Communities' scuffle over sharing of SRA benefits

Forest communities in the Bia-Juaboso and Wiawso Forest districts of the Western region are battling over what they describe as irregularities in the sharing of Social Responsibility Agreements (SRA) among communities along forest reserves.

Their misunderstandings are basically based on which community must rightfully be a beneficiary of SRA. While some of the communities along the Suhuma, Krokosua and Morro forest reserves believe they fall within the radius allowed for SRA, other neighboring communities think otherwise.

A case in point was when Gimplex, a logging company in the Suhuma Forest Reserve paid SRA beneficiaries to Betenase which, they believed, is in the 5km radius allowed for SRA but the people of Old Adiembra, which is also within the 5km SRA range believed they should be receiving the SRA.

Per law, logging companies are required to commit to the social development of forest fringe communities within 5km of operational activities of the logging company. But an inventory on SRA conducted by Tropenbos Ghana, revealed that though most of the communities are forest fringe communities, they were not captured as the beneficiaries of the SRAs being paid by the logging firms.

The Nature and Development Foundation (NDF), through the project, strengthening the capacity of Non State Actors to better engage in FLEGT and REDD+ processes, created a platform to educate and broaden the understanding of stakeholders that matter in handling such sensitive issues as SRAs.

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Ivoirians, Liberians Hail Ghana's Wood Tracking System

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Forest and timber stakeholders from Liberia and la Cote d'Ivoire, have hailed steps Ghana is taking to ensure wood for both domestic and the export markets is traced to its source, in line with the Wood Tracking System (WTS).

Making the observations during a three-day tour programme in Ghana, the stakeholders, drawn from the timber industry in the two West African countries, expressed optimism that the processes Ghana is applying would ensure forest sustainability.

"We have a similar system in Liberia but Ghana is some steps ahead of us. If they (Ghana) continue with it till the end, they will ensure sustainability in line with the WTS under the Forest Law"
CSOs Taken Through Legality Systems in the Forest Sector

Representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been taken through an overview of the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT), the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) and Ghana’s Legality Assurance System (GhLAS), as well as how to perform audits.

The second in the series of training for the fifteen representatives, a continuation from last year’s, aimed at equipping CSOs to effectively participate as observers in the Timber Validation Division (TVD) legality verification audits.

It was also to help CSOs improve on the level of transparency, integrity and credibility of the GhLAS.

At the close of the event, some participants opined that the training was educative and would prove useful in subsequent observer missions.

Eli Amemo, a beneficiary of the training, stated that, he is now equipped with the necessary skills to undertake an observation work. “This training has improved the way I will conduct my work when undertaking monitoring and evaluations of my project work.”

Another participant, Jerry Asare, said he had a clearer understanding of things with this second training. “The training gave me much understanding of some things I observed on the previous observer missions. It will impact my subsequent observations as I now understand the various ways in which TVD verification is done and ways in which evidences are taken.”

The two-day training workshop organised by Civic Response was held under the auspices of Civil Society-led Independent Forest Monitoring (CSIFM) in Ghana Project through the FAO FLEGT Programme with funding from European Union, the Swedish International Cooperation Agency and the United Kingdom Department of International Development (DFID).

Source: Civic Response

NGOs Push For Wildlife Resources Bill Passage

Some Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are pushing for the quick passage of the Wildlife Resources Bill to give strength to the Community Resources Management Areas (CREMA) policy.

According to the CSOs, the passage of bill would empower communities living around natural resources to protect them and generate income for development.

At a media engagement in Accra on Natural Resources issues of concern, Mr. Nehemiah Tettey Odje-Bio of Friends of the Earth, explained that the CREMA policy, an integral part of the Wildlife Resources bill, encourages the fringe communities to protect, manage and utilize the resources in a sustainable manner.

He disclosed that, “the benefits of passing the bill are numerous and include revenue from tourism, protection of the resources, medicinal source and game for the community, among others.”

He, therefore, urged Parliament to consider the bill with some urgency to ensure sustainability of Ghana’s natural resources, including wildlife.

Though the bill has been presented to the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR), its passage has been partially hampered by change in ministers and, what some CSOs term as “lack of political will”.

Director of Tropenbos, urged all stakeholders in the natural resources sector to ensure that a suitable agreement is reached in the benefit-sharing formula for natural resources, especially trees.

