

HUMID FOREST ZONE CASE STUDY 1

Joint Management as an Option for Rehabilitating Degraded Forests: The Case of the Gwira Bansa Project in the Wassa West District of the Western Region of Ghana¹

BACKGROUND

Gwira Bansa is located in South-west Ghana (latitude 3° 30'-3° 45' and longitude 5° 25'-5° 30'). The population of about 5,000 is mostly made up of the indigenous Gwira people and migrants who are mostly Ashantis, Krobos, Fantes and Brongs.

The average annual rainfall, which is the highest in Ghana, is between 1700 and 2000mm. The area is characterized by wet forest on highly acidic latosols generally unsuitable for the growing of cocoa. The vegetation is tropical high forest of the wet evergreen type.

The major occupation of the people is farming using slash and burn with cocoa being the major cash crop planted. Because of the high acidity of the soils the yield of the cocoa is generally low. The damp conditions under the high forest canopy produces black pod diseases, which affect the productivity of the cocoa farms. Thus the farmers abandon their farms after a few years, and clear new forests for new farms. The abandoned lands are used subsequently for food crop farming after a short fallow period of 3 to 5 years.

Logging has also been extensively practised for many years using indiscriminate felling practices. Therefore the activities of the farmers together with logging have led some areas to be degraded (Picture 1).

In 1994, as a result of its growing business interest in Ghana and backed by its newly developed environmental policy of supporting worthwhile initiatives towards sustainable forestry, Dalhoff Larsen & Horneman (DLH) began discussions with one of its business partners in Ghana, Ghana Primewood Products Ltd., to set up a joint forest management project. Ghana Primewood Products Ltd. had at the time also embarked on a programme of good forest management practice in view of worldwide trends towards sustainable forest management as a tool for marketing timber and wood products.

Later during the same year, the two partners, taking advantage of the newly set up office for the DANIDA Private Sector Development Programme (DANIDA/PSD-Programme) at the Royal Danish Embassy in Accra, approached it for funding support for the forest management project. In September 1995 agreement was reached with the DANIDA/PSD-Programme of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide a grant of DKK 2,150,000 (USD 335,937) for the first phase of the project which was estimated at a total cost of DKK 3,840,000 (USD600,000). The two commercial partners funded the balance between the estimated cost of the project and DANIDA support. These partners were to collaborate with the chiefs and people of Gwira Bansa, the Forestry Service of Ghana, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Nzema East District Assembly to undertake the pilot project of jointly managing the resources of a 16,000 ha off reserve area.

¹ Compiled by J.Prah, Ghana Primewood Limited and Dominic Blay, FORIG



Picture 1: A degraded Area as a Result of Forest Clearing for Crop Farming

The first phase of the project, which primarily sought to introduce the “Joint Forest Management” concept and collect data for sustainable forest management, focusing on farmers as the main agents of change, ran for three years. After this period, the project partners generally agreed with DANIDA PSD-Programme that “the project had collected many important data and began developing methods for sustainable natural resource management in collaboration with the stakeholders. In addition, it had successfully introduced the concept of “Joint Forest Management” and due to its innovative nature, had attracted much attention. The authorities in Ghana supported it and saw it as a model for replication in other off-reserve forest areas. However, the project had not yet fully achieved sustainability with regard to ensuring the forest resources in the area.

For these reasons, in 1999, a second phase of the project, this time oriented in a more commercial direction but still working within the framework of “Joint Forest Management”, was approved for support by the DANIDA PSD-Programme with a further grant of DKK 1,976,823. The second phase had as its main objective to ensure that the project produced timber including those species considered lesser-used, on a sustainable basis for processing by the Ghanaian partner and for marketing and sales involving DLH.

During the second phase, most of the direct supports to farmers undertaken in phase one, were implemented by CARE Denmark and CARE Ghana within the existing project structure. Thus a unique opportunity was created to implement a sustainable and commercially sound resource management system, with the involvement of local people, two business partners, DANIDA, an NGO, and the Ghanaian authorities in forest management and agriculture.



Picture 2: A Degraded Forest Area Due to Commercial Logging

OBJECTIVES

Developmental Objective

The developmental objective was to develop jointly a sustainable natural resource management system for the rehabilitation of degraded lands in off-reserve forests and to enhance the livelihoods of forest dependent communities through increased benefits.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives were:

- To promote sustainable forest management in a farming environment;
- To increase production of wood from the project area through identification, utilisation, and promotion of lesser-used timber species available in the area and elsewhere;
- To develop land use guidelines and promote sustainable agricultural practices in the project area leading to improved livelihoods for the individuals and communities in the area;
- To implement village level development activities with funds contributed to a community development fund by the timber companies.

APPROACH

The approach used in the project involved mobilizing and fostering close partnership between forest sector stakeholders concerned in jointly creating the appropriate conditions and implementing appropriate activities in line with the stated objectives. Collaborating partners included Ghana Primewood Limited (GAP), Dalhoff Larsen & Horneman (DLH), the local people, CARE (an NGO) and the Forest Services Division (FSD). The implementation strategy included a division of responsibilities, in terms of which DHL was to provide technical assistance, training and technology transfer on the various activities of the project through its staff in both Ghana and Denmark. All training and technical assistance took place in Ghana except for a short period of about a month where some training in Low (Reduced) Impact Logging took place in Brazil.

The various steps in the implementation are described below:

Stakeholders' consultations

At the beginning of the project, a series of consultations was held with various stakeholders, principally the local inhabitants of the area, (the landowners and farmers), the District Assembly (the political authority of the area), the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Forest Service of Ghana. The meetings were used to explain project aims and objectives, solicit views for improvement and seek the participation of the people.

