

Ziguinchor, Senegal, July 11 (Infosplusgabon) - The conifer is a plant species that is increasingly threatened with extinction in the forests of Casamance, southern Senegal.

This very precious species has been overexploited for years by poachers who take advantage of the climate of insecurity created by decades-long armed conflicts.

This phenomenon of exploitation is most noticeable in the border areas with The Gambia where most of the forests are gradually disappearing.

Commander Mamadou Goudiaby, inspector of the Ziguinchor Water and Forests Region, confirms that this species is endangered and links this to the fact that this tree is very valuable and that everyone, including carpenters who use it for making furniture, rush for it.

"I confirm that the conifer is a species that has become very endangered in Casamance as all observers have noticed, and it is because it is a very precious wood, so very popular. It is widely used by carpenters for the manufacture of furniture," he said.

He pointed out, however, that this threat of disappearance was not due to local craftsmen, but was rather to the looting of Casamance forests by poachers from The Gambia.

According to him, the threat of extinction of the conifer is not due to local artisans, but to Asian 'illegals' from the other side in The Gambia who enter the territory and fraudulently harvest this wood.

"If you walk in this country, you will realize that the Gambia, which exports a lot of wood, does not have forests. They come in, especially to where there are many classified forests that have been there since the 1940s to cut down trees. So it is ripe wood that is there and the Senegalese have never cut this wood.

"It is these poachers who come to cut it nightly and bring it out. As proof, all the trucks loaded with wood that we took are Gambian vehicles. We took 21 vehicles, loaded not only with the conifer, but with other species of wood like the caïcédraat," he noted.

According to Inspector Goudiaby, faced with the gravity of the situation, the Senegalese authorities have taken measures to ban the cutting of this species.

"But it is especially the conifer that is threatened with extinction and the State has taken steps to, initially internally suspend its exploitation since the campaign 2016-2017.

“And since Cop 17, held in Johannesburg, the state has included this species in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). So Senegal has inscribed it as a threatened species for its preservation, to allow its exploitation to stop and for this species that grows in spontaneous natural ways to recover.

He points out that this tree grows everywhere throughout Senegal and its disappearance will have serious consequences in the lives of the populations and especially for the peasants, because it is a leguminous species, it is a nitrogenous plant.

"When you go to Tambacounda, you will see that its foliage is used as fodder for the feeding of the small flock. So it's a kind of value that is well known to local people. If this species disappears, so there will be consequences, aerial fodder will lose a kind of value and you know that livestock is the savings of the farmer.

“When a farmer has an added value, he prefers to buy a cow, a sheep or a goat and to feed it, he takes the leaves of this species. Imagine if it disappeared, it will have social consequences that people will feel,” he said.

He said the water and forest services were working hard to fight against outlaws engaged in cutting this species, adding that it was working closely with other defense forces towards this end.

In this regard, he noted that during the reforestation campaign of 2017, it was the conifer that was sponsored.

“During the reforestation campaign (2016-2017), it was to allow all Senegalese to be able to plant as much as possible. And we produce a lot in our tree nurseries, which allows people to have a lot of plants to reforest. And as there is now a provision that says if you reforest, it will come back to you right, so you will leave here a savings to your sons who will benefit.

“So these are measures that allow the prohibition first, but also the compensation that revolves around reforestation. By mentioning that logging is suspended, this shows the willingness of the authorities to take up this issue. By launching the reforestation campaigns of this kind, it shows that the state has taken the lead, even beyond the struggle on the ground, to compensate for the losses, that is to say what has already been cut,” he stressed.

He welcomed the state of mind of people who responded to reforestation campaigns launched by the government.

"What is encouraging today is that people adhere to the reforestation campaigns that are fixed by decree: it is the first Sunday of August each year. This is an excuse for each of us to plant a tree. And it is not only forest trees, you see today the cashew which is so popular, it is the services of water and forests that introduced it here in Casamance. Until today, it is we who give the plants free of charge to the people because we are the only service that produces the cashew plants. The consolidated investment budget of the State allows us to recruit maneuvers to produce plants that we give free to the people. And at the harvest you see that the peasants are rubbing their hands," he said.

Lamine Banding Gassama, coordinator of the non-governmental organization (NGO), who is very active in the protection of the environment, said: "We must not stop at campaigns of denunciation against those who destroy the forests of Casamance.

He advocates a strong sensitization so that the populations understand that this fight concerns them first.

He also welcomed the great work done by the water and forest services in the context of reforestation campaigns, and called for the intensification and extension of these campaigns.

"We know today that it is the Chinese who cut the timber in our forests of Casamance and bring it to Gambia. We must first of all denounce this organized looting, but above all we must carry out a strong campaign in the villages so that people understand that it must first be their own struggle to save the environment because their lives depend on it. The water and forest services are doing a good job in the reforestation campaigns. We must continue these campaigns by expanding them to all corners of Casamance," he said.

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