

## Participatory management of natural resources in Benin: case study of the Bassila Subdistrict, Atacora District<sup>1</sup>

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### SUMMARY

The Republic of Benin is a country in West Africa. The Bassila Subdistrict, with which this case study is concerned, is situated in the northwest of the country. It is the most wooded region of the country. The vast natural forest resources in the region are constantly degrading, as a result of such factors as shifting cultivation (including burning), overgrazing, uncontrolled timber exploitation and late bush fires.

As a result of institutional changes, including the drawing up and adoption in 1993 of an Environmental Action Plan, the review of the forestry code, and the drafting of a new forestry policy in 1994, the Bassila Forest Project, along with the communities, has since 1996 been dedicated to the development of community forestry models that can prioritize the sustainable management of forests.

These models are based on the signing of forest management contracts binding the communities and the forestry services. These contracts precede the implementation of participatory forest management plans.

Among the worthwhile results that have been attained are the drawing up and implementation of the participatory gazetted forest management plan for Penessaulou, which has four neighbouring villages, and the drawing up and implementation of 28 participatory management plans for private natural forests in 18 villages.

The major difficulty encountered is that forestry laws do not explicitly recognize the traditional right to ownership on forest lands. Recently, the project initiated a national seminar to bring together all the officials on various levels to reflect on the issue.



1. Only a summary of this case study is available in English. For the full text in French see p. 345-352.