Government Lifts Ban on Small Scale Mining with Strict Measures

Government has lifted the ban on all forms of small scale mining after putting measure in place to regularize activities of sector.

However, the lifting of the ban benefits only small scale miners who have successfully gone through the vetting process and have been approved by the inter-ministerial committee on illegal mining (IMCIM).

In all, some 1,350 small scale miners were vetted with over 900 of them cleared to operate.

Prof. Frimpong Boateng, the Minister for Environment, Science and Technology, and Chairman of the committee, made the announcement in Accra at the outdooring of government's new policy framework on regularizing and reforming mining activities in Ghana.

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...We are equally concerned of the interest of government to mine the source of water for over 5 million Ghanaians, the Atewa Range Forest Reserve located in the Eastern Region of Ghana which is considered the jewel in the crown of Ghana forests and globally recognized as Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), as well as a Globally Significant Biodiversity Area (GSBA) and thus holds high importance for the global persistence of biodiversity.

We strongly add our voice to other advocates against mining in the Atewa Forest, and rather urge government to pursue green development such as tourism development, and cocoa processing value addition within the landscape, among other opportunities.

Communique from the 21st AGM, 2018 (Ho Ghana)

Using Technology to Trace Forest Illegals

Community monitors from Forest Fringe Communities have been empowered on how to use technological forms to capture data on illegalities.

The training workshop was organized by Nature and Development Foundation (NDF) with funding from the European Union at Asempanaye, Juaboso, Kofikrom and Sefwi Wiawso communities in the Western Region of Ghana.

At the training, a recap on community forest monitoring, Social Responsibility Agreement (SRA), compensation, consent, permit, harvesting operations, transportation, environmental and cultural issues, community rights, illegal farming and bush fires were discussed.

However, discussions on possible illegalities in the area and the supporting evidence to gather when raising alert on infractions, took centre stage.

The community monitors were introduced to the concept of using the mobile Collectaur Application to capture data and raise alerts on forest monitoring and illegal activities in the forest. The Collectaur App is a Community Forest Monitoring tool that feeds the alert information to the ForestLink Real Time Monitoring (RTM) platform.

The application is designed in a way that does

The app also uses the Short Messaging System (SMS) to transmit alerts. This makes the app very cheap to use.

The Collectaur app, as well uses the Global Positioning System (GPS), embedded in android phones to capture the location of the incident or report. The app is easy to use and can be installed on everyday android devices. Immediately an alert is transmitted, Administrators receive the information sent for review and necessary action. This is what gives it the Real Time Monitoring element.

Some identified Community Based Organizations (CBOs) who have been selected to serve as verifiers on the ForestLink RTM platform were introduced to the community monitors during the training workshops.

Participating communities were urged to revive existing SRAs in their various committees at the local level. Where nonexistent, communities were urged to form and create Local Social Responsibility Agreement Committees (LSRAC) in their various communities.

It was also discussed that the NDF community monitor groups should hold frequent community meetings, durbars to discuss, pass on information and influence the knowledge of conservation and protection of the forest to the community members as recommended by participants at the workshop.

Where community monitor groups are not stable, participants were educated on the need for stable groups for effective forest governance.

In a related development, Forest Services Division (FSD) District Managers and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) were also trained on the ForestLink Real Time Monitoring (RTM) in order to steer affairs of the platform for Independent Forest Monitoring (IFM) in Ghana.

The District Managers participated as administrators whiles the CBOs represented as verifiers. The alerts on forest illegalities are expected to be sent from verifiers to monitors and then to administrators for the necessary action to be taken.
Deputy Lands Minister Lauds Tropenbos, A Rocha Collaboration

Non-governmental and Civil Society Organisations working in various socio-economic sectors of the country have been called upon to emulate Tropenbos Ghana and A Rocha Ghana by collaborating with funding and development agencies to implement projects that are aligned with the national interest of Ghana.

The call was made by Barbara Oteng-Gyasi, Deputy Minister of Lands and Natural Resources at the launch of the Project ‘Securing Food and Ecosystem Services in Mining Plagued Regions of Ghana’ which is being jointly implemented by Tropenbos Ghana and A Rocha Ghana with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD).

The launching ceremony which took place in Kumasi was witnessed by over 40 participants drawn from Civil Society Organisations working in the forestry sector, ministries, Forestry Commission, district assemblies and KNUST, among others.