Mrs. Owusu Ansa, who was speaking on the tree tenure system, opined that an equitable and assuring formula would enhance the communities’ involvement in afforestation.

She noted that, the tree-owner is not adequately catered for in the current formula, thus the need to make it for equitable to persuade the fringe communities to plant more trees.

families, communities and individuals so it is important to consider their stake in any benefit-sharing formula that is aimed at protecting our natural resources,” she emphasised.

Mrs. Bernadette Adjei of the Water Resources Commission, warned Ghanaians against breaching the Buffer Zone Policy that seeks to protect water resources from abuse and unsustainable exploitation.

“Under the policy, to drill water from the earth, you need a permit even though the land belongs to you. The management of water resources is vested in the State,” she revealed.
NORAD to the rescue of 'galamsey' ravaged communities

The Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD) is lending support to the Government of Ghana to step up the governance of its natural resources by funding two non-governmental organizations working in the forestry sector.

The two organizations, Tropenbos Ghana and A Rocha Ghana, are to generate empirical information that will feed into the creation of an Integrated Land-Use Policy.

There have been many attempts by government to bring sanity into the indiscriminate exploitation of its natural resources which has wreaked havoc on its forests, arable land, water bodies and the environment with the latest attempt being a ban on all forms of small-scale mining in February 2017 in a bid to clamp down on illegal mining, also known as 'galamsey'.

However, there has also been pressure by the Small-scale Miners Association of Ghana on the government to lift the ban, which was initially scheduled for six months, and government is currently working on a comprehensive roadmap that will permanently address illegal mining.

Meanwhile, the absence of a Land-Use Policy that will, among other things, spell out areas designated for mining and other forms of natural resource exploitation and demarcate areas that are prohibited, remains a stumbling block that undermines efforts at effective governance of the country's resources.

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Public Procurement Officers urged to demand Legal Timber for Public Works

Public procurement officers from four (4) regions in Ghana (Eastern, Western, Brong Ahafo and Northern Regions) have been sensitized on the need to ensure that only legal timber is used for public works.

The procurement officers were encouraged to include some timber legality clauses in their tender invitations issued out to contractors and conscientise the contractors to demand proof of timber legality from their suppliers.

The training was carried out as part of implementation of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) funded project “Innovation for Improved Forest Management in West Africa; Demand and Supply Side Solutions in a Changing Landscape”.

Speaking at the various training sessions, the Operations Director of the Nature and Development Foundation (NDF), Mr. Glen Asomaning, explained to the officers that, on a visit to the

confessed that contractors who worked for the KMA (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly) are now required to use legal wood and also show proof of the legality as well.

He said amidst the absence of any legal backing for the policy, feedbacks from previous trainings in Kumasi had encouraged the subsequent training in the other regions.

After the training, the procurement officers showed high enthusiasm about the policy with demonstration of understanding on processes to demand and insist that, only legal wood is used for government works.

The training of these procurement officers is directly hinged on the impending Public Procurement Policy for Timber and Timber Products’ in Ghana which is yet to receive cabinet approval.

The policy, commits government to play its leadership role in addressing illegal timber logging and associated trade by using its purchasing power on procurement to signal the market in favour of legally sourced timber and timber products.
A refresher training workshop has been organized for twenty (20) community forest monitors to undertake forest monitoring and reporting activities.

The 20 form part of 25 community representatives trained in 2017 to undertake community-level forest monitoring.

Last year, the capacity of selected community-level forest-level monitors from forest fringe communities in Brong Ahafo, Eastern, Western, Ashanti and Volta regions, was built on how to use the SMS mobile application platform to identify and transmit forest offenses to a central database.

The training was to intensify forest monitoring and reporting of infractions using the Real Time Monitoring (RTM) “forestlink” SMS mobile application.

This year’s training was essentially to review what the forest monitors have done so far, give them the opportunity to share experiences and challenges encountered during their monitoring exercises after the last training in 2017 and to encourage them to do more.

At the end of the training, the community monitors indicated that the training had been helpful with some recounting that the training had helped to address challenges they faced earlier in their monitoring and reporting activities.

“Most of us had challenges operating the App but now, due to this refresher training, the challenges have been addressed,” Stephen Yeboah, a community monitor from Enchi in the Western Region, noted.

“Because of this meeting, contractors can no longer take advantage of us because we are now enlightened. We have also been empowered to monitor our forests and protect them from destruction,” Eunice Affum from Sui in the Western Region said.

