

MBP *Newsletter*

Migratory birds for people



Newsletter No. 3, May 2019

West Africa: Wetlands and culture

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In Africa, culture may be one of the most important factors that could encourage the involvement of local communities and get them to participate in wetlands conservation. Unlike many western cultures, some local communities have maintained traditional relationships with their environment.

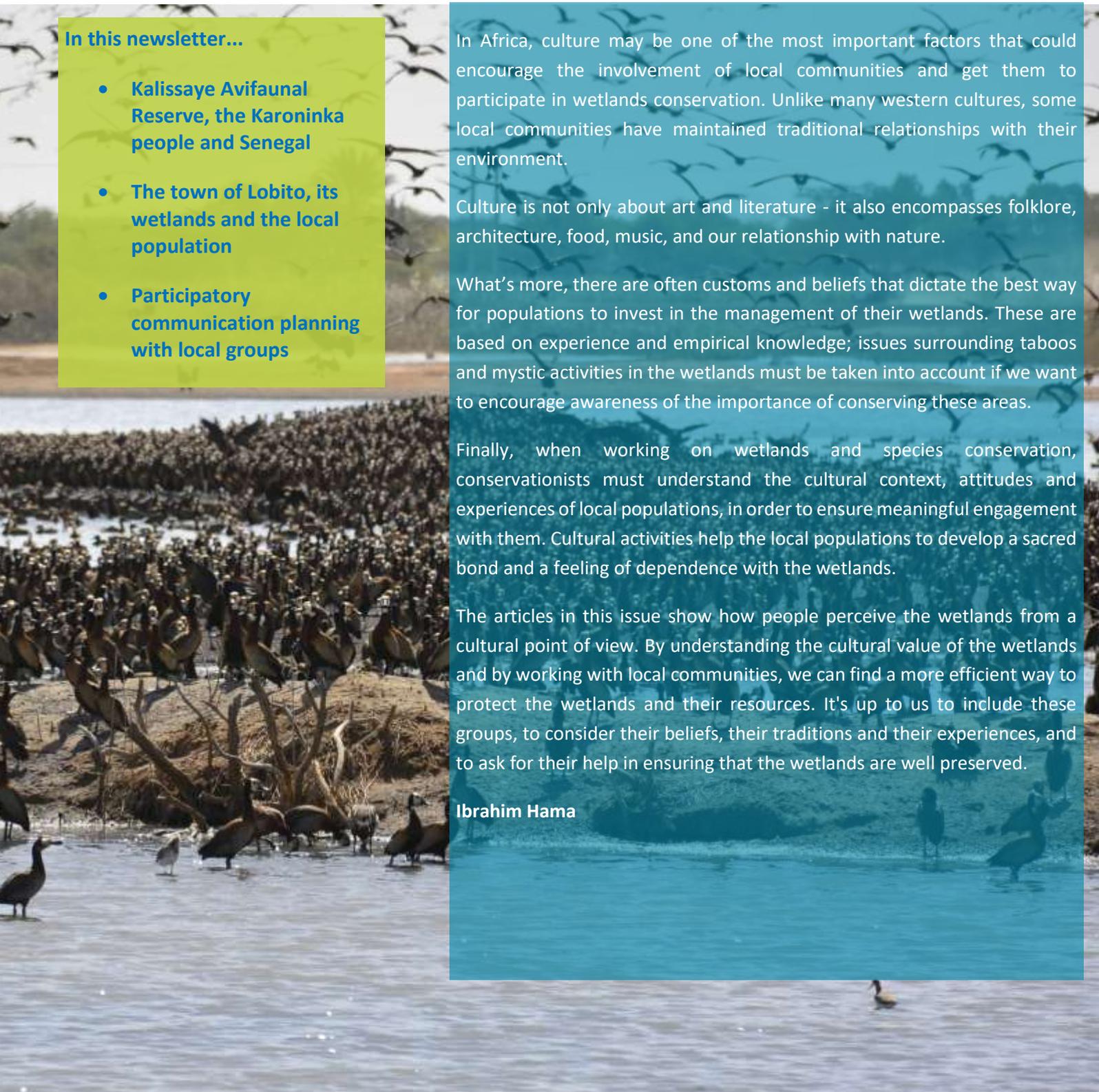
Culture is not only about art and literature - it also encompasses folklore, architecture, food, music, and our relationship with nature.

What's more, there are often customs and beliefs that dictate the best way for populations to invest in the management of their wetlands. These are based on experience and empirical knowledge; issues surrounding taboos and mystic activities in the wetlands must be taken into account if we want to encourage awareness of the importance of conserving these areas.

Finally, when working on wetlands and species conservation, conservationists must understand the cultural context, attitudes and experiences of local populations, in order to ensure meaningful engagement with them. Cultural activities help the local populations to develop a sacred bond and a feeling of dependence with the wetlands.

The articles in this issue show how people perceive the wetlands from a cultural point of view. By understanding the cultural value of the wetlands and by working with local communities, we can find a more efficient way to protect the wetlands and their resources. It's up to us to include these groups, to consider their beliefs, their traditions and their experiences, and to ask for their help in ensuring that the wetlands are well preserved.

Ibrahim Hama



The culture of the Karoninka People: a factor of sustainable management in Kalissaye



The Jola-Karon people are traditionally very mindful of the sustainable conservation of their environment. Aware of the benefits that nature gives them, they promote actions and provisions that aim to maintain and preserve the environment.

