

NaturAfrica.

West Africa | Afrique de l'Ouest
Regional programme

Short-term Technical Assistance Mission

"Review of community forest establishment initiatives in West Africa".

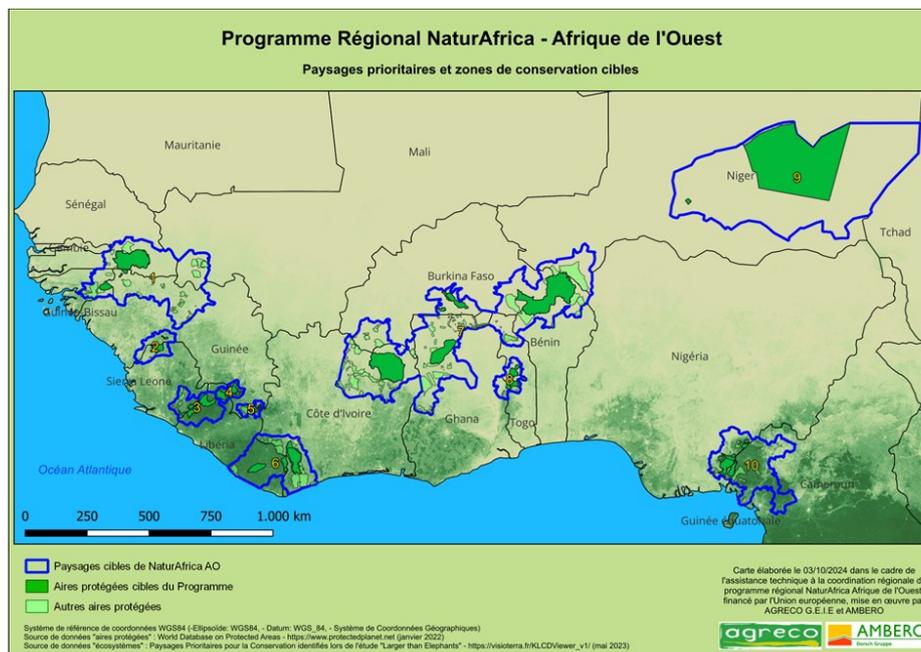
Categories of Experts :	Senior
Number of days of expertise :	62 days: 42d forestry expert (lead); 20d legal expert
Planned period for the assignment :	December 2025 to April 2026
Location :	Remote (no travel planned)

1. Introduction

Through its NaturAfrica initiative, the European Union is supporting a network of key landscapes for conservation and development in Africa, to protect wildlife and stimulate economic growth, sustaining ecosystems and ensuring impact in the face of increasing external pressure.

Geographically, the programme is organised by African region, including West Africa where NaturAfrica West Africa is being implemented under the aegis of the WAEMU, through a funding agreement signed in August 2023. The field programmes, in around ten landscapes, are implemented by operators under contracts managed by the European Union Delegations. In addition to these programmes at landscape level, the programme has a Regional Coordination Unit to support European Union Delegations (EUDs) and operators.

This initiative is organised around three main pillars: Conservation, Green Economy and Governance, the three pillars being closely linked to each other.



2. Context

The fundamental principle of community forestry is the involvement of local communities in the management, protection and benefit-sharing of forest resources. Through a participatory approach, communities identify the areas that will be devoted to different uses, recorded in a management plan. While some areas may be allocated to multiple uses that can lead to forest degradation, it is essential that most of the forest is used for conservation or sustainable management. The most common form of allocating land for these purposes is the creation of community forests (CFs), although the definitions, legal framework and objectives vary greatly between West African countries.

Once established, community forests are generally managed by a management committee, which must represent the various stakeholders and be legitimate in the eyes of the users in order to be able to apply the rules contained in the management plan. When established and managed appropriately, community forests can ensure the conservation and sustainable management of forests and natural resources, while providing resources to communities, whether in kind or in the form of income. In addition, most community forests provide important environmental services and protect socio-cultural heritage.