The training was organized under the auspices of the Civil Society-led Independent Forest Monitoring (CSIFM) Ghana Project, through the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme with funding from European Union, the Swedish International Cooperation Agency and the United Kingdom Department of International Development (DfID).

Source: Civic Response

NDF Unveils New Project To Build Capacity Of Forest Enterprises

The Nature and Development Foundation (NDF) has launched a new project aimed at building the capacities of Small-Medium Forest Enterprises (SMFES) in Ghana and Liberia.

According to Mr. Mustapha Seidu, Director of NDF, the project, funded by DFID, would last a period of 33 months and would be implemented in collaboration with the Timber Industry Associations, the Forestry Commission (FC), the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR), the Building and Construction Associations, the Plantation Development Fund Board, Research Institutions and the media.

He explained that, the project aims at consolidating and securing the gains made in previous EU FAO FLEGT projects, which sought to build the capacity of 60 companies through wider sector engagement and mock audits.

He added that, the project would be implemented in Ghana and Liberia, partnering the Kumasi Wood Cluster (KWC), the Liberia Timber Association (LibTA) and the Liberia Chainsaw and Timber Dealers Union (LITSDADUN) as the major beneficiaries.

The project would include building the capacity of Liberia Timber Association (LibTA) Executives and member companies on VPA legality matrix and on Liberia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative.

“We shall also develop grievance and disputes resolution mechanism guidelines, a Code of Forest Harvest Practices (CFHP) for compliance with the chainsaw milling Regulation (CSMR) and put in place financial management systems to increase fiscal transparency for Liberia Chainsaw and Timber Dealers Union (LICSDADUN),” he elaborated.

Earlier, the Operations Director of NDF, Mr. Glen Asomaning, disclosed that the organization’s just-ended project, "Innovation for Improved Forest Management in West Africa: Demand and Supply-Side Solutions in a Changing Landscape", was successful in the achievement of its objectives.

He noted that, aspects of the previous project that couldn’t be completed ahead of the timeline, have been rolled into the current one to ensure fuller implementation.
Communities' scuffle over sharing of SRA benefits

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Through the platform, communities interacted with the District Forest managers, the logging companies as well as some Traditional leaders.

Deliberations included rightful community beneficiaries of SRA, total amount of SRA to be paid, cooperation between logging firms and the communities and the Forest Services Division (FSD) office, and roles of communities to ensure continual payment of SRA by protecting the forest.

After the debates, communities had a clearer understanding of maps and distances between their communities as well as operational areas of logging firms in relation to beneficiary SRA communities.

John Bitar Company, the biggest logging firm in the Western region commended NDF for clearing the long standing dispute most logging companies had with communities.

Source: Nature & Development Foundation

Government Questioned Over Procurement Policy

Over the years, government has been seen as the leader in combatting the menace of illegal logging.

Nonetheless, some stakeholders see the fight as meaningless, as government itself is tagged as a promoter of the practice since it does not discriminate among the wood used for its funded projects.

The public procurement policy for timber and timber products seeks to ensure that government, who is the lead buyer of wood and wood products, uses its purchasing power to signal the market in favour of legally sourced timber and timber products.

To support government’s effort at achieving this goal, the Nature and Development Foundation, NDF, with financial support from the Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO, collaborated with the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR) and the Timber Industry Development Division (TIDD) of the Forestry Commission (FC), between 2014 and 2015, to develop implementations guidelines for the policy.

As part of the support, the capacity of all public procurement officers from Regional Coordinating Councils and selected Metropolitan Assemblies were built on a

However, since the development of the implementations guidelines and the ToT, little has been seen of government in getting the policy passed.

There is unofficial information that, the policy was submitted to Cabinet for approval but due to some lack of clarifications and the anticipated impact the approval of the policy would have on sourcing of wood for public works, it could not be passed.

The ministry was then advised to find other ways of implementing the idea because its potential to impact trade in legal timber can be enormous.

The big question still remains, when will the dust gathered on the public procurement be cleaned, to give way for passage of the policy and save our forests from the havoc being caused by illegal logging?

Source: Nature & Development Foundation
NORAD to the rescue of 'galamsey' ravaged communities

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Hence, delivering information through empirical research to provide insights into integrated land-use for the establishment of an Integrated Land-Use Policy that will also strengthen inter-sectoral coordination in the management of Ghana's lands and natural resources will help address the problem of indiscriminate mining and its resultant impact on the country's biodiversity and food security.

