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## CONTRIBUTIONS OF COMMUNITY BASED GROUPS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN WESTERN GHANA: A CASE OF COMMUNITIES FRINGING CAPE THREE POINT FOREST RESERVE

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### ABSTRACT

*The roles of the CBG's and their impact on the development of communities cannot be under-estimated, but with current emergence of these groups, there are doubts as to whether they are well structured and their roles being clearly defined in order to reduce any conflicts of interest that may occur. This study therefore tried to determine the extent of CBG's involvement in sustainable forest management, their roles in ensuring sustainable forest management and the constraints faced by the Groups in performing their roles in forest management. The findings of the study indicated that CBG's fringing Cape Three Points forest reserve were actively involved in all the processes (i.e. decision-making, implementation, monitoring and benefit sharing) geared towards sustainable forest management. The results also emphasized on the roles of the CBG's comprising boundary clearing, monitoring the reserve, creation of forest protection awareness, preventing illegal chainsaw operations, reporting of illegal activities, fire prevention and prevention of encroachment. The groups were however confronted with numerous constraints that inhibit effective performance of their roles. These were inadequate materials and logistics, delayed payment of funds, financial constraints, attacks from illegal chainsaw operators and weak collaboration with authorities. The overall conclusion shows that the involvement of the CBG's in management has immensely contributed to the control, prevention and reduction of illegal activities and bushfires in the forest reserve.*

**Key word:** conservation, collaboration, involvement.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The marginalization of the local people in forest conservation has contributed to the dwindling nature of Ghana's original forest cover from 8.2 million hectares to 1.6 million hectares (Adomako, 2004). As a result, tropical forests are losing capacity to provide basic goods and services that is key to human livelihoods.

The extensive and increasing pace of degradation of forest resources in the last decade, both challenge the assumption that the central control of the forest resources by the government alone cannot continue to work (ODA, 1992). According to the World Bank (2006), estimated global deforestation is around 65000 ha per annum. In Ghana it is estimated that the average annual rate of deforestation since the twentieth century is 22000 ha (Oduro, 1996). A minimum figure of USD 120 million is lost each year in Ghana due to the degradation of Ghana's forest; and this is equivalent of 4 percent of GDP (Falloux and Talbot, 1993). These problems among others led to the call for local people's participation in all aspects of the forest resource management and planning.

