



Giving Mangroves A Voice

A blue economy solution designed to safeguard our planet's coastal mangrove eco-systems

**UNOC 2022 Written Statement
by Blue Forest**

During a hot summer afternoon, I met with the local tribal chiefs of Adiake, a breezy fishing village on the banks of Gulf of Guinea in eastern Cote d'Ivoire.

Sitting on firm wooden chairs and looking onwards to the calm sea, we discussed my plans to plant 160,000 mangroves in a deforested area not far from where we were sitting. Whilst the community members seemed receptive to the idea, it was clear that the chiefs were not entirely convinced.

“What happens after the seedlings are planted?” said one of the tribal heads with a stern voice. “Who will care for them for 10 years to make sure they grow to become mature trees?”

This is a valid point; most tree planting projects only look to cover the cost of the planting and maybe a few years of monitoring.

“What happens if we help you plant them and in 5 years a public official decides to parcel off the area and sell it to developers?” pronounced another weary tribal official.

It's a trend that is not uncommon. The coastal sites where mangroves grow are usually coveted by developers for real estate projects and aquaculture investment, typically crab or shrimp farms.

This is especially painful for fishing communities as those mangrove forests represent vital nesting grounds for a wide variety of fishes that they depend on for their livelihood. Once the mangroves disappear so too does their source of income.

And it's not only developers and cunning officials that are slashing away at these coastal eco-systems for personal gain.

Mangrove forests are in tropical regions in developing countries, with many of their citizens living close to the poverty line.

This makes for a lethal combination: growing number of people, looking for sources of income, and an idle mangrove forest full of natural riches and no way of defending itself.

As populations grow around the world, so does the pressure on our mangrove forests. Already, we have lost half of the planet's mangrove forests. And each year we are losing 1% of the world's remaining mangroves. This suggests that in 50 years there will be no more mangroves.

Aside from being a vital nesting ground for fishing communities, these forests also shield coastlines from natural disasters such as tsunamis and cyclones. If you take away the mangroves, you take away their coastal defenses as well, thus exposing already vulnerable communities to potentially lethal disaster.

Yet, despite the security and biodiversity benefits, mangroves remain under-appreciated. That's because those benefits are not directly resulting in benefits that people can count and put in their pockets. On the



other hand, converting the trees to charcoal results in direct and measurable returns. It's a losing battle for our precious mangroves.

Luckily, the mangrove tree has a third superpower, one which could ultimately ensure its survival. Mangrove trees have the ability to sequester up to five times more carbon dioxide than terrestrial trees.

Today, there is growing marketplace of corporates who are looking to offset the CO2 volumes which they cannot eliminate via nature-based solutions, notably long-term reforestation projects.

As a result, there is a surge in demand for what is called "blue carbon," carbon offset projects based in wetland environments, such as mangrove projects. The mangrove trees are worth more in the ground than they would be as charcoal or wood beams for a new house.

Blue Forest designs mangrove reforestation projects that allow communities to generate funds to not only restore the mangroves for 30 years but also provide communities with livelihood improvements and jobs.

Voluntary carbon markets are providing mangroves with a voice. They are allowing the mangrove trees to defend themselves, to stand up for themselves.

Local communities such as the one in Adiake can now leverage the carbon markets to channel capital from polluters to protectors. This provides hope for our coastal mangrove forests and the diverse communities that live side by side these vital marine eco-systems.

Blue Forest is an accredited organization for UNOC 2022 and is focused on mangrove forest restoration.