

Project Update: September 2009

Towards this third quarter of the year 2009, our region has been rocked by unusual heavy tropical rainfalls resulting to flooding in the valleys restricting major activities in the habitats/forest and major patrolling activities by the guards, not only limited patrols but also reduced the number of illegal incursion due to the inhabitable weather conditions. There were reported cases that a halt to illegal activities such as the illegal logging of timber and illegal hunting of mammals in the last three months.

CONTINUE BASELINE ACTIVITIES

The baseline activities which started with SWBGC support and were covered in part under ICBCTE Phase I during its first years and totally under ICBCTE II during the last 2 years are now underway yielding very positive results to be completed by December 2009. Under the current project phase formal biological surveys would be exorbitantly expensive but a simple low-cost participatory technique has yielded useful baseline data for Togo Plateau Conservation such as the presence and absence of important species and simple indicators of ecosystem health.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION, PROFESIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

With the support from UDS, Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG), Plant Genetic Resource Centre (PGRC) and other local institutions the following activities beside conservation education continue to be achieved result in the Togo Plateau biological reserve. The professionals over the period of the project continue: (i) the biological and socio-economic surveys; (ii) identification and mapping of endemic species and genetics in the 'hotspot'; (iii) development of management plans and selective restoration in ecological priority areas; (iv) identifying changes in ecosystem and biodiversity status; and (v) determining status and trends of indigenous crop varieties up to date with the goal to achieve and enhance community participation in biodiversity conservation activities through strengthened collaboration with both local organizations and the outside world.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The Rural Development and Health Concern Network has become an integral part of the project's overall Planning Strategy to conserve natural resources of the Togo Plateau Tropical Forests. The organization has assisted individuals, families and even private sector organizations to initiate and develop rural development and planning services that protects natural resources for their inhabitant's workers and dependant's communities.

Our services and awareness education is carried out extensively in the rural areas. Our programmes are committed to the enhancement of family, individual and community welfare through environmental awareness, planning services and education as well as forest resource management and plantation development for the poor.

CONSTRAINTS TO THE COMMUNITY PLANNING IN OUR REGION

There are a lot of constraints to the community planning in our region. This can be attributed to the lack of finance and education, which are the major hindrances. According to 2006 demographic survey, 68% and 67% of women and men respectively living in rural areas have not attended school. Therefore the knowledge of both modern and traditional community planning is weak.

Secondly, the socio-cultural traditions are not conducive to the quick acceptance of community planning. The value of large families and low status of women and the reluctance to discuss community planning matters have all contributed to lack of development, population explosion, forest /environmental degradation and falling economic living standards of the people.

This year we planned to create a forests community's Unit Task Force to enhance regular visits to the villages and forests communities to give education, information, services and counselling on effective forest resource management practices and monitoring of illegal activities in the forests. The Unit is also challenged to give education, information and counselling on the effective community participatory forest resource management issues, benefits derived from forest conservation, wildlife conservation, effects of bushmeat trade and private/individual timber plantations development plan for poverty reduction but it could not take place due to financial constraints or permanent sources of finance that have not been put in place that inhibit the organization to implement it; these programmes will now be extended to next year (2010).

THE PROJECT INITIAL OBJECTIVE

The project primary objective was to increase awareness to improve community participation in conservation activities by strengthening collaboration between the various local ethnic groups, farmers, hunters, women, youth and organizations in the outside world, in order to address three primary constraints to the conservation of biological resources in the Togo Plateau as follows.

1. Inadequate knowledge of the ecosystem

The diversity and abundance of biological resources in the Togo Plateau are very little known and believed to be exceptional. They represent some of the more intact ecosystems and provide an important refuge for endangered primate species including chimpanzees. Formal biological surveys would be exorbitantly expensive but a simple low-cost participatory technique has yielded useful baseline data, such as the presence and absence of important species and simple indicators of ecosystem health.

2. Insufficient capacity for biodiversity conservation

The effective protection of biological resources in the Togo Plateau cannot be achieved by central government alone. Inadequate financial resources and a lack of incentives (the absence

of a tourism industry) have eroded the government's will to invest in the Togo Plateau. Thus an imaginative partnership between local institutions and individuals with the government authorities provides the most realistic way forward, but requires the careful establishment of a collaborative strategic framework that has not, so far, been attempted. This why Adzicels Happy Home Foundation (AHHF) has entered into collaboration with partners such as Rufford Small Grants Foundation (RSGF) in the UK and SWBG-Conservation Fund (SWBGC- Fund) in the USA.

3. Chronic underfunding for conservation management

This project represents the exploratory phase for a more extensive fundraising effort by AHHF for community-based conservation in the Togo Plateau protected area. AHHF specializes in raising funds from its network supporters, SWBGC-Fund and RSGF for conservation of the Togo Plateau in Ghana. For this to happen, the organization must first establish strong collaborative partnerships with individuals and organizations on the ground. The present project is designed to cement those relationships so that more substantial follow-up funding can be sought by AHHF, focusing on reliable partners and viable conservation strategies.