It's thanks to this that all of the vil-

lages surrounding the Kalissaye Avifaunal Reserve (ROK) have marked out sacred woods. As a site used for Jola initiation ceremonies, the sacred wood is an intangible cultural heritage, a treasure and an incredible asset to these local communities. The trees represent one or more sacred objects or charms that may belong to either a group of villages, a segment, a family, or to women or men. Each charm has its uses and its rules; there is a well-defined code of clear taboos and sanctions.

As a result, each rule depends on its owner. Violating these rules can lead to the death penalty. To avoid the worst, the offender must make an offering of palm wine. This offering can also involve an animal for certain charms. It is also strictly forbidden to clear areas of the sacred woods, cut down trees or start fires there. Wood cutting may be authorised by the owners and fruit may be gathered and eaten at the site, but

none must leave the woods except for through family members.

In addition to sacred woods, totems are a very important element for different ethnic groups, particularly among the Jola-Karon. Totems are linked to the soul of a person; the death of an animal totem symbolises the death of a family member, which is why these animals are well-protected against any threats. In fact: "in the long Kalissaye opposite the sandbar where there are birds, there are totems belonging to a Bakassouck family. In this area, carrying out any activity is very dangerous, as you could lose your equipment or your life."

Places of remembrance are also important in all of the villages surrounding the reserve. They are a tribute to the history of these people while being in keeping with their traditions. For example, a place of remembrance has been identified in the village of Boune. This place served as a gathering place for local communities when there was danger (invasion of settlers), bad news, meetings, and so on.



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The town of Lobito, its wetlands and the local population



The town of Lobito, located in the province of Benguela, is a major Angolan town. This town, also known as “*a Cidade do Flamingo*” (Flamingo City) contains several coastal wetlands that can be found all over the region. Its wetlands are rich in avifauna, with the birds living alongside the human activities carried out in these areas.

It may now seem impossible to imagine the town of Lobito without its wetlands and its significant population of water birds, especially the flamingos that give the town its nickname. However, due to the degradation of these wetlands, within 5 years, between 2010 and 2015, the flamingo population completely disappeared from the town of

Lobito. It was then that the people of Lobito started to realise how the flamingos formed part of the town’s culture, and they began work to recover the degraded wetlands. This degradation was due to two main factors: pollution, and the production of salt in these areas. The efforts made on a local level caused the flamingo population to return in 2015.

It is hard to imagine Lobito without its flamingos and other water birds; the culture of the people of Lobito is completely engrained in the presence of these wetlands and these birds. The town would not be the same without this cohabitation between the humans and the water birds, which are so often represented in paintings and other cultural objects.

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Development workshop for the local MCA communication plan - Saloum in Ndangane Sambou



The development workshop for the Mangrove Capital Africa local communication plan in the Saloum Delta held

on 10-13 September 2018 ended on a generally positive note. This meeting brought together community radio stations, grassroots community organisations and managers of protected areas in Saloum.

These three days of work led to the development of a detailed and realistic framework document that takes into account all of the expectations of the communities that live and enormously depend on the mangrove ecosystems in the Saloum delta. This communication plan has an estimated budget of \$30,000 USD and will be fully funded by Wetlands International Africa through its programme, Mangrove Capital Africa. In the communication plan, emphasis is given to social mobilisation as a factor to change behaviour. It will be executed over a period of 8 months, from October 2018 to May 2019, through close ongoing collaboration between grassroots community organisations, decentralised public technical services and community radio stations.

By using innovative and participatory approaches and communication tools, such as publicity caravans, home visits, public broadcasts and interactive programmes, the local media will support and implement these mangrove restoration and conservation plans. This approach will have the advantage of further raising awareness among communities and decision-makers on the issues relating to restoration,

conservation and sustainable use of mangrove resources:

- * The importance of mangroves in the ecological balance
- * The causes of degradation in mangrove ecosystems
- * The reasons behind failed mangrove plantation campaigns
- * Success factors in mangrove restoration
- * Alternative energy sources to mangrove wood
- * Good practices in using mangrove resources
- * The impacts of climate change on mangrove ecosystems
- * The role of mangroves in reducing the impact of climate change
- * Good practices in using mangrove resources
- * The importance of protected areas in mangrove conservation
- * The effects of pollution on mangrove ecosystems

This local communication plan for the Saloum Delta by Mangrove Capital Africa is an operational



branch of the Wetlands International Africa communication strategy, which is dedicated to participatory communication and social mobilisation for behavioural change. Mangrove Capital Africa is funded by DOB Ecology.

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Mobilising Saloum mangrove clubs to save the birds



As is custom among the international community, on 11 May 2019 we celebrated World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD).

This day is a bi-annual awareness campaign that highlights the need to conserve migratory birds and their habitats. It is celebrated all over the world and it is a useful tool to help raise awareness about the threats affecting migratory birds, the ecological importance of these birds and the need to cooperate on an international level for their conservation.

This year, in Senegal, Wetlands International Africa supported the organisation in a series of activities led by the Saloum Delta Mangrove Clubs network, one of our key partners in the Mangrove Capital Africa programme funded by DOB Ecology and the “water bird monitoring” project funded by the MAVA Foundation.

To maximise mobilisation and awareness around this year’s theme on “plastic waste: let’s be the solution”, we have joined forces with schools in Saloum to develop and implement a specific action plan. This led teachers and staff in schools in Mbam, Sokone, Foundiounne and Dassilamé Sérère to be trained by the Mangrove Clubs on bird identification techniques and social mobilisation. What’s more, around thirty students chosen as **“Mangrove Ambassadors”**



went on an educational trip to Île aux oiseaux before taking part in a videoconference with schools based in France, Luxembourg and Casamance. The schools then finished the day with awareness sessions and a plastic litter collection in their respective villages.



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