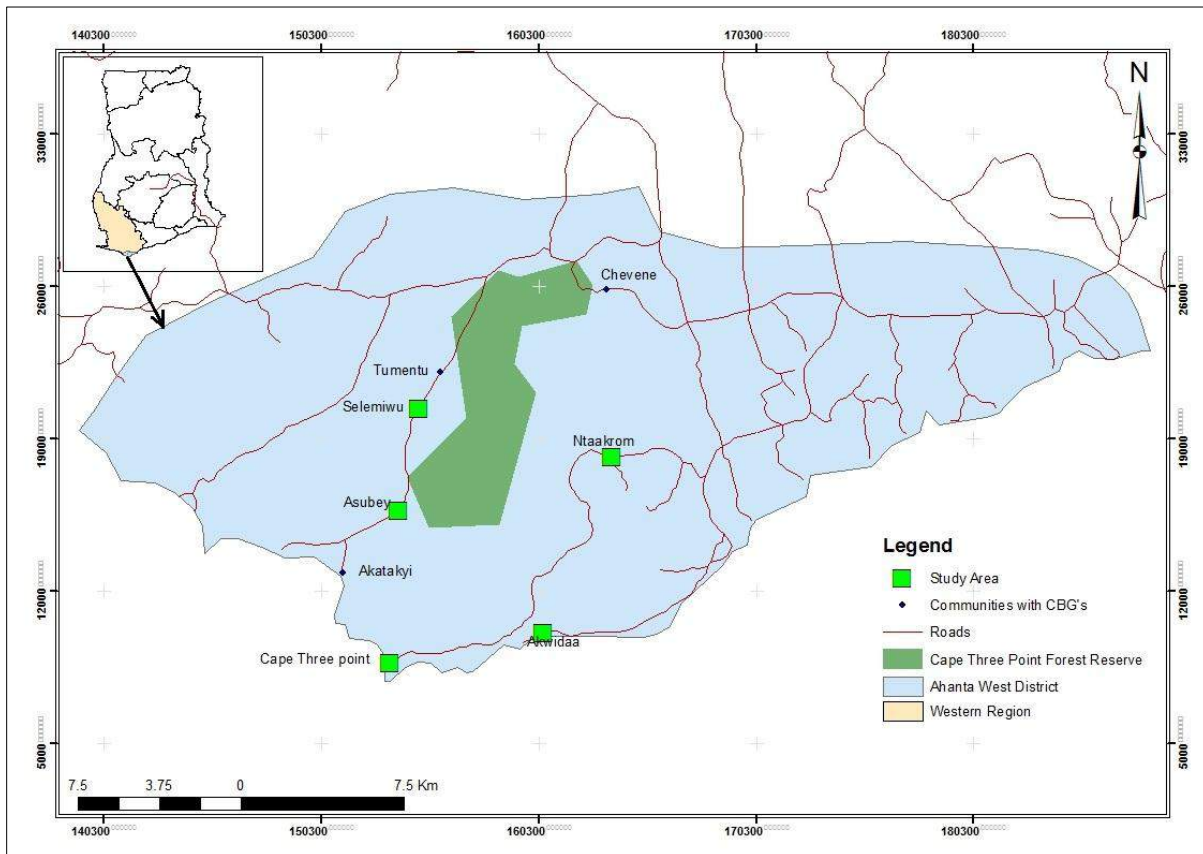
The involvement of local communities in forest resource management has seen the birth of a lot of CBG's in Forest Resource Management. The roles of the CBG's and their impact on the development of the community cannot be under-estimated but with current emergence of these groups, there are doubts as to whether they are well structured and their roles being clearly defined in order to reduce any conflicts of interest that may occur.

Becoming aware of the presence of these CBG's brings to bare different knowledge and ideas that would make a strong basis for sustainable forest management (Adamowicz and Veeman, 1998). Bengston (1993) is of the view that moving through the roles and activities of the CBG's contribute positively and accurately to forest sustainability. This study therefore tries to understand the extent of CBG's involvement in sustainable forest management, their roles and the constraints faced by the Groups in performing their roles in forest management.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study Area

Cape Three Point Forest Reserve falls under Ahanta West District in the Western Region of Ghana. It constitutes the forest management unit three (FMU 3). The reserve lies between latitudes 4°53' and 4°46' North and longitude 2° 00' and 2° 05' West.



**Figure 1 Geographical map of the study area**

## 2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The empirical analyses were based on data from a survey conducted in five communities fringing Cape Three Point Forest Reserve. The five communities (Asubey, Selemiwu, Cape Three Point, Ntaakrom and Akwidaa) were randomly selected from eight (Tumentu, Asubey, Akatakya, Selemiwu, Ntaakrom, Chevene, Cape Three Point and Akwidaa) communities identified to have active community based groups. Purposive sampling technique was employed to identify 75 respondents by the help of key informants. The respondents are people who were active members of various Community Based Groups namely Community Resource Management Committee (CRMC), Community Biodiversity Advisory Group (CBAG) and Community Monitoring Team (CMT).

Data collected were analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 17.0). The result from the assessment was validated through FGDs with the community based groups.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Extent of Community Based Groups Involvement in sustainable management

The findings of the study indicated that the CBG's were involved in all the processes (i.e. decision-making, implementation, monitoring and benefit sharing) geared towards sustainable forest management. The result shows that CBG's are mostly involved in decision making (37.33%) and least involved in benefit sharing (12%). According to Kotey, *et al.*, (1998), the principle of participation demands that forest fringe communities are involved in all decisions concerning the management and development of their forest resources, since that will give them a better understanding and commitment to the natural resources development and protection. Community Forestry exist when the local community in an area plays a significant role in land use decision-making and when the community is satisfied with its involvement and benefits from the management of the surrounding forest and its resources. Benefit sharing being the least extent form of involvement can be attributed to the fact that Cape Three Point forest reserve is managed solely under protection.

