats. CWCS now serves as the technical coordinator for AEWA in Cameroon.

CWCS helps coastal communities benefit from the “Blue economy”

Shoving the boat out of the ocean after a successful fishing day

At the Blue Economy Conference held in Yaounde Cameroon, July 2025. The CWCS came with a clear message: protecting the ocean and improving people's lives must go together.

"Our work is about conserving the ocean and strengthening the resilience of local communities," explains Eugene Diyouke, Interim Project Coordinator. Side by side with partners AMCO, EJF and CAMECO, CWCS showcased how conservation can become an engine for local development.

A central focus is the creation and management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) such as Douala-Edéa and the proposed Ndongore site, along with identifying Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) between Douala-Edéa, Kribi, Campo and Bakassi.

Through Oceans5-funded projects, CWCS has helped develop management plans for MPAs that were previously gazetted without a clear roadmap. These plans are being shaped and validated with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife and, crucially, with communities themselves through workshops, consultations and field meetings.

"The mistake in the past was to focus only on science and forget the people," says Diyouke. "Now, consultations and community participation are at the centre of every step."

On the ground, CWCS is also helping communities diversify livelihoods and restore ecosystems. In Mouanko, women's groups are trained in snail farming as an alternative to bivalve harvesting, which has pushed shellfish to the brink. Another association now manages household waste, sorting plastics and turning organic waste into compost with the help of a project-funded tricycle.

"We are proving that a fair blue economy is possible, where healthy seas and thriving coastal communities rise together."

Restoring Mangrove Life

Since 2008, CWCS and its partners have restored around 200 hectares of degraded mangroves, vital nurseries for fish and natural shields against coastal erosion.

Les mangroves font leur grand retour à Douala-Edéa

Sur les vasières du paysage de Douala-Edéa, la mangrove revient doucement — rangée après rangée, plantule après plantule.

« Ici, nous sommes dans la plantation de mangrove de 2023 », explique Etame Prince, Assistant technique au CWCS, en désignant cinq blocs de restauration de 15 hectares chacun. Deux espèces de mangrove sont replantées, *Rhizophora et Avicennia*, espacées d'environ deux mètres afin de laisser aux jeunes plants la place de s'installer. À cette densité, un hectare nécessite environ 2 500 plantules.

Au fil des années, la pression sur les mangroves du paysage de Douala-Edéa s'est accrue en raison de la collecte de bois-énergie et du fumage du poisson. Cela a rendu la restauration indispensable.
Deux ans après la plantation, le site montre déjà les premiers signes de reprise. Les plantules s'enracinent, et une nouvelle génération de mangroves commence à s'élever dans la zone soumise aux marées — fragile, mais tenace.

Derrière ces progrès, il y a un effort communautaire remarquable. Une pépinière a été mise en place pour fournir les plantules, et 45 personnes ont travaillé à la collecte des propagules, à la préparation des planches et aux soins apportés aux jeunes plants jusqu'à leur mise en terre.

Le rythme s'est depuis accéléré. En 2025, le CWCS a restauré 40 hectares — soit l'équivalent d'environ 100 000 plantules mises en terre. Et la préparation est déjà en cours pour 2026 : une pépinière dotée de 60 000 plants pour soutenir la restauration de 60 hectares supplémentaires.

À Douala-Edéa, la restauration n'est pas une promesse. C'est un engagement — mesuré en hectares, et porté par des racines qui reprennent vie.

CWCS supports communities to map and manage 5,000-hectare community forest

Close to Douala, the fast-growing economic hub of Cameroon, the municipality of Dibombari is home to predominantly Sawa communities whose livelihoods rely largely on fishing and subsistence farming, especially cassava and plantain. As pressure on land and natural resources grows, local leaders have been looking for practical ways to diversify incomes while safeguarding forests and wildlife.

That opportunity is taking shape through the Dibombari Community Forest, a 5,000-hectare area officially allocated to the community to promote local participation in sustainable natural resource management. Community forestry can generate local revenues from timber and non-timber forest products, but only when it is guided by reliable data, strong governance, and clear rules that prevent overexploitation.

With support from the CAMERR project, CWCS is providing technical assistance to help Dibombari communities carry out a multi-resource forest inventory—a critical step toward developing an approved management plan. CAMERR is funded by Orange France International and implemented by a consortium of local partners, largely drawn from the Cameroon Mangrove Network.

Ms Ndelle Lizette, CWCS sociologist leading the inventory team said, “Community forestry only works when decisions are based on data and when communities have the skills and structures to manage resources transparently and sustainably.”

