The pressure on the environment is still very high, mainly linked to the poverty of local communities. There are opportunities to support reforestation with useful plants - including Camellias - by developing a sustainable use program fighting poverty and engaging local community in forest conservation.

Guangxi Zhuang region is incredibly rich in terms of biodiversity with more than 4,000 species of higher plants. These include many medicinal plants of main importance both at local and international levels.

Assisting the regeneration of Guangxi’s karst biodiversity through participation of local communities.

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The site and its biodiversity

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (GZAR) is one of the most important and richest regions of China in terms of biodiversity, especially plants. GZAR boasts more than 8,000 species of higher plants, half of which are of immediate socio-economic relevance given their use in herbal medicine and for food.

Area of particular wealth in biodiversity in GZAR, the Fangcheng Golden Camellia National Nature Reserve in the southern part of the region was established in 1986 to preserve its unique species. Covering over 9,000 ha, this nature reserve harbours nearly 1,400 vascular plants, including some of the rarest camellias in the world, including the ‘Golden’ camellias - C. nitidissima, C. euphlebia and C. tunghinensis.

Major issues

Conversion of natural habitats and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources in the remaining wild areas, continue to reduce GZAR’s endemic biodiversity, much of which is preserved through a network of nature reserves.

Fangcheng Golden Camellia National Nature Reserve (FGCNNR) - one of the last remaining karst seasonal rainforests within this network - faces tremendous ecological challenges.

Indiscriminate exploitation of biological resources and subsistence agriculture continue to degrade the core zone of FGCNNR despite its protected area status. The buffer zone surrounding FGCNNR is a highly man-made environment with uniform plantations (Pinus massoniana, Cinnamomum cassia, Illicium sp. etc.). Soil erosion and invasive alien species are widespread problems in and around the reserve.

A large rural population living in the immediate vicinity of FGCNNR depend on the biological resources of the reserve to meet its livelihood needs.

Committed partners

This project complements and adds value to an overall programme undertaken by Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) and its local office for several years now in support of plant diversity conservation in China. Working collaboratively with various local stakeholders, this project will include the following local partners of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

1- Main local scientific project partners:
Guangxi Institute of Botany & Guilin Botanical Garden, Chinese Academy of Sciences

2- Local project partners :
• Village committees of Nasuo, Huashi, Natong, Dalu, Naqin, Tanying and Pingwang townships, Fangcheng district
• Fangcheng Golden Camellia National Nature Reserve Management Office
• Guangxi Forest Department

The project and the prospects for change

While the controlled farming of specific flagship species is still just budding, there are real opportunities to use these plants both for reforestation purposes and to improve the well-being of the communities.

The project aims to test several restoration techniques on the land surrounding the reserve by developing endemic flagship species, especially camellias.

It is keen on collaborating with local communities and developing endemic species farming on State-owned and private land, with a view to improving the standard of living.

The project is built around on three general objectives:
• Encourage the use of endemic camellias in the restoration and income-generating activities programs on the outskirts of RNCOF;
• Generate additional income from target species for the benefit of local communities;
• Harmonize socioeconomic and ecological projects with the knowledge, aspirations, and needs of numerous ethnic groups.

These actions will go hand in hand with a series of capacity building activities, including cultural events (fairs, vocational trainings) and exchange trips for representatives of local communities, the forest administration and researchers, and staff of parks and other botanical organizations, to enable them to acquire additional skills in relation with the different conservation and restoration methods and best practices.