*Table 1: Extent of community based groups' involvement in Sustainable management*

Extent of CBG's Involvement in SF	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Decision-Making	28	37.33
Implementation	20	26.67
Monitoring	18	24
Benefit Sharing	9	12
Total	75	100

#### 3.2 Roles of Community Based Groups in the sustainable management of Cape Three Point Forest Reserve.

CBG's were observed in numerous activities such as boundary clearing, monitoring of the reserve, awareness creation, encroachment prevention, prevention and reporting of illegal activities and prevention of wildfires as a collaborative effort to ensure the sustainable management of forest resources. Carter (1996) observed that collaboration is a two-way affair, which involves exchange of experience and knowledge in partnership between the local people and forestry. This observation was confirmed by Kotey, *et al.* (1998) who revealed that collaboration in the forest resource management is the working partnership between the local people, especially

the fringe communities and the Forest Services Division to ensure that the management of all forest resources is more efficient and equitable.

Asare (2000), stated that community forest committees (CFC's) which fall under the umbrella of CBG's are to be the main channel through which the statutory forest management agency, that is the Forest Service Division (FSD) is to implement its collaborative management activities. Thus, CFC's will operate from the down or basic to the highest levels of forest management. Some of their functions include:

- Enhance and encourage wide spread participation in forestry matters especially those that will affect the community.
- Mobilize wide stakeholder awareness and participation in the forest management planning process.
- Monitor and report all illegal activities concerning natural resources management and utilization.

The roles identified by this study are one way or another connected to the above stated ones. From figure 2, boundary clearing is the highest role recorded. This is because the clearing of boundary lines are done on contract basis and the monies generated from FSD serve as a source of income. It is mostly done twice a year as prescribed by the Forest Services Division (FSD). Some of the respondents said even forest guards who do not know where boundary lines and pillars were located are shown and this goes to confirm what was realized by IIED/FD (1994), which recognized that the local people could be more efficient at executing certain forest tasks as compared to the Forest Services Division (FSD) staff. According to the report by IIED/FD, the local folks constitute readily available cheap labor living close to the forest with the advantage of being more familiar with the terrain and other features than the FSD personnel who in most cases stay at post for only a short period.

Thomson (1994) observed that, community participation in combating bushfire is an intrinsic tool that cannot be neglected in the management processes of sustainable natural resources since human-induced burning is the major cause of wildfire. This confirms the views expressed by five (5) selected fringe communities. The monitoring and reporting of illegal activities and also encroachment prevention implies that the Community Based Groups understand forest protection and are willing to protect the Cape Three Point Forest Reserve. Community Based Groups who live close or within the forest reserve are willing to render forest protection and management roles to enhance sustainable forest management (Rishi, 2006).



The study indicated that poaching, and the slush and burn method of farming activities, which usually resulted in bushfires decreased because of the level of education of the farmers who adopted improved system of farming activities.

The awareness creation and sensitization program being part of the roles of the Community Based Groups has really had a positive impact on sustainable forest management. This is because as the group members understand the concept of sustainability and forest protection, they in turn have sensitized the community members on the need to come together as a unit to jointly manage the forest since the forest is more of theirs than the Forest Services Division (FSD).

