REGIONAL NEWSLETTER · OCTOBER 2026 EDITION

PACO NEWS

Voice of nature:
sustainable solutions for West and Central Africa

Niokolo-Koba National Park, Senegal.

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Tangible results on the ground

This edition of PACO News highlights the progress and results of IUCN initiatives in Central and West Africa. In Benin, camera traps are improving knowledge of wildlife in the Mono Biosphere Reserve; in Senegal, 283 artificial reefs have been deployed with the participation of fishing communities; in Burkina Faso and Ghana, new solar-powered infrastructure is helping to improve access to water.

At regional level, progress on governance and cooperation also reflects PACO's commitment.

Finally, our "Success story" section celebrates the women of the GOUWIE Union in Burkina Faso, whose cooperative has recorded significant growth in its economic activity.

Happy reading!

The PACO Communications team

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Ecosystem conservation and restoration

BENIN · AGeReB

Benin: sitatungas filmed in the Mono Biosphere Reserve

Purple heron photographed in the Mono Biosphere Reserve, Benin.

Just three weeks after being installed in the Naglanou forest, at the heart of the Mono Biosphere Reserve, camera traps filmed several sitatungas, including young animals, pregnant females and a large male. These first images, collected under the AGeReB project, are adding to knowledge of the reserve's wildlife.

In total, 25 camera traps were deployed across five sites, notably in the Naglanou forest and in the Bouche du Roy marine protected area. They also documented the presence of marsh mongooses and herons.

> *"Given the wealth of images collected in such a short time, the wildlife in the forest is still very remarkable."*
> Dérick Francisco Aze, Executive Director, JADDI ONG

Carried out under the scientific supervision of the Laboratory of Applied Ecology of the University of Abomey-Calavi, this monitoring provides initial data to guide conservation action.

Funded by the European Union, the AGeReB project is implemented by IUCN in a consortium with IUCN NL and ECOBENIN.

SENEGAL · NATUR'ELLES

Senegal: 283 artificial reefs built and deployed by fishing communities

Local communities deploying artificial reefs.

From 21 to 28 September 2026, four Local Artisanal Fisheries Councils (CLPA) in the Sine-Saloum delta and Casamance deployed 283 artificial reefs made by their own members. Carried out under the Natur'ELLES project, the operation aims to support the restoration of marine habitats essential to the reproduction and development of aquatic species.

The CLPAs of Thiobon, Diouloulou, Kafountine and Fimela took part in the deployments, in the Kaalolal Blouf Fogny, Kalone Bliss Kassa and Kolou Ndig protected and conserved areas, at sites previously identified by local stakeholders.

With technical support from the Direction de la gestion et de l'exploitation des fonds marins (DGEFM), IUCN supported the characterisation of the seabed. This step proved decisive in selecting, from the two types of reefs built, those suited to the conditions of each site.

Having communities build the reefs themselves strengthens their ownership of these conservation initiatives. The Natur'ELLES project is implemented with support from SOCODEVI and funded by Global Affairs Canada.

MAURITANIA · DRYLANDS

Mauritania: dune stabilisation in five municipalities and soil and water conservation measures across 45 hectares

Mechanical dune stabilisation at M'heijrat (Inchiri), on the Nouakchott–Nouadhibou road. © DRYLANDS Project

In Mauritania, the DRYLANDS project recorded several achievements against land degradation in 2026: dune stabilisation work was carried out in five municipalities, and soil and water conservation techniques were applied on 45 hectares.

In the municipality of Benichab, dune stabilisation aims in particular to protect farmland and village infrastructure from sand encroachment.

The soil and water conservation works include 15 hectares of half-moons and 30 hectares fitted with gabion check dams. They are designed to reduce erosion, improve water infiltration and create better conditions for restoring degraded land.

The project also supported 28 women's cooperatives in developing income-generating activities, including agricultural processing, small livestock farming and handicrafts.

GHANA · LOGME II

Ghana: with LOGMe II, communities move from nursery to land restoration

Communities take part in land restoration under LOGMe II.

In Ghana, the LOGMe II project – Sahelian Landscapes: A Land of Opportunities has entered a new phase. During the September–October 2026 planting season, communities began transplanting seedlings from previously established community nurseries to restoration sites.

This step follows an initial phase focused on capacity building and local seedling production. Under the programme, which involves 44 communities, activities include planting young trees, establishing agroforestry systems, developing community woodlots and other measures to rehabilitate degraded agricultural landscapes.

Technical support is helping communities with site preparation, planting practices and the care of young seedlings.