During implementation of the project, the objectives did not change and the points (1) and (2) were successfully achieved and comprehensively addressed. However, point (3) could not be comprehensively addressed as AHHF was relying on local communities and organizations to access funding support using advocacy based fundraising mechanisms available locally and a website search for international funding for local conservation organizations.

TRAINING WORKSHOPS

AHHF and its collaborative institutions Ghana Forestry Commission (GFC) and the Ministry of Food & Agriculture (MOFA) organized 4 workshops in 2008 and 2009 to upgrade the minds of citizens, local communities and other local forest institutions, associations, organizations including our NGO members in the district. The stakeholders attended all workshops this is because these workshops fall directly under our areas of operation. The 4 training workshops were centered on forest management, organic farming, agro-forestry, forest plantation development and tree nursery making, environmental awareness campaigns, natural resource management, environmental pollution and role of communities/NGOs and benefits in community participatory Forest Management Plan including the follow-up activities in the rural communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Kawu primary is located in Kawu in the Hohoe district and has a population of about 2,000 residents in 13 village environs. Environmental clubs were established in Kwamikrom, Akpafu, Bowiri and Nkonya primary schools to create awareness on the dangers of shifting cultivation, traditional honey harvesting techniques, poaching, palm wine tapping and forest fires to the environment, using schools kids as the entry point to the wider community. This clubs meet weekly and there are organized awareness activities for the entire school through activities like

tree planting in schools and villages. The school deputy head teacher started the club three years ago with a membership of 40 pupils. Today the club boost of over half the school population as the children developed more interest in their environment.

COMMUNITY AND CONSERVATION

The Togo Plateau reserve is inhabited by the Kwamikrom, Akpafu, Bowiri, Santrokofi's, Alavano, Nkonya tribes. These are the indigenous people who have traditionally gathered food, medicine, building materials and fuel from the plateau. Once hunters and gatherers, they are now dependent more on subsistence cultivation of farming, livestock keeping, harvesting wild plants and honey. The new alternative is however a new way of life to the Kwamikrm, Akpafu, Santrokofi, Bowiri and Alavanyo's people who have been cut-off from their traditional source of livelihood, the forest, as it became increasingly inaccessible due to demarcation as a Protected Area and insecurity.

Since both their traditional and new livelihood options are natural resources-based, it's important that these livelihood means are sustainably managed. However biodiversity conservation in this region is primarily constrained by:

- Inadequate knowledge of the ecosystem;
- Insufficient capacity for biodiversity conservation; and
- Chronic underfunding for conservation management.

AHHF has been working with local communities and organizations in the Togo Plateau to identify key threats to their ecosystems and helped strengthen a few simple points.

COMMUNITY PATROLS AREA - RESOURCE MONITORING AND AWARENESS CREATION ACTIVITIES

Based on the field assessments, the existing community-based initiatives were strengthened to mitigate the effects of unsustainable resource use. These programmes focused on surveillance and reporting of threats and illegal activities and improving local people's understanding of their environment. There are community patrols through the volunteer community guard's programme and environmental education and awareness in schools. Working in collaboration with Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS), the two activities were strengthened and expanded to cover larger geographic areas, basic training surveillance provided and environmental education materials disseminated. The community patrols were done through the Volunteer Community Forest Committees and Guards Programme, a local initiative which was initiated with support from GFC and AHHF. Through this, 22 out of the 40 selected young men from all the 27 villages have been given basic training on biodiversity resource surveillance and data collection. The volunteers have been going on patrol four days every month to comb the forest for illegal activities and threats and to gather the information about the ongoing activities in the forest. The reports are forwarded to the programmes head, state or AHHF monitoring and community forests committees for further action.

Towards the end of 2008 and third quarter of the 2009, unusual heavy rains rocked the region. The valley area outside the Togo biological reserve which will be used for sustainable agriculture and livestock-raising by stakeholders resulted in flooding of the valley and part of the unprotected area of the reserve, which not only limited activities of patrols but also reduced the number of illegal incursions due to the inhospitable weather conditions. Now self-regulation is the way forward in natural resource utilization in this area due to limited investment in conservation in the region. This pilot initiative would be replicated in other villages and communities who need support to help the idea grow and make it sustainable by provision of sustainable livelihoods option, awareness creation on Natural resource management and forest legislation/Act 2004 on Participatory Forest Management (PFM)

PROGRESS ACHIEVED SO FAR

Sociological studies, quantitative evidence of the improved awareness / protection of monkeys and chimpanzees /general awareness education campaign that was provided.

The most encouraging activity following educational campaigns is the initiative of the villagers around Kwamikrom, Akpafu, Bowri and Kawu Region to set up surveillance committees. The AHHF regularly supports these committees in sensitization activities. During this process, over 200 poachers were formally identified and are willing to restrain from hunting. Moreover, they control illegal activities in their villages, such as bushmeat trade, intrusions in the biological reserve etc. Projects that encourage this initiative are currently being developed and followed up by different partner organizations around the Togo Plateau. In 2006 when the project received funding from SWBGC-Fund, the AHHF supported a group of ex-hunters who set up livestock keeping and beehives projects in our region. Villages at the eastern side of the Togo Plateau, Odormi, Adorkor, Sokpo etc., also expressed their interest in forming surveillance committees. Around Nkonya in the south, the Association of Youngsters of the Nkonya youths initiated on several occasions sensitization activities. Moreover, they submitted a project to the AHHF to create village committees like Youth Advocate groups in the rest of communities to help reduce hunting in Kwamikrom, Nkonya and Akpafu and to sensitize the quarters neighboring communities but funds at the time were insufficient to cover all those communities.

