



What difference has thirty years made to forest governance in Ghana?

Ghana's forestry sector has contributed significantly to socio-economic development over the past thirty years by employing thousands of people and generating about six per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, forest governance – characterised by stakeholder participation, accountability and legality – remains weak and is consequently an obstacle to sustainable forest management efforts.

The forest sector has been plagued by issues such as lack of transparency in allocation of resources, non-involvement of forest-fringe communities in decision-making processes and uncontrolled illegal logging.

In order to address these issues, a series of forest and natural resource governance initiatives are now underway in Ghana. These include: the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Initiative, which is being implemented under the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA); the Natural Resources and Environmental Governance Program (NREG); and the Non-Legally Binding Instrument (NLBI).

Continued improvements since the 1990s

According to Oppon Sasu, Coordinator of Donor Projects at the Forestry Commission (FC), forest governance in Ghana is on track and has been ongoing since the 1990s. He recalled for instance that, previously, the public was ignorant of how resources were distributed, "because resources were allocated by administrative discretion." Oppon Sasu says that following the introduction of reforms in the sector in the 1990s, the method of resource allocation was changed to Timber Utilization Contracts (TUCs) which are obtained through an open bidding system. This is backed by law (L.I. 1649 - Timber Resources Management Regulations, 1998), which provides for the procedure for granting timber rights.

Around the same time, the FC also initiated the Forest Forums to ensure local communities and other stakeholders, such as chain saw operators, actively participated in forest management discussions. The forums are still functioning and a National Secretariat has been established to coordinate them. In 2000, a series of capacity-building activities were initiated to strengthen the governance process as part of the Forest Sector Development Programme Phase 2 (FSDP 2) funded by the UK Department for International



Cocoa plantation in Ghana © Mary Ama Kudom-Agyemang

Development (DFID).

However, natural resources consultant Elijah Danso disagrees with the assertion that forest governance is on track in Ghana. He explains that governance at different levels is about taking the resource, looking after it and allocating and sharing for all to benefit. Danso maintains that in spite of recent initiatives, a closer examination will reveal that the essential elements of governance such as transparency, accountability and legality are not working. He asserts that the TUC method of resource allocation that was open and fair has currently been abandoned in favour of administrative allocation that cannot be scrutinised by rights holders and stakeholders.

A timber industry source expressed similar sentiments. He laments the disregard for the rule of law in resource allocation and suggested that "even the Commission Board members including the chairman, have been allocated resources in the Tonton and Sui Forest Reserves, which are two of best stocked reserves in the Western region."



The Chief Executive Officer of the FC, Samuel Afari Dartey has dismissed this suggestion as false. He says no Commissioner has been given any timber concessions. He explained that some of the degraded areas still had a number of timber species in them but could not be considered under the TUCs because of the low number of valuable timber species. Therefore, these areas were allocated to companies under Salvage Permits (SP), which allow them to retrieve valuable timber from areas that have been given out for mining, or developmental activities such as road construction.

Some advances in stakeholder participation

Joseph Osei, a forest economist and auditor believes that the country has made some progress in the pursuit of forest governance. He says this has mainly been

in stakeholder participation in forest sector policy formulation. However, Mr. Osei condemns the situation whereby the policies and regulations are not being implemented, saying “the return to administrative allocation of resources, is a rejection of the voices of stakeholders and this has stalled the governance process.”

The indications therefore are that forest governance is on track as far as stakeholder participation in decision-making is concerned. But the issues of non-enforcement of regulations, the inability of the FC to fulfil its institutional mandate, and the abuse of its discretionary powers in allocating resources need to be addressed to put the process of forest governance on full track in the country.

- Mary Ama Kudom-Agyemang, January 2012



Forest destruction caused by informal gold-mining in Atewa Range Forest Reserve, Ghana. © Mary Ama Kudom-Agyemang

Further information

Growing Forest Partnerships (GFP) is an initiative that helps develop and support networks of people and organisations at local, national and international levels towards an equitable and sustainable management of forestry resources. It brings together actors who may not have worked together before, to ensure that global discussions about forests include the real and current challenges that forest-dependent people and local forest managers are facing and to develop and test new and innovative ways of tackling those challenges.

‘Forest voices’ and the GFP in-country journalist programme

In 2011 GFP established a journalist programme in Ghana, Guatemala, Liberia and Nepal. In each country, a local journalist has been recruited to report on relevant issues in the forest sector, as well as providing updates on the work of GFP. The journalists work in close coordination with the in-country GFP teams, however, they also look beyond GFP to report on some of the other issues that affect forest-dependent people. The articles and features produced by the journalists are a result of interviews with a wide-range of stakeholders, including: local communities, regional and local government authorities, civil society organisations and private sector workers and business owners.

The ‘Forest voices’ series aims, through the work of local journalists, to provide insight into the forestry context in each of these countries and illustrate how locally controlled forestry and partnerships are working in practice on the ground.

For more information on GFP and for more updates on the in-country projects, please visit the GFP website:
www.growingforestpartnerships.org