Field Activities

Following the consultations, actual fieldwork began in 1996 with a two-week training of some forest operations staff of GAP in the techniques of taking inventory of timber stocks and survey of some non-timber forest products.

After these initial surveys, further project activities were implemented focusing on the specific objectives as described below:

Promoting Sustainable Forest Management in a Farming Environment

Reforestation

The choice of indigenous species was done by the farmers and was limited to those native to the area because of insufficient information on the silviculture of the non-native ones. They were planted in mixed stands just as they occur in nature, on farms, at a rate of 20 – 40 seedlings per ha depending on the wishes of the farmer and the crop being cultivated. The species included *Khaya ivorensis*, *Heritiera utilis*, *Tieghemella heckellii*, *Entandrophragma angolense*, *Nauclea diderrichii*, *Entandrophragma utile* and *Ceiba pentandra*. The main exotic species planted in the project is *Cedrela odorata*. Because this is a short-rotation timber tree, it was planted in pure stands on fallow lands with an initial population of about 1200 seedlings per ha. The farmers were provided with free seedlings by the project.

In spite of the efforts made by the farmers to reforest the degraded areas, the project did not effectively build their capabilities on how to manage the areas after planting. Programmes to sustain continued efforts

on the part of the farmers were also lacking. Another issue that remained unresolved before the end of the current project period was that of land tenure between most settler farmers and the landowners and this had an impact on the reforestation programme.

Development of Land Use Management Guidelines and Promoting Sustainable Agriculture for Improved Livelihoods of the Local People

Development of land use management guidelines began with the physical measurement of the sizes of farms. CARE continued the process when the project ended. Farmers, however, were trained in simple techniques of using a GPS to trace their farm boundaries and to take subsequent measurements. With respect to promoting sustainable agriculture, the project initially undertook an inventory of farmers, their land holdings and crops being grown. This was to establish a database for implementing and monitoring project activities. Furthermore, new cash crops more suitable than cocoa for the area, such as black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) and kola (*Cola nitida*) were introduced to farmers.

RESULTS

- A total area of 416 ha of farmlands was planted with indigenous (40%) and exotic (60%) timber tree species;
- Black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) and Cola (*Cola nitida*) were successfully introduced and adopted by farmers in the project area;
- An extensive groundwork for sound social, economic and ecological management of natural resources has been firmly laid in the project area;
- Crop and tree growing as a form of agricultural diversification was promoted along with collaborative natural resource management among farmers;
- The project created a forum for dialogue between farmers, landowners and other stakeholders to address land-tenure issues.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

- The initial broad consultation with all partners;
- The decision by all partners to cooperate and respect each other's interest;
- The choice of species for restoration by the farmers;

- The supply of free seedlings to the farmers;
- The diversification of agricultural crops on farmers' fields.

SHORTCOMINGS

- The land tenurial arrangements for the mostly migrant farmers were unresolved;
- There was also no arrangement for marketing of the tree products as well as benefit sharing arrangements in such a complex project;
- Inability of the project to provide the farmers with the capacity to manage the established plantations as well as ensuring sustainability of the programme had the potential of eroding most of the gains of the project;
- Although the taungya system had been practised in Ghana for a long time it had always been in the moist and dry semi-deciduous zones and not in the wet evergreen zones. There is therefore the need to develop appropriate technologies for the wet evergreen zone.

LESSONS LEARNT

Many lessons have been learnt in the life of the JFM-Gwira Bansa project. Among these are:

- **Understanding the Psychology of the Rural Setting**

Understanding the psychology of people who live in or on the fringes of the forests is important if one is to succeed in winning their cooperation in a project as complex as the JFM project.

- **The Issue of Giving "Handouts"**

Many years of giving out incentives in rural areas has in general created a situation where people who live in such areas, including those in Gwira Bansa, expect to receive handouts particularly if a project which is donor supported is brought to their doorsteps. Thus when the JFM projects did not provide such incentives in the form of cash, cutlasses, wellington boots etc, many became suspicious of the real motives of the project. However, the provision of capital projects allayed their fears.

- Although the chiefs and people gave their overwhelming support to the project the issue of land tenure and tree ownership could not be resolved because it was more complex than it was thought to be.
- The project has demonstrated that farmers can reforest degraded land in most off-reserve areas in the forest regions of Ghana.

- The project provided a unique opportunity to demonstrate the possibility of sophisticated private commercial sector teaming up with simple, even unlettered rural people, the public sector and NGOs to undertake a complex, inherently interest-conflicting project like the JFM.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy

Rehabilitation of degraded lands is the responsibility of all stakeholders. There should therefore be a national forum at which the role, responsibilities, as well as associated inputs for rehabilitation by all stakeholders is discussed.

Management

- Consultation workshops made at the beginning of a project should be holistic, and should touch on all issues that will border on the project including incentives and should indicate the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.
- All arrangements made including roles and responsibilities should be clarified, defined, written and signed.
- Land and tree tenure issues as well as benefit sharing arrangements should also be clearly defined at the beginning of a project to avoid conflicts and promote coordinated activities.
- The local farmers should be provided with the capacity to manage the trees on their farmlands.
- Programmes that will help sustain the project after donor funding ceases should be put in place.

Research

- The compatibility of different tree species with different agricultural needs to be determined.
- Appropriate spacing for planting tree and agricultural crops as well as the impact of shading on the different agricultural crops will also need to be determined.