The project, 'Securing Food and Ecosystem Services in Mining Plagued Regions of Ghana', will focus on the Ashanti, Eastern and Western Regions of Ghana which fall within the High Forest Zone and have the highest concentration of forests and water bodies as well as mineral resources, including gold, bauxite and diamonds.

These three regions have suffered massive degradation from both legal and illegal mining activities which have decimated forests, polluted water bodies and destroyed cocoa farms and food crops.

Source: Tropenbos Ghana

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NDF Unveils New Project To Build Capacity Of Forest Enterprises

He called on the media to support efforts aimed at ensuring the passage of the Public Procurement Policy on Timber and Timber products into law.

The Policy, which seeks to bind government to buy and ensure the use of only legal wood in all its projects, couldn't be passed during the lifespan of the project, thus it has been included in the current one.

Mr. Asomaning revealed, education on the policy has yielded a lot of result with some District and Municipal Assemblies insisting contractors use only legal wood in projects they bid for.

Source: Nature & Development Foundation

Ivoirians, Liberians Hail Ghana's Wood Tracking System

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Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT)”, Mr. Arthur Karangbea, Secretary of the Liberian Chainsaw and Timber Dealers Union said.

For his part, Mr. Whiter spoon Emmanuel Ekema Alex of the Liberia Timber Association was happy Ghana was spearheading the process of ensuring that the sub-region was not only dealing in legal wood in accordance with the WTS, but also promoting trade among the countries,

"Ghana is doing well in bringing us together to learn from each other so we can deal in legal wood as we trade among ourselves. Liberia is learning a lot from the Ghanaian experience," he said.

Mr. Lookou Maxime of STP/ FLEGT in la Cote d'Ivoire, praised the Nature and Development Foundation (NDF), organizers of the programme, for bringing the various stakeholders together, and asked for a similar thing to be held in their country.

"It is a good programme and we thank the organizers for the efforts. They should consider since we have similar processes," he said.

Mr. Edmund Koudjo Damo of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA)/ FLEGT of la Cote d'Ivoire disclosed that, Ghana was practicing the same tracking system as the Ivorians and the only difference between the two countries is the language.

"The benefit sharing in Ghana, which gives consideration to the local communities, is one that gives more meaning to the Wood Tracking System and encourages the community members to be more involved," Mr. Damo said.

Participants, numbering about fifty, were taken on a tour to Sefwi Wiawso to visit the Suhuma forest reserve and John Bitar Company Limited. The activity ended in Accra where a conference was held for participants to interact more with officials of the Forestry Commission to clarify any concerns expressed during the tour.

This activity was organized by the NDF as part of the implementation of their project “Innovation for improved forest governance in West Africa; Demand and Supply side solutions in a changing landscape” which is receiving financing support from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the European Union (EU), Sweden Sverige and the UKaid under the FAO –EU FLEGT PROGRAMME.
The radical approach – A story from Legal Working Group in Liberia

In Liberia, ClientEarth works in close partnership with national lawyers Heritage Partners and Associates (HPA) to host legal working groups with NGO and community representatives.

Jozef Weyns, Law and Policy Advisor in ClientEarth’s Climate and Forests team, just returned from the latest legal working group in August 2018 and shared this story of a community member using his legal prowess to ensure forest communities get what they are entitled to.

“In my community we were suffering because a company was not paying cubic meter,” William V. Page told participants of the legal working group in Monrovia, Liberia. The legal working group is a place for coordinating and legal learning on forests and timber trade. The ‘cubic meter’ William mentions refers to payments which timber companies are obliged to make to communities affected by their logging operations.

William, also called ‘the Oldest’ by his legal working group colleagues, continued: “You remember how in the ClientEarth and HPA working groups they spoke to us about how we should keep our documents?”

“Evidence!!” others in the legal working group shouted amid rising anticipation to hear what story ‘the Oldest’ was about to share.

“Yes, evidence” William replied. “We collected all of our documents, I am saying, our documents were real fine!” Laughter filled the meeting room. “They were fine! We needed the documents because we decided to take the radical approach!” More laughter followed while others asked for silence to encourage William to continue his story. “We decided that maybe we will go to court!”