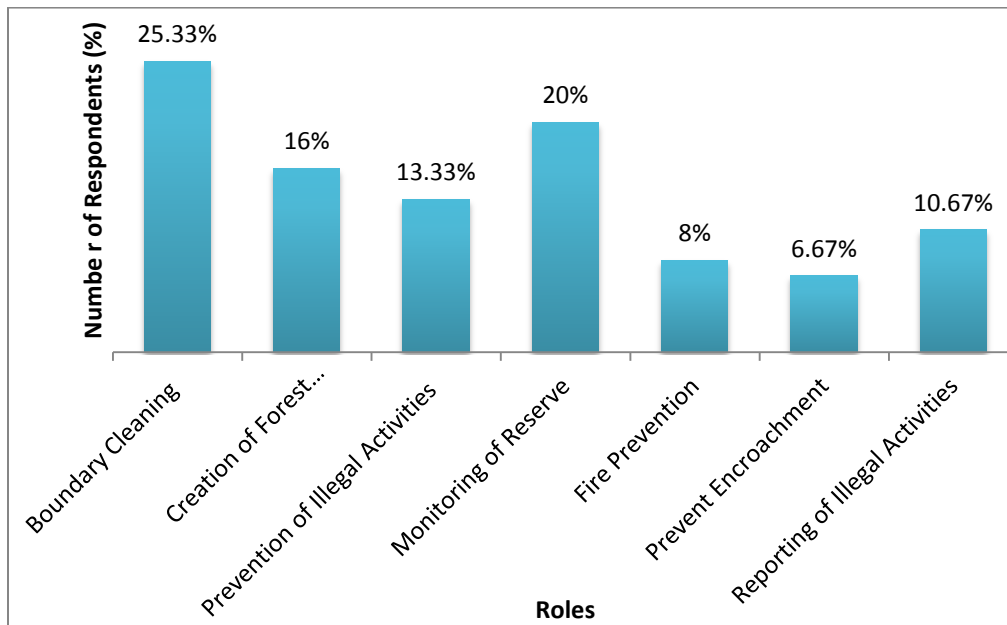


Figure 2 Roles of Community Based Groups in the sustainable forest management

### 3.3 Achievement of Community Based Groups

Community Based Groups are renowned organizations that have been put in place to achieve results in the face of the challenges that confront them. The result revealed that the Community Based Groups have been able to achieve certain successes which include reduction in illegal chainsaw activities, reduction in encroachment activities and active community participation in forest protection. The occurrence of illegal chainsaw operations and encroachment activities in the reserve has decrease significantly because of the presence of this groups which serve as watch dogs and monitor and report any illegal activities in the reserve. This has put fear in the illegal



operators to abandon all operations in the reserve. This is a confirmation of Roberts and Gautam (2011), accession that Community Forestry exist when the local community in an area plays a significant role in land use decision-making and when the community is satisfied with its involvement and benefits from the management of the surrounding forest and its resources. The sensitization program carried out by the various groups with assistance from FSD has inculcated in the community members the need to protect the reserve at all cost because they see the reserve as one of their own.

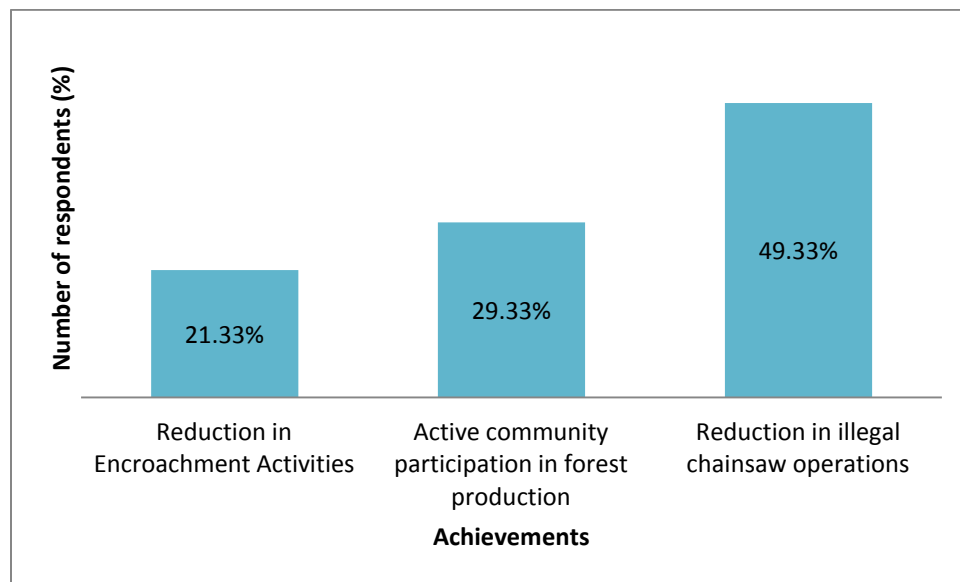


Figure 3 Achievements of Community Based Groups.

