

Wildland Fires in West Africa: Interventions and the Way Forward

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Abstract

Fire is a regular feature in the landscape of most West African countries especially in areas dominated by savanna and woodland vegetation. More recently wildfires have become annual events in the forest and forest transition zones of some countries (e.g. Ghana). The causes of wildfire occurrence are quite similar in most member countries in the West African region and are mostly human-caused. Fires are set deliberately to clean bushes surrounding villages, to prepare land for cultivation of crops, to enhance regrowth of new grass for cattle and wild animals as well as for cultural purposes. Most of these intentional fires get out of control and destroy large areas of vegetation and reduce the long-term capacity of the land to support agriculture and other livelihood activities. In spite of these negative impacts, most countries lack a holistic and efficient system for preventing and controlling wildfires. Consequently, the problem of rampant wildfires continues to persist.

In some member countries (e.g. fire management projects in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire), efficient wildfire management systems have been put in place mostly through donor funded projects. The main achievements include the formulation of National Wildfire Policies (e.g. Ghana National Wildfire Policy), National Strategy on fire management and associated action plans (e.g. Burkina Faso) and community-based fire management strategies (e.g. Burkina Faso), and have resulted in reduction of wildfire occurrence. These successes need to be sustained and scaled-up across communities and other member countries in the region.

In this paper, current gaps in wildfire management in the region are highlighted and follow-up actions are recommended to secure the gains already made.

Key words: *UNISDR Regional Subsahara Wildland Fire Network, West Africa Region, Global Wildland Fire Network*