



Awareness-raising campaign against bushfires, the greatest threat to the Mpem & Djim National Park's loss of biodiversity in dry season

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Sites: Schools in **Linté** and **Yangba**, adjacent to Mpem & Djim National Park

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Background and rationale

Mpem & Djim National Park, located in Central region of Cameroon, stands as a vital sanctuary for biodiversity, sheltering a remarkable array of plant and animal life, including the endemic katydid *Macroscirtus kekeunoui*. Despite its ecological significance, the park faces severe threats from bushfires, particularly during the dry season from January to March. These fires are predominantly caused by human activities: pastoralists set fires to regenerate grazing fields for livestock, while farmers use burning as a method to clear land for cultivation. Such practices devastate habitats, displace wildlife, and pose a serious risk to species with limited mobility, like *Macroscirtus kekeunoui*, whose survival depends on the park's fragile ecosystems. The surrounding villages of Linté and Yangba, along with others such as Sérère, Kamkata, Djim-Massambe, and Mindou-Mindja, are directly impacted by these environmental challenges and the conservation policies of the park. Within Linté and Yangba, the primary schools serve not only as educational institutions but also as centers for community engagement and environmental awareness. Recognizing the influential role of schools, a targeted awareness-



raising campaign was launched in both villages, reaching nearly 200 students. This campaign aimed to educate youth and the broader community about the dangers of bushfires, promote sustainable land management practices, and introduce viable alternatives to bush-burning, such as agroforestry, firebreaks, and pasture rotation. By fostering a new conservation culture among future generations, the initiative sought to empower local communities to become active stewards of Mpem & Djim National Park. Through educational outreach, the campaign highlighted the interconnectedness of human activities and environmental health, emphasizing that the protection of the park's unique biodiversity is essential not only for wildlife but also for the long-term well-being of the region's people. These efforts represent a critical step toward ensuring the preservation of Mpem & Djim's rich natural heritage and the sustainable development of its neighboring communities.

Activities carried out

1. Interactive environmental education

➤ Presentations using PowerPoint with the help of a video projector and laptop

presentations were conducted using PowerPoint projected via a video projector connected to a laptop (figure 1). These presentations featured documentary films and visual materials illustrating the park's unique ecosystems, the devastating impacts of bushfires on flora and fauna, and the human activities driving these fires, such as pastoralists' grazing practices and farmers' land clearing. The multimedia approach engaged students and community members by combining vivid imagery, explanatory texts, and real-life examples to clearly communicate the urgency of protecting the park. By leveraging modern technology in accessible village schools, the campaign effectively raised awareness and fostered a conservation mindset among youth and local populations living adjacent to the park.



Figure 1. Presentations using PowerPoint

➤ **Short films and visuals on the impact of bushfires on biodiversity.**

The short films and visuals used during the awareness-raising campaign vividly depicted the severe impact of bushfires on the biodiversity of Mpem & Djim National Park (figure 2). They illustrated how these fires, mainly caused by human activities such as pastoralists burning grazing fields and farmers clearing land, lead to habitat destruction, loss of vegetation, soil degradation, and displacement of wildlife. The visuals highlighted the vulnerability of key species, including endemic and less mobile animals like the katydid *Macroscirtus kekeunoui*, and showed the cascading effects of fire on the park's complex ecosystems, including disruptions to food chains and long-term habitat degradation. By combining real footage and graphical representations, the films effectively communicated the urgency of preventing bushfires and promoted sustainable alternatives such as agroforestry and firebreaks. This multimedia approach engaged the community emotionally and intellectually, fostering a deeper understanding of the ecological consequences of bushfires and motivating local populations to participate actively in conservation efforts to protect the park's unique biodiversity during the dry season.