The inventory is designed to generate the evidence needed for long-term, community-led management estimates of timber stocks, guidance for low-impact harvesting practices, and mapping of priority non-timber forest products such as medicinal plants. The study will also help document the presence of wildlife species and identify threats affecting the forest biodiversity.

A defining feature of the work has been community participation, including the recruitment of local youth who supported data collection and shared field knowledge on resource use and emerging pressures. This approach strengthens local ownership of results, builds technical skills in the villages, and helps ensure that future decisions, such as where to harvest, what to protect, and how benefits are shared, align with community priorities.

According to one of the village chiefs, “This inventory is helping them understand what they have, what they must protect, and how they can use our forest responsibly to support families and the future.”

Next steps after the inventories will focus on translating survey data to develop community forest management plan that sets out harvesting rules, conservation measures, and an investment framework for revenues generated from legal forest use.

The Chimpanzees who watch the boats go by

On the edge of the Douala-Edea National Park, where forest meets river, a small family of chimpanzees gathers on the bank of the Sanaga. They sit close, quiet, watchful, like elders at a meeting.

Then a motorboat cuts through the water, and the chimps turn their faces toward the sound, curious and cautious, following the wake with eyes that seem to ask what kind of future is approaching.

These are vast, wholly intact forests. Here, the chimpanzees have been pushed into fragments, patches of green surrounded by people, roads, farms, and noise. Their world has shrunk to a fragile refuge. Inventories conducted by CWCS shows that only about 100 individuals are believed to remain in this landscape.

“Every loss matters: a mother taken, a feeding tree cut, a corridor broken, a riverbank disturbed,” says Dr. Leonard Usongo, National Coordinator of CWCS.

And yet, they endure.
Each day they return to the Sanaga’s edge, reminding us that conservation is not an abstract idea. It is a choice, made in real places, for real lives. If we keep this river wild and these forests standing, their curiosity can remain a story of survival, not a final goodbye.

Les chimpanzés qui regardent passer les bateaux

À la lisière de l'Aire Protégée de Douala-Edéa, là où la forêt rencontre le fleuve, une petite famille de chimpanzés se rassemble sur la berge de la Sanaga. Ils restent serrés les uns contre les autres, silencieux, attentifs, comme des anciens réunis en conseil. Puis un bateau à moteur fend l'eau, et les chimpanzés tournent le visage vers le bruit, à la fois curieux et prudents, suivant le sillage d'un regard qui semble demander quel avenir est en train d'arriver.

Ces écosystèmes sont des vastes forêts encore relativement intacts. Ici, les chimpanzés ont été repoussés dans des fragments : des îlots de verdure entourés d'habitations, de routes, de champs et de bruit. Leur monde s'est réduit à un refuge fragile. Des inventaires menés par le CWCS montrent que seuls environ 100 individus subsisteraient dans ce paysage. « Chaque perte compte : une mère enlevée, un arbre nourricier abattu, un corridor rompu, une berge perturbée », explique le Dr Leonard Usongo, Coordinateur national du CWCS.

Des inventaires menés par le CWCS montrent que seuls environ 100 individus subsisteraient dans ce paysage.

Et pourtant, ils tiennent bon.
Chaque jour, ils reviennent au bord de la Sanaga, nous rappelant que la conservation n'est pas une idée abstraite. C'est un choix, fait dans des lieux bien réels, pour des vies bien réelles. Si nous gardons ce fleuve sauvage et ces forêts debout, leur curiosité pourra rester une histoire de survie, et non un dernier adieu.

Cassava as alternative income source

Now, let's cut the grass invading our Cassava farm

CWCS promoting alternative income through cassava cultivation

Through the CAMERR project (Cameroon Mangrove Ecosystem Restoration and Resilience), CWCS is supporting communities to cultivate one hectare of cassava per village in Dibombari–Beach and Njoukou villages in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. The goal is practical and urgent: increase incomes and improve living conditions.

“The purpose is to improve living conditions by increasing income,” explains Ndele Lisette, who leads the activity. In 2025, the initiative is being piloted in two villages—Dibombari–Beach and Njoukou—with one cassava farm established in each. The work is carried by local teams: eight farmers in Njoukou and five in Dibombari–Beach, cooperating from planting to maintenance, and preparing for harvest together,” Ndele explained.

Cassava is a strategic crop here because it offers reliability, something families can count on when fishing seasons fluctuate or casual labour is uncertain. But the real value is unlocked after harvest, when tubers are transformed into *myondo*, a staple that carries cultural meaning and strong market potential.
From one hectare, farmers can produce around 20 tons of cassava tubers, feeding processing and trade. *Myondo* increases shelf life, raises value, and creates work along a chain of skills, peeling, soaking, grinding, pressing, wrapping, often led by women.