The Deputy Minister announced that the government is currently implementing a number of projects to restore degraded landscapes in Ghana. These include the supply of oil palm seedlings to communities in degraded mining areas.

Tarkwa and Dunkwa; two old mining towns scarred by years of indiscriminate mining, are beneficiaries of the oil palm seedlings to promote its cultivation as an alternative livelihood to mining.

Tree seedlings are also being supplied to farmers in a number of communities in the Western and Brong-Ahafo Regions under the Ghana Forest Investment Programme (GFIP) to increase the stock levels of trees on farms.

Another intervention is the implementation of the Youth in Afforestation Programme by the Forestry Commission in conjunction with the National Youth Employment Agency (NYE) and the Modified Taungya System (MTS) to restore degraded forests, increase food production and improve upon the ecological integrity of forest reserves.

Madam Oteng-Gyasi said the NORAD project will go a long way to complement these projects but cautioned the implementers to take a cue from past projects and draw on lessons learnt from their implementation to guide them in the execution of the project.

The project, which will undertake a research study to generate data to provide insights into integrated land-use for the establishment of an Integrated Land-Use Policy, will be implemented in the Ashanti, Eastern and Western Regions of Ghana. These regions 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.

As a result of the vast resources occurring in these regions, they 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.

The project will also strengthen intersectoral coordination in the management of Ghana’s lands and natural resources and assist local communities to rehabilitate mined-out lands and integrate farming, settlements, buffer zones and mining into agricultural landscapes.

Source: Tropenbos Ghana

CSOs to Play Critical Role in CFI Implementation

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Ghana have over the years acquired a vast array of expertise in diverse fields including forestry and monitoring which can be tapped into by the Cocoa and Forests Initiative (CFI) in its quest to address the role of cocoa cultivation in forest degradation and deforestation.

In this vein, CSOs stand a good opportunity to play a catalytic role in the implementation of the Cocoa and Forests Initiative in Ghana, especially with regards to its bid to bring about reforms in the cocoa sector, says Mrs. Doreen Yeboah, Advocacy and Networking Expert for Tropenbos Ghana and a representative for Civil Society Organisations on the steering committee of the Coordinating Team for the initiative.

Speaking at a meeting organised by the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) and the World Cocoa Foundation (WCF) at Utrecht, Netherlands, Mrs. Yeboah said the effective contribution CSOs make can only be possible if CSOs are given the mandate to play a bigger role in the implementation of the Cocoa and Forests Initiative.

“We have a seat, but that's not enough. We want to have deliberations with government, private sector and farmers. Beyond this, we want to see the outcome of these deliberations incorporated into national and local policies and projects design and implementation. We want to be partners in practice not partners on paper”, Mrs. Yeboah reiterated.

The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for the governments of Ghana, Ivory Coast and Colombia as well as key international development partners, participating companies and leading environmental organisations to discuss progress on the Cocoa and Forests Initiative.

The meeting follows months of multi-stakeholder work in Ghana, Ivory Coast and at the global level to convert the ‘Joint Frameworks of Action’ into ‘National Implementation Plans’ for each country.
CSOs Justify Fight For Atewa Forest Preservation

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are insisting the Atewa Forest range must be protected from destruction for the purposes of bauxite mining.

This is in consideration of the significant social and environmental priorities that the forest landscape provides. Critical of which are local and national priorities of achieving food security and livelihoods, conservation of forest ecosystem for biodiversity and climate mitigation, sustainable management of watersheds and water access for over 5 million Ghanaians, sustainable cocoa, palm oil and a bundle of non-timber forest products.

Also, the Atewa Forest range has an opportunity to be developed into the biggest tourism destination in Ghana, supported by an integrated landscape management and local and international partnerships.

The alliance of CSOs is therefore maintaining that due to the aforementioned ecological and economic benefits derived from the landscape, any plan for extractive bauxite mining will be detrimental and erode long-term development goals of achieving resilience and building prosperity and well-being.

According to Daryl Bosu of A Rocha Ghana, the country stands to benefit tremendously from the transformation of the forest into a National Eco-Tourism Park. He further indicated that, averting the bauxite mining plan will open the doors for significant green development investments, a lot of which are already suspended due the looming bauxite mining threat.

“The economic benefits from bauxite mining advanced by government are far below what Atewa can rake in for Ghana in terms of revenue,” he posited at a Legal Working Group meeting in Accra.

