

Value of maintaining healthy coastal environment discussed

Value of maintaining healthy coastal environment discussed By Olu Sarr ACCRA 15 July - Experts from the Guinea Current countries of west and central Africa began a two-day meeting Wednesday to discuss harmonized methods to measure the economic value of maintaining a healthy marine and coastal ecosystem along their coast stretching from Guinea-Bissau to Angola on the Atlantic.

“The aim is to give a first estimation of the overall [economic] value [(use and non-use value] of the GCLME ecosystem in order to form the basis for decision-making regarding protection and further utilization of the ecosystem,” Eduard Interwies, the international socio-economic consultant hired for this module by the Interim Guinea Current Commission. Eduard Interwies, the international socio-economic consultant for the socio-economic module by the Interim Guinea Current Commission To achieve this goal the international expert is closely cooperating with national socio-economic experts appointed by the GCLME countries. Experts say that a well-protected, managed and sustained ecosystem cannot only increase the welfare of the local communities by increasing fish yields, tourism income and maintaining a continuous stream of timber and non-timber products from mangrove forests but also improve the overall economic performance of a country by providing a series of precious environmental services like, for example, the reduction of coastal erosion and carbon sequestration capacity. So far, decision-makers have been focusing most on the exploitation of ecosystem resources (direct use value) without adequate assessment of the value of environmental and social services provided by healthy ecosystems (non-use value) and the opportunity costs. Yet, in many cases the economic value of environmental and social services provided by healthy ecosystems is much higher than the value of marketable products that can be extracted from an ecosystem.

“The GCLME project is sensitizing the countries involved to muster the political will to preserve the ecosystem for sustainable use,” Dr Jacques Abe, the environment scientist at Interim Guinea Current Commission/Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem, said. (Left) Dr Jacques Abe, environment scientist at the Interim Guinea Current Commission The GCLME project is helping, at this workshop, the countries to better assess the economic valuation of resources in the GCLME area. This is in line with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded effort to “combat the living resources depletion and coastal area degradation in the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem”. The main focus of combating resources depletion and coastal degradation centres on the priority problems GCLME countries have identified in a Trans-boundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) as having led to unsustainable fisheries, the unsustainable use of other marine resources, as well as the degradation of the marine and coastal environment by human activity. Socio-economists discuss methods to measure the economic value of maintaining a healthy marine and coastal ecosystem The ecosystem refers to the interaction of people, plants, animals, micro-organisms, mineral resources, climatic and other factors in an area determined by ecological criteria. In this context, the socio-economic experts will support the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) including proposals on the potential use of economic instruments for each country. At the end of the workshop, the participants will be armed with the tools needed to produce full valuation reports which are required by the end of August for inclusion in the National Action Plans. “It also provides a forum of exchange of information among us because some of our problems are similar and we can apply what we learn from each other back home,” Mary Fosi Mbantenkhu, the national socio-economist for Cameroon appointed by her country, said. “It would also help us to speak to the various governments of the GCLME countries to integrate into their developmental policies the economic valuation of environmental goods and services.” Mary Fosi Mbantenkhu, national socio-economist for Cameroon Mbantenkhu is also the environment adviser to the Centre for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development of Cameroon, a private national non-governmental organization.