For families, the impact is measured in everyday wins: school fees paid on time, medicines purchased without delay, meals secured in difficult weeks.
Today, there are only two farms. Yet CWCS has 11 other villages still waiting to begin. Dibombari–Beach and Njoukou are proving what’s possible when communities are supported with tools that turn hard work into stable income, and resilience that can last beyond one season.

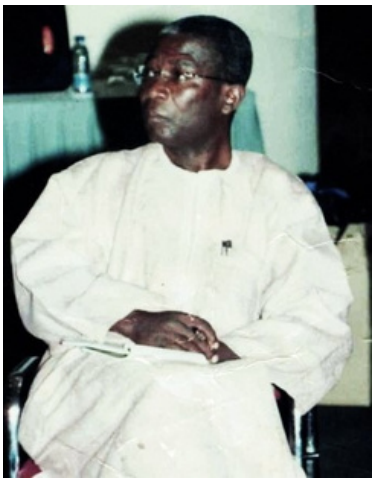
Expecting bumper harvest

The Darkest Year in CWCS History

Some years leave marks. Others leave absences.

For CWCS, 2025 will be remembered as the year the light dimmed, again and again, until grief became part of the air we breathed. In a span of just twelve weeks, we lost three people who were not only colleagues, but pillars, names that held stories, habits, laughter, and a deep belief in what conservation can mean for a country and its communities.

In early January 2025, **Mr. Yadji Bello, our National President**, passed away. The shock arrived before the words could. A leader is not only the person who speaks on behalf of others; it is the one who carries the weight of responsibility even when no one is watching. His absence was immediately felt in the silence after meetings, in the pause before decisions, in the sudden question of who will steady us now?



Late Yadji Bello

Three weeks following Yadji's death, in February, we lost **Dr. Gordon Ajonina, CWCS National Programme Coordinator.** For many of us, Gordon was the kind of colleague who made the work feel possible even when it was difficult, someone whose presence had direction. His passing did not just remove a role from an organigram; it removed a rhythm from our days.

Late Gordon Ajonina

And when we were still struggling with the first two losses, April took **Nju Wilfred, our veteran drive**r. Wilfred was part of CWCS backbone: the one who knew the roads, the weather, the timing, the unspoken rules of field missions. In conservation, there are people who are visible, and there are people who make everything possible. Wilfred belonged to the second kind—steady, dependable, always there… until suddenly he wasn't.

Together, Yadji, Gordon, and Wilfred represented more than sixty years of cumulative institutional memory, years of commitment, of early departures, long drives, late-night debriefs, and countless moments when the work demanded more than was convenient. Their departures were sudden and unthinkable, like thunder striking where there was no warning. And the psychological impact has been real: morale shaken, minds heavy, and a grief that returns in waves—quiet some days, unbearable on others.

Late Wilfred Nju

Loss sometimes refuses to become "normal." It lingers, it insists, it keeps calling their names in the corridors of our routines.

This is why we dedicate the CWCS Annual Report 2025 to Yadji Bello, Gordon Ajonina, and Nju Wilfred—not as a formal gesture, but as a promise.

Let’s make 2026 a year for protection of mangroves

In the Douala–Edéa National Park, deforestation is steadily eating into the mangrove forest—one bundle of firewood and one plank at a time. Along creeks and estuaries, mangrove trees are felled, cut into poles and boards for construction, or piled for household fuel. What looks like a quick solution today is quietly dismantling a living shield that protects communities tomorrow.

Mangroves are nurseries for fish and crabs, a natural barrier against coastal erosion and flooding, and one of the most powerful carbon stores on earth. When they are cut, riverbanks collapse, fish catches decline, water quality worsens, and villages become more exposed to storms and rising tides. The cost is paid by families, fishers, and future generations.

Let’s stop the cutting now. Choose cleaner and more efficient cooking options, use legally sourced and sustainable building materials, and support community-led surveillance and restoration.

Cut for firewood

Felled for construction, furniture

Thank you to our Donors and Supporters

We are deeply grateful to our donors, partners, and supporters for your unwavering commitment over the years. Your support has been essential to our work, and it is thanks to you that CWCS was able to achieve the remarkable successes of 2025.

Yoyo village in Mouanko subdivision is slowly being swallowed by sedimentation. Sand has pushed deep into the settlement, surrounding a fragile wooden house whose base now sits on bare, newly deposited ground. The yard looks more like a beach than a village space, with scattered debris and nets resting beside the structure.

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