He said the CSOs had done the economic assessment, looking at different development scenarios, which demonstrates to government why it is better to preserve Atewa as a better income-earner.

He disclosed that, besides the effects on biodiversity and the forest, the irreparable damage to be caused to the water source for some five million Ghanaians by the proposed bauxite project, should serve as enough deterrent.

Government Lifts Ban on Small Scale Mining with Strict Measures

“Lifting of the ban will allow mining companies with valid company registration certificates, valid permits and licenses from the regulatory authorities, Minerals Commission, EPA and the Water Resources Commission, tax identification numbers from companies which have had their mining equipment licensed and electronically tagged by DVLA, and whose concessions have been vetted and given QR codes to go back to work. Mining equipment, especially excavators and bulldozers not licensed by DVLA will not be allowed for small scale mining” the Minister emphasized.

The Minister added that 72 mining sub-committees have been set up by government at the MMDAs to ensure monitoring and supervision of the activities of artisanal miners.

Prof Frimpong-Boateng revealed that the country had lost about 2.4 million hectares of land to illegal mining which needed to be reclaimed, adding that it would cost about 2.9 million dollars of taxpayer’s money to reclaim the degraded lands.

Using Technology to Trace Forest Illegality

Participants were also trained on the web platform of the ForestLink RTM, the life cycle of alerts and data capture and transmissions which link the web platform. Alert verification protocols and other parameters were also reviewed.

The participants greatly embraced the idea of the project and stated they were ready and willing to work to save the forest and the country as a whole. They envisaged the need to train community monitors properly to generate accurate alerts.

They also expressed the need for capacity building on gender equity for the project.

Source: Nature & Development
Cocoa Agroforestry, Key to Higher Yields and Cocoa Trees Longevity - Veteran Cocoa Farmer

While Cocoa Agroforestry is being touted in recent times as the solution to combating deforestation driven by the conversion of forests into farmlands, fueled in part by the expansion of cocoa farms, Madam Gladys Adjei, a 52-year-old veteran cocoa farmer, says cocoa agroforestry also holds the key to obtaining higher yields and prolonging the lifespan of cocoa trees.

Madam Adjei, a native of Paboase in the Bibiani Forest District of the Western Region of Ghana, who has been cultivating cocoa for the past 32 years, says planting cocoa trees within timber tree species used to be the norm when she was a child. Her parents never cleared the timber trees on their land to plant cocoa trees but rather cultivated them under the shade of these trees.

Speaking in an interview, she said, “My parents used to cultivate cacao among the timber species on our farms and the yield from cocoa was higher back then”. She attributed the higher yields to the shade or microclimate generated by the timber trees which protected the cocoa trees from the high temperatures of the scorching tropical sun.

Madam Adjei was one of 19 community monitors from six communities in the Bibiani and Wiawso Forest Districts on a peer learning visit to Breku and Bonkor in the Edubiase Forest District. The two-day visit was organized by the Non-State Actors (NSA) Project being implemented by Tropenbos Ghana as part of efforts to educate forest fringe communities on Social Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) and also encourage them to play a more active role in the preservation of forests.

She said this was back in the 1970s and her parents continued to cultivate their cocoa on the same piece of land using the ‘Tetteh Quansahie’ (Amelonado) cocoa variety.

However, years later, following the introduction of a new Hybrid of cocoa by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), farmers were advised to cut down all the timber trees on their farms to enable the new breed to thrive. This move ushered in the new era of cocoa monoculture.

Unlike the ‘Tetteh Quansahie’ variety which requires five years to start bearing pods, the Hybrid variety had a faster maturity rate and bore pods after just three years, much to the excitement of cocoa farmers. In addition, the Hybrid variety produced far more pods after three to four years, enabling farmers to earn a lot more revenue per year.

Madam Adjei pointed out that not all crops can be inter-cropped with cocoa trees; certain crops stunt their growth and eventually kill them instead of helping them to thrive.

“The cocoa trees that my parents cultivated under the big timber trees such as the Odum tree are still bearing high quality pods up to date. These cocoa trees are over 60 years old. I attribute their longevity to the fact that they were cultivated under these timber shade trees which have over the years protected them from the scorching sun. Cocoa trees are very sensitive to sunlight. Their leaves tend to shrivel and die when exposed to high temperatures.”

While Madam Adjei agrees that the short lifespan of the Hybrid variety may be due to the breed, she is of the view that stripping cocoa farms of all timber tree species was never a good idea and blames their early demise on the lack of a favorable microclimate due to the absence of shade trees as well as their over-exposure to the scorching sun over the years which eventually led to their death.