In a context where the creation of protected areas such as national parks or wildlife sanctuaries is meeting with increasing opposition, but where governments have committed to protecting larger parts of their territories (particularly in view of the 30x30 target of the Kunming-Montreal global framework for biodiversity), the creation of community forests has been gaining ground in recent years, as they offer the potential to achieve conservation objectives while being more easily politically acceptable to local populations by guaranteeing forms of direct and indirect income, which other types of protected area find more difficult to offer.

In the context of NaturAfrica West Africa, community forests are very often integrated into landscapes, with different aims: forest corridor, buffer zone, or natural resource reserve to reduce pressure on protected area resources. Although they vary greatly in size from one country to another, they are of great importance in achieving the objectives of conservation and governance of natural resources, which are at the heart of the programme.

In order to provide a framework for this short-term technical assistance, in October 2025 the programme's regional coordination carried out a quick survey of partners (implementing agencies, EUDs, national administrations) in countries where the community forest dimension appears to be important.

From this rapid consultation, it appears that the situation varies greatly from one country to another in terms of the actual establishment of community forests, the existence or non-existence of a regulatory framework and its application. Given the diversity of situations, it is very difficult to draw lessons from national experiences and to make recommendations with a view to harmonising them at regional level. On the other hand, a better understanding of the situation in each country would enable efforts to be better directed in future integrated conservation and development programmes; such an inventory could also form the basis of political incentives to promote and improve the community forest approach within different countries.

3. Objectives of the short-term technical assistance

The general objective of the mission is to draw up an inventory of the implementation of community forests in nine NaturAfrica West Africa intervention countries.

More specifically, the mission will document and compare the legal and institutional framework in each country; identify the community forests established, the support programmes dedicated to CF and any evaluations; and identify the main obstacles to establishing or improving CF management in West Africa.

4. Planned tasks

More specifically, the consultants will:

- Organise interviews with a selection of NaturAfrica action operators (including more specifically RSPB for Sierra Leone and Liberia, WCF for Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, WCS for Nigeria and AGN for Burkina Faso). The regional coordination team will help to establish contacts.
- Organise meetings with the national administrations responsible for community forests.
- Draw up a list of formally established community forests (or forests with associated status) by country, their area and date of creation, their purpose, and their type of governance, indicating the sources.
- For each country, collect the legal texts governing the stages in the creation of community forests and their management, with a comparative analysis of their strengths and weaknesses.
- Produce a synoptic table proposing a typology of the state of progress of the community forestry approach in the different countries.
- Produce a 4-page summary technical note for distribution to EU Delegations and partners, to form part of the series of NaturAfrica Academy notes accessible on the EU's Cap4Dev knowledge platform.
- Present the results of the study in a 20-30 min presentation at one of the webinars organised by the programme's regional coordination team.

The nine countries targeted for this mission are: Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria (in-depth study) and Senegal, Burkina Faso and Benin (shorter study).

5. Deliverables

- i. List of community forests (or equivalent) by country with attributes (see above) organised in Excel spreadsheet format or equivalent.
- ii. Compendium of legal texts for each country, organised in a folder with a sub-folder for each target country.
- iii. Table summarising the development of the community forests approach in at least the nine target countries (and, if possible, Guinea-Bissau or other countries if relevant).
- iv. A summary report containing the analyses (detailing in particular the challenges and successes per country) and recommendations on the implementation, management and monitoring of community forests in the context of the CBD 30/30 objective, the formulation of NaturAfrica II or the regional policies of WAEMU and ECOWAS.
- v. A Powerpoint file presenting the results of the study and summarising the salient points of the report, enabling a presentation of around 20 to 30 minutes to a broad audience with a basic knowledge of the general aspects of conservation in WA but without deep understanding of community forests.
- vi. A presentation during a webinar, followed by questions and answers (total expected duration: 1.5 hours).
- vii. A 4-page technical note summarising the results of the study, in particular:
 - a. For what types of action contexts can community forests be relevant?
 - b. What resources (financial, human, logistical) are mobilised by this system?
 - c. What lessons learned and concrete recommendations can be drawn from these examples?