Throughout 2008 and 2009, the AHHF was approached by villagers, associations and schools to animate local manifestations and sensitize about the conservation of the forest and the chimpanzees and monkeys existing there. Some new micro-projects that have been developed in the Kawu Region through a cooperation of various local NGOs under the SWBGC-Fund have continuously supported activities. Projects include grasscutter, pig, chicken and rabbit supported farms and planting of a 72 ha teak plantation in collaboration with GFC in the deforested area of the Togo Plateau. These projects will provide alternative future revenues for poachers and are an incentive to stop hunting. In Bowiri and Kwamekrom specific actions of villages or local organizations around the Togo Plateau not only increased significantly over the past years, but activities and projects also became much more organized and therefore will have a higher impact on the protection of the concerned areas.

CHALLENGES, DISAPPOINTMENTS AND FAILURES DURING IMPLEMENTATION

The biggest constraint was in implementing permanent and sustainable financing mechanisms for the Togo Plateau conservation project, capacity and funding access to develop an Internet facility and construct a rural access road to open-up the plateau for the rest of the world, funds to enable us to fully implement the programme within the time constraints of the project. However, a follow up grant from RSGF has been obtained to further strengthen the work.

THE RESULTS SO FAR TO PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL OF THREATS TO THE TOGO PLATEAU ECOSYSTEM IDENTIFIED AS FOLLOWS

A number of methods of data collection were used to assess the threats to the Togo Plateau ecosystem.

1. Community Patrol Guards

The few patrol guards who had been trained on resource surveillance and data collection between 2006 and 2009 so far respectively provided information on field reports like sightings of threats and illegal incidences gathered during patrols in the reserves.

2. Interviews - formal and informal with key people on the ground

They include Ghana Wild life Society (GWS), Ministry of Food Agriculture (MOFA) Officers, local community's leaders, forest committees, local NGO personnel and District Assembly representatives in various communities.

3. Direct field observation

Response to the structured questions was supplemented with informal conversations and direct field observations on various aspects under investigation.

4. Government records

Government records where possible, we used vehicle log books, crime Occurrence Book (OB) for arrest and reported incidences and cases, other records from Forestry Department, the Police and GWS were used to retrieve information on threats and action taken.

5. Secondary literature

Data was also obtained from literature reviews, projects annual reports, and district development plans, statistical abstracts, and unpublished manuscripts such as the Togo Plateau National Reserves quarterly and annual reports to date. The main objective of this data collection was to: 1). improve local capacity to assess resources, define threats and articulate realistic and effective conservation strategies; 2). implement at least two small pilot programmes for participatory monitoring resources and mitigation of threats; and 3). facilitate communication between local community groups, government, and with the outside world by establishing community based conservation.

PROJECT OUTPUTS

Recommendations

1. Alternative sustainable livelihoods option for the region needs to be explored. For example, Kawanu culture and eco-tourism which is increasing becoming popular in other parts of Ghana.
2. Introduction of modern technologies in beekeeping to maximize production and reduce fires.
3. Marketing of the products outside the district should be developed to raise the income generated from eco-friendly honey and bee products.
4. Training on PFM – Participatory Forest Management, a new concept introduced in the new Forest Act 2002 which come into force this January is needed to enlighten the community on the new Act which recognizes the right of communities living around forest to sustainably manage and utilize the forest resources.
5. The government should invest more in the area to curb insecurity and improve the dilapidated infrastructure to open up the Togo Plateau to tourism and more proactive active conservation.

CONCLUSIONS

The threats to the Togo Plateau ecosystem though recorded so far during the survey were noted to be on the lower scale and do not pose a significant threat to the biodiversity of this area. This is due to the densely human population which exerts pressure on the resources of the forests. Many destructive natural resource based activities carried out pose a significant threat to the environment. This is with the exception of wild fire whose benefits and negative impacts to the environment have not been well understood.

But this should not be a reason to differ conservation measures to stop the threats identified. Indeed, this is the best opportunity to prevent these threats from getting bigger and more serious, since it will be easier to control them at this early stage. That's why AHHF is working with local communities to support their own initiatives in resource monitoring and surveillance. Some pilot activities started will form the basis of much larger interventions in future. The last three years of AHHF project in the reserve has enable more conservationists, NGOs, researchers and businessmen to work in the area. The awareness had resulted in raising income for the local community, investment in infrastructure and environmental conservation and improved awareness on natural resources management among the local community to stop escalating the poaching incidents and hampering conservation efforts currently underway in the Togo Plateau.