“I realized that the cocoa trees on my neighbor’s farm were doing much better than mine; they were healthier and bore more pods, because he chose not to cut down his timber trees. I also realized that even on my parents’ farm, those cocoa trees which have survived up to date are those under the timber trees. From one tree, you can gather four baskets of cocoa pods. Those that were not under timber trees have now perished. I have since made the decision never to cut down the timber trees.

Madam Adjei’s experience with cocoa agroforestry proves that people living in forest fringe communities do not need to clear forest trees before establishing their cocoa farms and serves as a learning experience and an example for beneficiaries of the Non-State Actors Project to emulate. In addition, her parents’ farm where over 60-year-old cocoa trees are still thriving could serve as a model farm for the promotion of cocoa agroforestry.
Do Not Use Exotic Species for Reforestation - Conservationist

The Forestry Commission (FC), Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the forestry Sector and forest fringe communities engaged in reforestation activities, have been advised to desist from using exotic tree species in the reforestation of degraded tropical forests.

This is because exotic trees are alien to existing birds and wildlife in these forests, and hence do not meet their nutritional and other basic needs necessary for their survival.

“I have never seen a bird on a teak tree. Wildlife and birds prefer indigenous trees and not exotic ones”, said Mr. Mark Williams, a bird watcher and Chief Executive Officer of Ashanti African Tours which organises Bird Watching and Wildlife tours to Ghana.

Mr. Williams was speaking at the commissioning of a school building built by his organisation at Bonkro at the cost of 350,000 Ghana Cedis as part of their corporate Social Responsibility Agreement (SRA) with the Bonkro and Benku communities in the Edubiase Forest District of the Western Region.

The Bonkro and Benku communities became important destinations for bird watching tours organised by the Ashanti African Tours following the discovery of the Yellow-Headed Picathartes in the Nyameben Forest Reserve fringed by these two communities.

The Yellow-Headed Picathartes, which is endemic to the Upper Guinea Forests of West Africa, has been categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. The bird was also considered extinct in Ghana until its rediscovery a few years ago. However, one disturbing situation for the birds in the Nyameben Forest Reserve is the presence of illegal chainsaw operators.

“The noise of chainsaw operators cutting down trees in the forest was all I could hear during my first visit to this forest” Mr. Williams said.

The communities were therefore encouraged to preserve their habitat by spearheading the fight against illegal chainsaw logging which was then rampant in the forest reserve so as to enable the birds to thrive.

Mr. Williams said cutting down trees drives away wildlife since it destroys their habitat and source of food. He advised members of the two communities to initiate steps to protect the forest against forest fires, especially with the advancing dry season, stressing that the Nyameben Forest Reserve also has high quality butterflies which constitute an additional eco-tourism potential.

A Five Unit Visitors Centre with a borehole is currently under construction at Benku to provide accommodation for birdwatchers who visit the community. Proceeds from the Visitors Centre, which also forms part of the Social Responsibility Agreement between Ashanti African Tours and the two communities, will be retained by the communities for development purposes.

Mr. Williams disclosed that plans are afoot to provide alternative livelihoods to members of the two communities in areas such as bee keeping and honey extraction as well as small ruminant and grasscutter rearing. The 19 community monitors sponsored by the NSA were impressed with the achievements of the two communities and promised to redouble their efforts in eradicating illegal chainsaw and other illegal activities from their forests to enable the wildlife and birds in their respective forests to thrive.

They also expressed their determination to negotiate for better Social Responsibility Agreements with timber companies and other beneficiaries of their forests reserves.

Source: Tropenbos Ghana

CSOs Justify Fight For Atewa Forest Preservation

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Mr. Bosu warned of dire consequences if government maintains its adamant-looking posture. “If government goes ahead with the project, the consequences would be devastating for the entire nation.”

The CSOs are not in any way convinced that the process will employ responsible and sustainable mining practices, indicating that, there is nothing responsible and sustainable about deciding to mine in a watershed that supplies water to over 5 million Ghanaians, supports significant climate mitigation services.

They believe that responsible and sustainable mining starts with recognizing that certain areas are ‘no go areas’ for extractive industries, and Atewa and equally threatened forests are such areas.