Communities and sustainable solutions

BURKINA FASO · PGPC/REDD+

Burkina Faso: more than 100 solar boreholes built for water and sustainable agriculture

Borehole fitted with a solar pumping system in Poa, Burkina Faso.

In Burkina Faso, more than 100 solar-powered boreholes were built between 2025 and 2026 under sub-component 3.2 of the PGPC/REDD+, through the partnership between the Government of Burkina Faso and IUCN.

Equipped with solar-powered pumping systems, these facilities address two linked challenges: supporting sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural production and improving access to drinking water for communities living near forests.

These facilities represent a tangible achievement of the PGPC/REDD+ project.

GHANA · NATURE-BASED ADAPTATION

Ghana: four solar boreholes to supply community nurseries with water

Solar-powered community borehole in Duase, Ghana.

In Ghana, four solar-powered mechanised boreholes have been commissioned under the project on nature-based climate change adaptation in the Guinean forests of West Africa. They provide drinking water and irrigation for four community nurseries.

The boreholes were installed in Pensanom and Nkrankrom, in the Wassa Amenfi landscape, and in Duase and Pipieh, in the Lake Bosomtwe landscape.

Reliable access to water is essential for producing the seedlings used in landscape restoration. This equipment therefore removes a major constraint for the communities involved in these activities.

The intervention also supports women's participation in nursery management, seedling production and the development of climate-resilient economic activities such as market gardening. The facilities are managed by the communities, with technical support from the district assemblies, to ensure their sustainable use.

BURKINA FASO · PGPC/REDD+

Burkina Faso: 495 sub-projects supported and business skills strengthened

Carine B. Sama (IUCN) during a training session for PFNL entrepreneurs.

In Burkina Faso, following the financing of 495 sub-projects under the PGPC/REDD+, IUCN is supporting entrepreneurs working with non-timber forest products (PFNL) in a new phase: adding value to their products, accessing new markets and thereby consolidating the investments made.

From 12 July to 18 September 2026, training sessions were held in the Nazinon, Guiriko and Nando regions, with support from the Agence burkinabè de normalisation, de la métrologie et de la qualité (ABNORM), the Agence burkinabè des investissements et de promotion des exportations (ABIPEX) and the Direction générale de la promotion de l'économie rurale (DGPER).

Topics covered included marketing, product development and communication, as well as quality, standardisation, certification and export requirements.

Plastic pollution and circular economy

CABO VERDE · ISLANDPLAS

Cabo Verde: more than 3.6 tonnes of waste collected during a national mobilisation against plastic pollution

Volunteers clean up the coastline during the IslandPlas campaign in Cabo Verde.

In Cabo Verde, the national mobilisation organised on 19 September 2026 under the IslandPlas project collected more than 3.6 tonnes of waste, including around 1.9 tonnes of plastics, according to data reported by the project.

Combining the second "Zero Plastic Waste" campaign with the national coastal clean-up campaign, the initiative brought together at least 374 participants in around 15 of the country's 22 municipalities. Activities covered all inhabited islands except Fogo and Maio.

Coordinated by IUCN and the Government of Cabo Verde through the National Directorate of Environment, the campaign mobilised local authorities, communities, civil society organisations, schools and private sector actors.

Beyond collection, the initiative focused on sorting, characterising and tracing plastic waste, with methodological support from CaboPlast. These initial results provide a basis for strengthening plastic collection and recovery, particularly through the PlastiNetwork, with a view to a circular economy.

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE · ISLANDPLAS

São Tomé and Príncipe: two collection points to improve plastic waste sorting and recovery

Plastic waste collection point installed in Lobata, São Tomé and Príncipe.

In São Tomé and Príncipe, two collection points dedicated to plastic waste have been installed in the districts of Lobata and Lembá under the IslandPlas project. Until now, in the absence of dedicated facilities, plastics there were generally mixed with other waste.

Inaugurated in the presence of the Minister responsible for the Environment, the two facilities now give residents dedicated spaces to drop off plastics. They are managed by district council teams, while the IslandPlas project organises the transfer of the recovered waste.

These collection points are part of the development of the Green Points system, which provides an incentive mechanism allowing residents to exchange their plastic waste for vouchers redeemable in partner supermarkets.

The project plans to gradually extend these facilities to other districts, including the Autonomous Region of Príncipe. Monitoring the quantities collected will make it possible to measure use of the facilities and their contribution to better plastic waste management.

Governance and regional cooperation

WEST AFRICA · FREAO

West Africa: two resolutions adopted at FREAO and IUCN-PACO receives regional recognition

Presentation of the Regional GIRE Trophy to IUCN-PACO at FREAO 2026 in Abidjan.

