

Bénin: Stakeholders – Citizens and Private Interests: Competing Value Interests

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The critical analysis of Benin's social and economic development plans of past decades shows that the territory management and the coastal environment development are not among the Government's priorities. Many factors contribute to the sea-coastal environment degradation which include : demographic growth, inappropriate establishment of human concerns in coastal areas, and poor technologies.

But face to the evolution of the coast behaviour, does the new attention the people, the economists, the environmentalists, and the politicians pay to this part of the territory constitute a sustainable deviation, or can "coastal economy" become in the future more and more difficult to be distinguished from the other parts of the economy ?

The Republic of Benin is located in the Gulf of benin, in West Africa. It has 125 km of sea coast made of a sandy offshore and swamps. It is very exposed to the Atlantic Ocean.

This coastal plain is occupied by population which is mostly rural and has an average density of about 250 inhabitants per km².

The Coast in Benin, like the ones in the other countries of the Gulf of Benin, constitutes the main resource of the economy since it holds the most important cities, the harbour-infrastructure, and the industries. Cotonou which is a harbour-city guarantees an important part of the country import-export trade as well as that of the enclosed countries in West Africa (Mali, Burkina-faso and Niger). But its importance should not mask that of mine, food, tourist and cement lacustries end mainly the quarries of sand extraction for many purposes and the pollution of waters by urban house waste.

Benin Coastal erosion is essentially due to the construction of the harbours in Accra (Ghana), Lomé (Togo) and Cotonou (Bénin), and the quarries of sand extraction. In less than 30 years, the shore has retreated by 300 m in average. For example in front of Grand Popo at the mounth of Mono (Bouches du Roy), 15 m of seaside are lost in 18 mounths. As regards the quarries of sand extraction, in 1983 they produced 500, 000 m³ in Cotonou alone and today they produced a greater amount of sand due to the increase in needs chere the filling in for whole coast accounts only for around 2 millions m³ yearly.

The main social and economic problem relating to the effects of coastal erosion concerns the abandonment of technical measures of protection in favour of a step of palnning. This implies, among other things, a progressive with drawal of erosion. Generally, social and economic aspects are rarely considered in studies on coastal erosion. This is true for Benin and for the other countries of West Africa as well.

Face to these different situations, the State in Benin has recently undertaken to acquire the appropriate means in creating a Ministry of Environment and other structures in order to organize and preserve in a better way the interest of everybody.