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We would like to thank José Gómez Peñate
gomezp_jm@hotmail.com

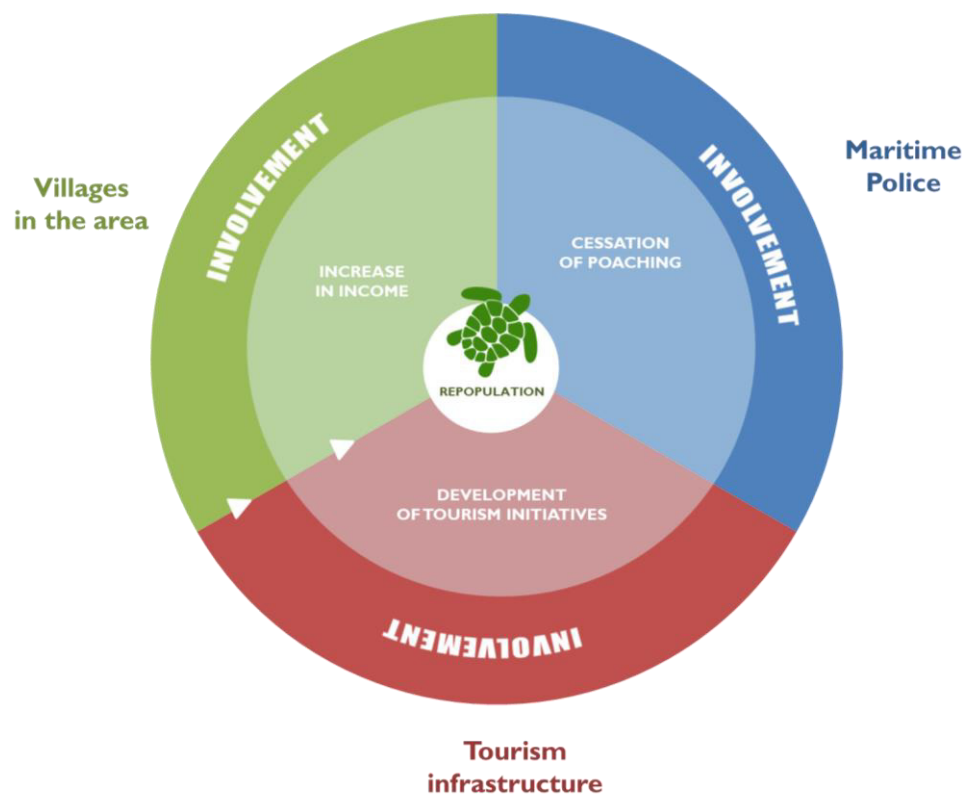
Conservation of sea turtles in Côte d'Ivoire

Objectives:

CEM has been working for 15 years in the Bas-Sassandra district of Côte d'Ivoire to support sea turtle conservation and local economic development. Its objectives are:

- Conservation of the native animal and plant species found in marine environments, including estuaries and river mouths in Côte d'Ivoire.
- Contributing to improvement of the quality of life of local populations (particularly women) living near the sea through the creation of ecotourism infrastructure and training programs.

Methodology:



In the last six years, CEM has focused on Roc-Kablaké beach, which is the largest sea turtle nesting area in Côte d'Ivoire (30 km).

[www.fondationensemble.org]



Conservation des
Espèces Marines
(CEM)

06 BP 1412 Abidjan
06 (Côte d'Ivoire)
Tel. +225-05 75 53 66
Association.cem@hotmail.com
www.ong-cem.org

Overview

CEM has been running a sea turtle conservation project in Côte d'Ivoire since 2010.

Thanks to this project, poaching has virtually ceased in the Grand Bereby area, located in the Bas-Sassandra district.

The goal now is to extend the protected areas and to enable local communities to improve their living conditions, in particular through ecotourism initiatives.

Get more information
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The conservation measures taken by CEM are developed in partnership with the villages in the area via a local NGO, Association Action pour le Développement (AAD):

- Awareness-raising meetings are held to discourage villagers from eating turtle meat and eggs;
- Former poachers are trained as guards: this permanent presence enables important data to be collected for turtle conservation and ecotourism development. The guards tag the turtles and their nests and also record meteorological, tide, and lunar phase parameters in relation to turtle nesting, etc.;
- Capacity building for local stakeholders;
- Construction of two sea turtle hatcheries;
- Sharing of experience with the Gostcon network for the protection of sea turtles (Ghana, Togo, Benin, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal).

In parallel, CEM has launched concrete initiatives at the community level. These include:

- Rewards for saving a turtle (for example, distribution of twine - much in demand - to repair fishing nets);
- Installation of solar-powered drinking water supply systems (a water tower with a capacity of 20,000 liters, a solar pump, solar panels to operate the pump, water pipes and taps);
- Construction of community centers in villages with a solar energy electrical system and donation of a solar-powered freezer, television, dryer and lamps;
- Renovation of primary schools;
- Donation of cassava grinders;
- Payment to the villages of income from ecotourism.

The Maritime Police are also involved in the project in order to discourage poaching (enactment of a customary law, capacity building, monitoring of the beaches and fishing port to stop the trade of turtle meat and eggs).

Finally, **ecotourism partnerships** have been established: a local ecotourism management committee has been set up (hatcheries that can be visited by holidaymakers, profits reinvested in the project, etc.)

Results:

Since the launching of project activities, the main outcome – and it is a remarkable one – has been the virtual **cessation of poaching** on the beach in the last five years. This beach used to be a favorite site for the sale and consumption of turtle meat and eggs during the nesting season. The poachers came both from outside the area and from the local communities. The whole beach was affected, resulting in virtually no sea turtles being born there. But the project has led to **gradual repopulation**, with a growing number of births. Over 700 female turtles are protected annually, with more than **40,000 births**.

Four species of turtle are concerned:

- Olive ridley turtle: over 600 nests per year. Numbers rising.
- Leatherback turtle: around 100 nests per year. Numbers stable or declining.
- Green turtle: over 50 nests per year. Numbers rising.
- Hawksbill turtle: numbers declining.

It is unclear why the populations of some species of turtle (green and olive ridley) seem to be growing in comparison with others (hawksbill and leatherback). Marine factors that have yet to be identified (for example, the impact of fishing) may play a role. It is too early to confirm whether or not these turtle populations are increasing, except in the case of the olive ridley, where the annual rise in numbers has been substantiated.