The first West Africa Regional Water Forum (FREAO), held on 24 and 25 September 2026 in Abidjan, led to the adoption of two resolutions supported by IUCN: one on tackling transboundary water pollution, the other on harmonising water information systems.

As co-organiser of the Forum and a member of the Regional Coordination Group, IUCN, through its Central and West Africa Programme (PACO), contributed to the preparatory work. Alongside Pôle Eau Dakar, it led the Regional Working Group on regional cooperation and hydro-diplomacy, whose report was presented during a session on the joint management of shared water resources. IUCN also chaired the session on the water–energy–food–environment nexus.

In recognition of its commitment to integrated water resources management (GIRE), IUCN-PACO received the Regional GIRE Trophy.

These advances provide a basis for strengthening cooperation among regional actors and continuing dialogue on the sustainable management of water resources in West Africa.

TOGO · WASOP3

Togo: the Senate authorises ratification of the BBNJ Treaty as national stakeholders prepare

Participants in the national BBNJ Treaty awareness workshop in Lomé.

On 20 August 2026, the Togolese Senate authorised ratification of the Treaty on Marine Biodiversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). This parliamentary authorisation marks a new step in the process under way since Togo signed the Treaty in September 2023. To take effect, ratification must still be formalised by depositing the instrument of ratification with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

From 20 to 27 August, IUCN, through the European Union-funded WASOP3 programme, supported the Haut Conseil pour la Mer in organising awareness workshops in Lomé for public administrations, the media, civil society and coastal local authorities.

Evaluations carried out after the workshops show a good overall understanding of the Treaty's four pillars, but also a need for further work, particularly on marine protected areas and the sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources. These lessons will help better target the next capacity-building activities.

A national roadmap structured around seven areas provides, among other things, for strengthening institutional coordination, national capacity and stakeholder mobilisation, in preparation for the first Conference of the Parties (COP1) and future implementation of the Treaty.

WEST AFRICA · WACA

WACA: countries set their priorities for 2027 and prepare the next phase of the programme

Participants in the WACA regional workshop in Saly, Senegal.

From 5 to 10 October 2026, the countries of the West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA) and partner regional institutions met in Saly, Senegal, to review progress in 2026 and define support priorities for 2027. Organised by IUCN through its WACA Regional Support Office (WACA BAR), in collaboration with UEMOA, the workshop also moved forward preparations for WACA+.

Representatives of the ResIP1 and ResIP2 countries identified their priority technical assistance needs, particularly in coastal engineering, environmental and social safeguards, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity building. These needs are to be integrated into the 2027 annual work plans and budgets (PTBA, French acronym) of the regional institutions concerned, to facilitate the mobilisation of the required expertise.

Discussions also covered WACA+, the next phase of the programme, already under way in Benin and Mauritania, which will give a prominent place to the blue economy and employment. They clarified the expected contributions of the regional institutions, with a view to consolidating a regional offer ahead of the next Regional Steering Committee, scheduled for December 2026 in Senegal.

IUCN will continue to support the countries, particularly in closing ResIP1, preparing WACA+ and capitalising on the programme's achievements.

PACO and IUCN network news

PACO · REGIONAL COORDINATION

PACO: twelve priorities identified to strengthen regional action by 2029

PACO regional coordination meeting, Dakar, September 2026.

From 14 to 17 September 2026, the teams of IUCN's Central and West Africa Programme (PACO) met in Dakar and identified twelve strategic priorities to strengthen their collective action over the 2026–2029 cycle.

The meeting brought together country programmes, thematic units and corporate functions, as well as representatives of other IUCN regions and global programmes. It took stock of the 2021–2024 cycle and prepared PACO's contribution to the IUCN Programme 2026–2029.

The discussions identified six internal and six external priorities. Among them, six workstreams were judged urgent: human resources and skills, mobilising and diversifying funding, project delivery, positioning on high-potential themes, and risk anticipation.

The next step is to translate these priorities into concrete actions. Responsibilities, deadlines and indicators for the action plan are still to be confirmed.

TOGO · IUCN MEMBER

Togo becomes a State Member of IUCN

Togo officially joined the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as a State Member on 4 August 2026. Already present in the Union through several Member organisations, the country is now also represented at government level.

This status gives Togo an official voice and voting rights in the Union's governance processes, and allows it to contribute directly to shaping global conservation policy.

Membership consolidates existing collaboration in several areas, including protected area management, biodiversity conservation and the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems. Togo also takes part in regional initiatives supported by PACO, including the WACA programme.