Figure 2. Presentation of short films and visuals on the impact of bushfires on biodiversity

➤ **Distribution of posters and flyers featuring key conservation messages**

The distribution of posters and flyers during the awareness-raising campaign against bushfires in the Mpem & Djim National Park area featured key conservation messages designed to inform and engage local communities about the severe ecological threats posed by uncontrolled fires. These printed materials highlighted the destructive impact of bushfires on the park's

biodiversity, including habitat loss, wildlife displacement, and the vulnerability of endemic species. They also communicated practical guidance on sustainable land management practices and alternatives to traditional bush-burning, such as agroforestry, firebreaks, and pasture rotation. The posters and flyers were visually appealing and easy to understand, aiming to reinforce the messages delivered through presentations and short films. By distributing these materials in villages and schools like those in Linté and Yangba, the campaign sought to extend its reach beyond direct participants, fostering a broader community-wide commitment to fire prevention and biodiversity conservation (figure 3).



Figure 3. Poster conservation messages

2. Student engagement activities

➤ Quiz competitions and Q&A sessions on bushfires and environmental stewardship.

The quiz competitions and Q&A sessions conducted during the awareness-raising campaign against bushfires at Mpem & Djim National Park focused on reinforcing knowledge about the causes, impacts, and prevention of bushfires, as well as promoting environmental stewardship among participants (figure 4). These interactive activities engaged students and community members by testing their understanding of how bushfires threaten biodiversity, disrupt habitats, and endanger species like the endemic katydid *Macroscirtus kekeunoui*. The sessions encouraged active participation, allowing attendees to ask questions, clarify doubts, and discuss sustainable alternatives to bush-burning such as agroforestry, firebreaks, and pasture rotation. By fostering dialogue and critical thinking, the quiz and Q&A components helped deepen awareness, motivate behavioral change, and empower local communities especially youth—to take an active role in conserving the park's fragile ecosystems during the dry season.



Figure 4. Quiz competitions and Q&A sessions

➤ **T-shirt rewards and symbolic prizes were given to outstanding participants.**

During the awareness-raising campaign against bushfires threatening Mpem & Djim National Park, T-shirt rewards and symbolic prizes were presented to outstanding participants, particularly those who excelled in quiz competitions and actively engaged in discussions on environmental stewardship (figure 5). These incentives served to recognize and motivate students and community members for their knowledge, enthusiasm, and commitment to conservation efforts. The distribution of T-shirts and symbolic gifts not only celebrated individual achievements but also fostered a sense of pride and belonging among participants, reinforcing positive behavior towards protecting the park's biodiversity. By providing tangible rewards, the campaign encouraged continued participation and helped cultivate a conservation-minded culture within the local communities adjacent to the park, strengthening their role as stewards of the environment during the critical dry season when bushfires pose the greatest threat



Figure 5. T-shirt rewards and symbolic prizes were given to outstanding participants

➤ **Group discussions on alternative practices and personal commitments to bushfire prevention.**

Group discussions during the awareness-raising campaign against bushfires at Mpem & Djim National Park focused on exploring alternative land management practices and fostering personal commitments to bushfire prevention among participants (figure 6). These discussions provided a platform for community members, including students and local leaders, to share experiences and ideas on sustainable alternatives to traditional bush-burning, such as agroforestry, firebreaks, and pasture rotation. Facilitators encouraged participants to reflect on the ecological and socio-economic impacts of bushfires, emphasizing the importance of protecting the park's biodiversity and fragile ecosystems. By engaging in open dialogue, attendees were motivated to adopt new behaviors and make personal pledges to prevent bushfires, thereby contributing to a collective conservation effort.



Figure 6. Group discussions on alternative practices to bushfire prevention

3. Stakeholder involvement : meetings with school heads and traditional leaders to encourage continued collaboration.

Meetings with school heads and traditional leaders formed a crucial component of the awareness-raising campaign against bushfires near Mpem & Djim National Park, aimed at fostering sustained collaboration for biodiversity conservation (figure 7). During these gatherings, campaign organizers engaged with educational and community leaders to discuss the ongoing threats posed by bushfires and the importance of integrating fire prevention and environmental stewardship into local practices and school curricula. These meetings provided an opportunity to share the outcomes of the campaign, gather feedback, and build strong partnerships grounded in mutual respect and shared responsibility. By involving traditional authorities and school administrators, the initiative sought to ensure that conservation messages continue to be reinforced beyond the campaign period, promoting long-term community commitment to protecting the park's fragile ecosystems. This collaborative approach helped embed conservation values within both formal education and traditional governance structures, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of fire prevention efforts in the region.



