

Destruction of mangroves in Mauritius: a neglected yet an insidious problem*

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When we talk about Mauritius, we often get the typical picture of the '*paradise island*'. However, it does have an intriguing façade. Some twenty years back, there was a limestone factory (four à chaux), situated on the riverbank of Rivière La Chaux at Ville Noire Mahebourg. Excess hot limestone was thrown on the riverbank of Rivière La Chaux which was used as a disposal site by the factory. The limestone factory is now closed.



Limestone factory (Four à Chaux) at Ville Noire, Rivière La Chaux

Consequences of this activity

The disposal of limestone had a major devastating effect on mangrove.

Mangroves, being one of the most biologically complex and fragile ecosystems on the planet, could not regrow in that area due to the one metre deposit of limestone. The roots of mangroves are a very good breeding site for small aquatic creatures namely: fish, shrimps and crabs among the other crustaceans. This is a source of food and income to people living on the coast as they practise artisanal fishing there.



The one metre deposit of limestone on the riverbank of Rivière La Chaux as well as thrown wastes

However, according to some fishermen, the destruction of some 80% of mangroves at Rivière La Chaux by the disposal of limestone along with the usage of the site as a dumping ground, has led to a drastic decrease in the population of those aquatic creatures.



Likewise, such actions have had an adverse repercussion on the livelihood of the fishermen. In addition, we are also facing the severe aftermath of climate change: dangerous storms, increase in soil erosion, rise in sea level and other natural calamities such as floods. Undeniably, the effects would be unbearable.

Dumping on the bank of Rivière La Chaux

Importance of mangroves and solutions to this problem

Certainly, this calls for proactive measures to be taken as mangroves are one of the main defenses in the delicate balance of the coastal ecosystem. They play a crucial role in our ecosystem. They act as filter trapping sediments. Not only do mangroves act as a form of natural coastal defense against storms and rising waters but also their soils are highly effective carbon sinks, sequestering vast amounts of carbon. According to Eco-Sud, a Non-Governmental Organization in Mauritius, mangroves have proven to be an effective climate protection measure with a potential to contribute towards its sustainable development goals.

Mauritius is a member of the International RAMSAR Convention since September 2001 and has been taking measures towards the wise use of all wetlands through national land use planning, appropriate policies and legislations, management actions and public education. Another way to sensitize Mauritians about this issue is through social media, the trend among most youngsters and young adults. Besides, to help the local fishermen and to restore our damaged ecosystem at Ville Noire, Riviere La Chaux, replantation of mangroves must be the top priority of the Ministry of Environment, NGOs and United Nations Development Programme (UNDD). Act now for a better tomorrow!

(Photos: Courtesy Hemisha Khadawo and Reeya Butchanah)