



THE SIERRA LEONE RIVER ESTUARY

OVERVIEW

THE SIERRA LEONE RIVER ESTUARY is located between the Port Loko District and the Western Area Rural District. It is in Western Sierra Leone and is formed by the Bankasoka and Rokel Rivers. The Sierra Leone River Estuary is the largest natural harbour in the African continent. Mangroves of this region have increased significantly as a result of reforestation efforts.



LAND AREA

The Sierra Leone River Estuary is estimated to cover an area of 2,950 km².

2,950 km²

PEOPLE



Majority of the native inhabitants of this region are Themnes from the Port Loko and Western Area Rural Districts, covering Waterloo, Deep Eye Water and their environs.



Major sources of energy for cooking are coal, wood from forests and mangroves. The use of mangrove wood is predominant in coastal communities in the Western Area such as Congo town, Goderich, Old Wharf, Portee, Kroo Bay etc. The major energy source for lighting is mostly rechargeable lamps with the population in some areas in the Kaffu Bullum Chiefdom using thermal supply.



The Port Loko District, the Western Area Rural District and the Freetown Municipal Councils are established under the Local Government Act of 2004 and provides the legal framework for local governance.

ECONOMY

Major livelihoods in this mangrove region include agriculture, petty trading, fishing, wood cutting, salt production, and sand mining.



WOOD CUTTING



SALT PRODUCTION



SAND MINING



AGRICULTURE



PETTY TRADING



FISHING

SIERRA LEONE RIVER ESTUARY

ECOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE

This region is made up of many habitat types amongst which are adjacent terrestrial coastal degraded forest, Aberdeen Creek, Bunce River, Tasso Island, Rokel river mouth, Port Loko river mouth and Lungi-Pepel Creeks. The mangroves of this region are estimated to account for 19.9% of the total mangrove cover of Sierra Leone and are concentrated along different tributaries, extending between 0.5 and 3km inland.

Other vegetation types in the Sierra Leone River Estuary include coastal forests, plantations, and subsistence farmland which also host important biodiversity. It is reported that 295,000 ha of this estuary are protected under the Ramsar Convention, and it is considered an important bird habitat. This estuary is rich in biological diversity which includes mangroves, birds, fish stock and other coastal and marine organisms.

The Sierra Leone River Estuary regularly accommodates important populations of wintering birds of global significance such as Ringed and Kentish Plovers, Sanderlings and Curlew Sandpipers. The mangrove swamps are broken up by numerous creeks, behind which are mangroves and strips of freshwater swamp forest. The Sierra Leone River Estuary is a very important habitat for migrant birds.

The main mangrove tree species are *Rhizophora racemosa*, *Rhizophora mangle* and *Rhizophora harrisonii*, all of which are found at the edge of the water. The others, *Avicennia germinans*, *Conocarpus erectus* and *Laguncularia racemosa* are dominant upstream at the tidal limits, where *Rhizophora mangle* and *Rhizophora harrisonii* can also be found.

THREATS

This region lost 22% of its mangrove cover between 1990 and 2016 because of various threats outlined below. It has a depletion rate of 0.85% per year. The drivers of change include:

- Industrial development and pollution: the estuary hosts two major industrial ports-- the Queen Elizabeth II Quay and the port of Pepel--as well as a number of industrial sites.
- Unplanned urbanization: urban extension as well as the development of hotel and related industries like unauthorized housing development has caused the removal of about 20 hectares of mangrove vegetation over the past five years.
- Sand mining, habitat destruction for fuel wood, poor waste disposal and overexploitation of fisheries resources: sand miners clear mangroves to access the sand along the beaches; some cut the mangroves to sell as fuel wood thereby destroying the mangrove habitat in the area.

CLIMATE CHANGE PAST AND ONGOING MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS:

- Artisanal Fisheries Development Project (2002 – 2010)
- Institutional Support to Fisheries Programme (2007 – 2010)
- West Africa Regional Fisheries Programme (2010 2015)
- Mangrove tree planting in Kaffu Bullum and at the Aberdeen Creek

Mangroves of this region have increased significantly as a result of reforestation efforts.

WA BICC PLANNED ACTIVITIES:

1. Promote community-based ecosystems management
2. Provide additional community livelihoods as a way of building resilience to climate change.
3. Promote awareness-raising and behavior change communication campaigns to support conservation; ecosystems approach to restoration of degraded mangrove areas; targeted capacity-building and sustainable management of ecosystem resources.
4. Promote institutional strengthening, good governance practices and the mainstreaming of climate change adaptation into local development plan.

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