Figure 7. Meeting with school heads and traditional leaders to encourage

Key results

- **Over 200 students directly reached in both Linté and Yangba.**

Over 200 students in the villages of Linté and Yangba were directly engaged in an awareness-raising campaign against bushfires, the greatest threat to biodiversity loss in Mpem & Djim National Park during the dry season. This campaign targeted primary school students as key community members, educating them on the dangers of bushfires and promoting sustainable land management practices (figure 8).



Figure 8. Students of Linté and Yangba.

- **Increased understanding of bushfire impacts and alternative land management methods.**

The campaign effectively educated students and community members on the dangers posed by uncontrolled fires and introduced alternative land management methods such as agroforestry, firebreaks, and pasture rotation. This enhanced knowledge fostered a shift toward more sustainable practices aimed at reducing bushfire risks. Ultimately, the campaign contributed to building local capacity for biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use in the park's surrounding communities.

- **Distribution of over 100 educational materials (flyers, posters, t-shirts).**

Over 100 educational materials were distributed to students during the awareness-raising campaign in Linté and Yangba. These materials included flyers, posters, didactic tools, pens, pencils, and books to support learning about bushfire prevention and biodiversity conservation. (Figure 9). Additionally, campaign-branded t-shirts and footballs were given to engage and motivate the students, combining education with recreational activities. This diverse distribution aimed to reinforce the campaign's messages and encourage active participation among the youth.



Figure 9. Educational materials distributed to students

➤ Creation of a Nature Friends Club

As part of the awareness campaign conducted in schools in the Mpem and Djim National Park in Linté and Yangba, a Friends of Nature Club was created to strengthen the bond between students and their environment (Figure 10). This club aims to provide a platform for ongoing environmental education and conservation activities beyond the campaign period. Student members of the club participated in practical projects, such as collecting polluting plastics in nature and playing games to preserve local wildlife, thus strengthening their understanding of biodiversity and the impacts of bushfires. This club is a sustainable initiative aimed at promoting responsible environmental management and empowering students to become advocates for park conservation. The creation of this club will ensure continued engagement and long-term environmental awareness within the community.



Figure 10. Nature friends club

Challenges encountered

During the awareness campaign in Linté and Yangba, the major challenge was the poor road conditions, sometimes with frequent breakdowns of the ferries transporting vehicles across the river on certain sections (Figure 11). These disruptions caused delays and complicated the campaign staff. In addition, the remoteness of the villages and the poor road conditions complicated logistics, making travel difficult and unpredictable. These factors required careful planning and great flexibility to ensure the campaign's success. Despite these obstacles, the team managed to reach more than 200 students and effectively disseminate the campaign messages.



Figure 11. Poor road conditions to enter villages of Mpem and Djim national park

Perspectives

- Extend awareness-raising activities to neighboring protected areas such as the Deng National Park, Dja Biosphere Reserve and Lobéké National Park.
- Develop a local bushfire management guide in partnership with schools and local leaders.

Conclusion

The awareness-raising campaign against bushfires, conducted in the villages of Linté and Yangba, proved to be a crucial step in addressing the leading threat to biodiversity in Mpem & Djim National Park during the dry season. By engaging over 200 students through multimedia presentations, educational materials, and interactive activities, the campaign succeeded in promoting knowledge and behavioral change. Participants gained a clear understanding of the devastating impacts of bushfires on local ecosystems and vulnerable species such as *Macroscirtus kekeunoui*. Sustainable alternatives like agroforestry, firebreaks, and pasture rotation were introduced and discussed. The creation of a Friends of Nature Club helped secure continuity for conservation education beyond the campaign. Despite challenges related to poor road conditions, the team ensured effective outreach. The active involvement of schools, traditional leaders, and park staff reinforced community ownership of conservation goals. This campaign laid the groundwork for long-term environmental stewardship and the preservation of Mpem & Djim's rich biodiversity.