“First, we took all our documents to the FDA [the Forest Development Authority, the government agency responsible for forestry in Liberia]. They asked us why we were agitating but that didn’t solve it for us. So then, we sent all of the documents to everyone: to the company, the FDA, the donors, to all! The company called my phone; “William where are you?” and then came to my house the very next day.

They owed us $US16,000 and came to tell me that they already paid $US4,000 to relieve the tensions. “So you don’t have to go to court,” they said.

By now, the room was buzzing with excitement. William paused for a second and then asked; “You know what I told them, the company?”

Another pause followed, all of us became curious as to what would follow. “I said thank you! For sure, now we have enough money to benefit and to ensure their forests are managed sustainably. To do this, they need to be able to speak and act with the law in mind.”

Source: ClientEarth

Civil society Contributes to EU corporate transparency regulations

Under EU regulations on corporate accountability and transparency, large companies that are active in the mining or logging sectors have specific reporting obligations. These laws require large EU companies that are part of the extractive (mining) and logging industries to disclose the payments they make to the government of each country in which they operate.

This obligation is on a country-by-country and a project-by-project basis, which is more stringent than regular financial reporting in that companies have to publish information for every country they operate in rather than providing a single set of information at global level.

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Civil society Contributes to EU corporate transparency regulations

These EU laws aim notably to strengthen corporate transparency and should offer the populations of resource-rich countries a way to hold their governments accountable for the exploitation of their natural resources.

The European Commission is in the process of reviewing these EU laws. The review process represents a chance for stronger rules on country-by-country reporting, but also a risk that the rules could be watered down.

As part of the reform process, the European Commission launched a public consultation to seek inputs from relevant stakeholders. The majority of respondents were from the extractive sector and EU countries.

Therefore, ClientEarth took this opportunity to ask for information from civil society in forest-producing countries including Ghana, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire and the Republic of Congo. It was a meaningful way for civil society in these countries, as the main beneficiaries of the EU rules under review, to input and to advocate for stronger transparency rules that reflect the realities of the logging sector.

In Ghana, ClientEarth created and disseminated a short survey, to which a number of civil society organisations in the forestry sector responded. ClientEarth integrated Ghanaian civil society inputs into a joint NGO reply to the European Commission public consultation.

With those inputs, we hope to have made the European Commission more aware of the producer country and the logging sector perspectives, and the need to strengthen rules on company reporting.

ClientEarth will be following the results of the public consultation once they are published. We hope that the inputs from civil society in Ghana will result in the amendments to this EU law better reflecting realities in the logging sector.

Source: ClientEarth

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ABOUT ClientEarth

“ClientEarth is a public interest environmental law organisation, founded in 2007. Their work combines legal approaches with scientific and policy analysis to create practical solutions to the most pressing environmental problems (www.clientearth.org).

ClientEarth’s Climate & Forests programme works to influence the development, implementation and enforcement of legal frameworks and policies. They seek to improve the operation and effectiveness of law in the EU and in non-EU focus countries with a view to minimising the impacts of agriculture, extractive industries and illegal logging on forests. They focus both on the substance and procedure of laws so that they become effective and equitable mechanisms to protect forests. The improved use and management of forests can contribute to a reduction in inequality and to tackling poverty, particularly for forest dependent communities.

Since 2012, ClientEarth has been working with national lawyers in Ghana, Gabon and the Republic of Congo to empower civil society organisations (CSOs) for them to take part in processes of law reform and implementation. Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) contribute to those processes and are therefore been an integral part of the focus of their work in country. This body of work is funded by the UK government under a DFID-FGMC (Forest Governance, Markets and Climate) grant.”

ABOUT NDF

The Nature & Development Foundation (NDF) was legally established in November 2013 in Ghana. It was born out of the long presence of WWF in Ghana and across the West African region as a non-profit organization, limited by guarantee.

The foundation has a mission to help build a society in which human development and nature conservation complement each other. It also believes that, ways exist to balance the needs of development with sustainable land uses that do not threaten forest biodiversity and forest dependent livelihoods of the region.

NDF understands that it must not limit itself to working only with those in the forest industries itself, but must engage more widely in multiple sectors and processes if it is to achieve its mission.

Though currently active in Ghana, it aims to increase its activities in Cote d’Ivoire and Liberia in the future. For more information visit www.ndfwestafrica.org Or call TEL: +233-302-518-710

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