This new step opens up prospects for stronger cooperation on national and regional conservation priorities.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE · PATRONS OF NATURE

Côte d'Ivoire: Jean-Louis Billon, first IUCN Patron of Nature from West Africa

Jean-Louis Billon, IUCN Patron of Nature.

Ivorian businessman Jean-Louis Billon has been appointed an IUCN Patron of Nature, an appointment announced on 14 September 2026 in Dunhuang, China. He is the first West African figure to join this international circle of leaders committed to biodiversity.

Chairman of the agro-industrial group SIFCA and former Minister of Trade of Côte d'Ivoire, he brings his private sector experience and his commitment to economic development that reconciles performance with environmental protection. Under his leadership, the SIFCA group has notably contributed to conservation and forest restoration initiatives in Côte d'Ivoire.

Established in 2010, the IUCN Patrons of Nature bring together personalities who contribute their expertise, influence and support to mobilising resources for conservation.

This appointment strengthens West Africa's representation within this platform and underlines the role African economic actors can play in protecting and sustainably managing natural resources.

CAMEROON · COUNTRY OFFICE

Cameroon: Marius Rodrigue Mensah Ekué takes up his post as IUCN Country Director

Dr Marius Rodrigue Mensah Ekué, IUCN Country Director for Cameroon.

Dr Marius Rodrigue Mensah Ekué officially took up his post as IUCN Country Director for Cameroon on 5 October 2026, at a ceremony held at the organisation's offices in Yaoundé, in the presence of the country team and Ny-Andry Rakotoharintsifa, representing the PACO Regional Director.

On this occasion, the new Country Director presented the two priorities of his mandate: consolidating IUCN's achievements in Cameroon and strengthening institutional relations with national authorities and technical and financial partners.

His arrival opens a new chapter for the IUCN office in Cameroon, which intends to continue its ongoing interventions and strengthen the collaborations needed to achieve its conservation objectives.

TRIBUTE

Séna Alouka

A committed voice for the environment and African youth

Séna Alouka, founder of Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement (JVE).

The African environmental movement has lost one of its committed figures: Séna Alouka, Togolese environmental activist and founder of Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement (JVE), passed away on 31 August 2026.

Since founding JVE in 2001, he devoted much of his work to environmental protection, the promotion of agroecology and youth participation in climate policy. In 2006, he created the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change to support young people's participation in international negotiations.

Active in many networks, he also championed food sovereignty, environmental education and the place of communities in decisions affecting their future. A member of the IUCN network, he took part in several World Conservation Congresses, including in Hawaii, where he spoke up for young people in support of conservation.

He leaves a legacy of commitment to a more inclusive conservation, attentive to youth participation and African realities.

BURKINA FASO · SUCCESS STORY

In Zambo, the women of the GOUWIE Union nearly double its turnover

Equipped with crushers, hullers and cooking pots, the GOUWIE Union, which brings together more than 200 women in Ioba province, has sharply increased its shea production. Its turnover has risen from around 11 to 20 million FCFA.

Shea processing in Burkina Faso.

The starting point

Founded in 2011, the GOUWIE Union of shea production, processing and marketing cooperatives (UGPTCK/IOBA) brings together more than 200 women from over 14 associations.

Its members work at every stage of the value chain, from collecting the nuts to processing them into shea butter for food and cosmetic uses. To grow, the Union needed to strengthen its production capacity and reach more diverse markets.

The support

Through PROGREEN funding, with support from the World Bank, the Government of Burkina Faso and IUCN, the Union acquired several pieces of equipment: crushers, hullers, cooking pots and protective gear. This support has helped improve its processing capacity.

The results

The Union reports significant progress in its activities, particularly in production volumes.

> ***"We used to produce around 5 tonnes. Today, we manage to produce between 20 and 30 tonnes of shea."***
> Marie Simone Poda/Kambiré, President of the GOUWIE Union

At the same time, the Union's turnover has risen from around 11 to 20 million FCFA. The Union also reports having diversified its sales outlets, with markets in Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, France and the United States.

Why it matters

Beyond volumes, this growth strengthens the cooperative's business prospects and its capacity to add value to shea locally. For the women of the Union, it consolidates their place in a value chain that combines local know-how, processing and marketing.

The Zambo experience shows how targeted equipment support can help a women's organisation develop its production capacity and access new markets, supporting the economic empowerment of rural women.

KEY FIGURES

200+ women members	**14+** associations	**20–30 t** of shea produced, compared with around 5 t before	**20 M FCFA** in turnover, compared with around 11 M	**4** countries cited by the Union among its markets

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE

Central and West Africa Programme (PACO)

iucn.org