Some professional associations like the Ghana Institute of Foresters have also issued concerns and communiqués, advising government to abort plans to mine Atewa Forest for bauxite, thus endorsing concerns already raised by other advocates.
VPA progresses in Guyana to improve forest governance

On November 23, 2018, after 6 years of negotiation, the EU and Guyana initiated a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA), to combat illegal logging, improve forest governance and promote trade in legal timber.

The initialising ceremony signalled the conclusion of negotiations and Guyana became only the second country in Central and South America to reach this stage.

The EU and Guyana will now establish a joint committee to oversee the implementation of the VPA, which will include legal reforms, and the development of a timber legality verification system that will enable Guyana to verify that all timber products for export and domestic markets comply with relevant laws and regulations.

Forests cover 87% of Guyana and make an important contribution to the economy, providing jobs and livelihoods.

The timber trade between Guyana and the EU accounts for up to 8% of Guyana’s timber industry. Most exports of timber from Guyana to the EU are destined for the UK.

VPA negotiations in Guyana have already helped to improve transparency and stakeholder relations and clarify legal and administrative requirements applicable to the forest sector.

During the VPA negotiations, Guyana published the draft content of the Agreement online, enabling citizens, businesses and NGOs to give their feedback on the text.

The VPA process has also led to legal reforms that have replaced outdated regulations that had been in place since 1953.

The new regulations make clear what logging companies must do to comply with law and what the authorities will do to verify legal compliance and enforce the law.

Guyana becomes the 8th country to conclude a VPA with the EU under the EU’s Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan.

Source: ClientEarth

Updated Collection of Forest Laws Shared

The burden of scanning through the various laws in search of legal references on forest, has been lessened by the updated version, the Green Book, also known as the Forest Bible.

A Law and Policy Advisor of ClientEarth, Jozef Weyns, is advising all persons interested in the protection of Ghana’s forest, to make it a habit to read the Green Book.

Mr. Weyns, who guided participants at the Legal Working Group’s (LWG) forum in Accra through the usage of the book, indicated that the Green forestry sector.

“In the Republic of Ghana, forest legislation is fragmented across numerous laws and amendments. In addition, laws governing other areas like land, agriculture and gender also have an impact on the regulatory framework governing forests. This document aims to help those working with forest, climate change, land and gender laws to navigate the maze of different legal texts,” Mr. Weyns concluded.

Source: ClientEarth
NDF Projects into 2019

As part of implementing the project, "Building capacities of small and medium scale forest enterprises in Ghana and Liberia to supply legal timber", the Nature and Development Foundation (NDF) is expected to build the capacity of 60 more small-to-medium scale timber companies to be able to comply with FLEGT-VPA regulations in Ghana.

The project is funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) under the Forest Governance Market and Climate (FGMC) programme.

According to the NDF, even though the processes in engaging and building the capacities of these SMEs can be very cumbersome as it involves travelling to their company premises, they would take up the challenge in 2019 as the approach yielded greater results in their just ended FAO funded project.

In the coming year, NDF is also anticipating promoting the signing and implementation of SRAs between communities and logging companies through a training being planned for district forest managers. The objective of the training is to enable the Forestry Commission officials play their role effectively, as referees in the signing and implementation of SRAs. The training is expected to cover all the forest regions of Ghana.

NDF is also looking forward to issuing publications and documentaries on the public procurement policy. This action, NDF believes, would sustain the momentum for the passage of the policy which they think is long overdue.

Project officer, Margaret Appiah, is optimistic that passing the policy would force decision makers to implement measures that would make legal timber available on the domestic market. The thrust of the Policy is that, "No illegally-harvested timber and its products shall be procured with public funds nor used in government projects".

Reviewing how 2018 had fared, NDF is of the view that, the year had been a good one as they have been able to carry out a number of activities which have yielded some positive results. Specifically, the foundation built the capacity of about 30 companies to be able to comply with FLEGT. This has greatly increased awareness on Occupational Safety and Health in the various companies.

Additionally, the training was captured in a short video documentary available online through this link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnAqgk8TAg titled, “NDF Supports Timber SMEs in Ghana on Safety and Health Compliance; A VPA Requirement”.

Source: Nature & Development Foundation

Please send your Feedbacks, Articles, Stories and Contributions to tetteh.sally@yahoo.com OR sallyviwotor@gmail.com
Contact: 024 936 7890 OR 050 919 9465
Compiled and Produced by Salomey Tetteh-Viwotor

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

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 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."