### 3.4 Constraints of Community Based Groups in the management of Cape Three Point Forest Reserve

Inadequate materials and logistics (such as protective cloths, wellington boots, cutlasses, raincoat, torch lights etc.) and delayed payment of funds are major constraints to the performance of the CBG's. This is a problem that breeds unwillingness and laziness as stated by (IIED/FD 1994) that incentives for improved forest management seek to encourage the land use and the manager to assume greater responsibility for the resource. This was confirmed in Mayers and Kotey (1996), that community empowerment and encouragement in extra responsibilities may require some incentives to motivate them for effective participation.

Financial constraints were seen as an impediment to effective performance by Community Based Groups in their execution of their duties as this was realized by their inability to hold meetings to disseminate information contrary to the view expressed by Asare (1999) that for effective performance of Community Forest Committees

(CFC's), members were to meet at least once a month throughout the year. As are (1999) further asserted that the executive should meet with the entire community at least once in every three months.

Group members who were into monitoring further complained of attacks from illegal chainsaw operators as having adverse effect on their performance. Difficulty to communicate any illegal activity as a result of weak collaboration with authorities most especially FSD was also reported by the community

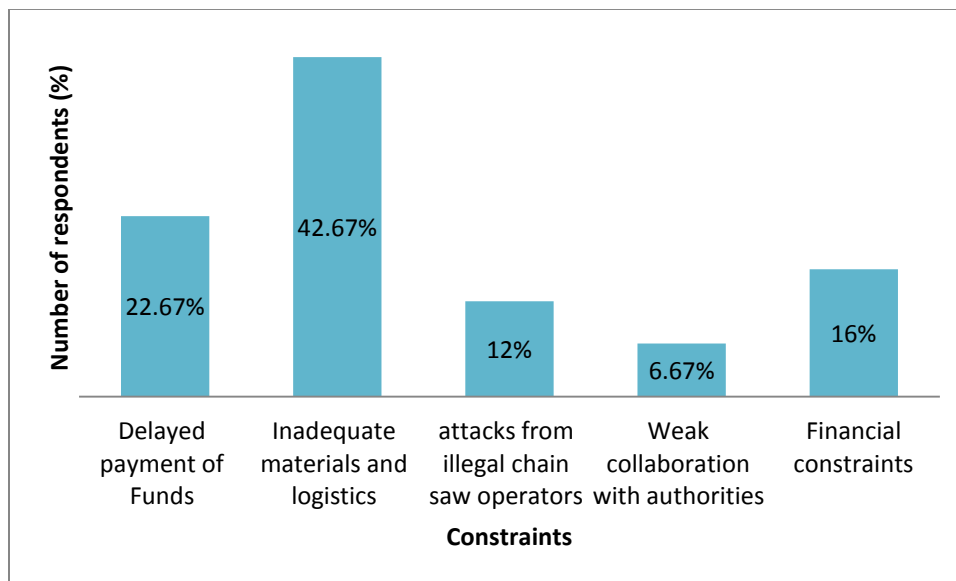


Figure 4 Constraints of Community Based Groups.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The focus of this paper has been to provide a simple literature and practical review of community based groups' contribution to sustainable forest management in Ghana. The study revealed majority of the respondents were found to be actively involved in decision-making, implementation, benefit sharing and monitoring. Inadequate materials and logistics (such as protective cloths, wellington boots, cutlasses, raincoat, torch lights etc.) and delayed payment of funds were identified as major constraints to the performance of the CBG's. This is a problem that breeds unwillingness and laziness as stated by (IIED/FD 1994) that incentives for improved forest management seek to encourage the land use and the manager to assume greater responsibility for the resource. The result revealed that the Community Based Groups have been able to achieve certain successes which include reduction in illegal chainsaw activities, reduction in encroachment activities and active community participation in forest protection in spite of the many challenges.

The study therefore recommends that the FSD should provide the Community Based Groups with the necessary materials and logistics such as raincoat, Wellington boot, torch lights, cutlass etc. to facilitate them to carry out their roles effectively towards the sustainable management of the forest. Funds allocated for the boundary cleaning should also be made available early enough by the Forest Service Division to enhance performance.

Community Based Groups are also advised to source funds from the District Assembly and Donor Agencies. The monitoring team should be assisted with army scout for maximum protection and also to ensure effective and efficient patrols.

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