

Project Update: October 2015

The project started officially in January 2015 and implementation of activities is following the planned schedule as detailed in the proposal and discussed during the project inception workshop. This update covers the project period from January 2015 to September 2015.

Community Entry and Reconnaissance Visits

Following laid down traditional protocols, the project started actively with reconnaissance visits to the Saamang stool land communities (Saamang, Konkoso, Gyampewa and Kumawu) in January 2015. Focused group meetings were held with the traditional authorities as per the customary/cultural demands of the area to introduce the project. These were followed up with community meetings where the project (main aim, targets and expected outcomes) was ultimately introduced to the fringe communities. Subsequently, visits were made to and meetings were held with Wassa Amenfi East District (WAED) officials, Forest Watch Ghana (a national level Forest and Environmental NGOs coalition), Forest Services Division (FSD), Centre for Sustainable Rural Agriculture & Development (CSRAD) and New Generation Concern (NGC), and the details of the project was introduced to them. The project team also made reconnaissance visit to the Montononso Sacred Forest (after permission was granted by the traditional authority of Saamang) to observe at first hand the current nature of the forest and appreciate and record the diversity of natural resources and sacredness of the forest.



Reconnaissance visit to the Montononso Sacred Forest. On the top left is Michael Kermah, Project Team Leader standing by a Ceiba petandra tree.

The project has established strong linkages with CSRAD and NGC which are local NGOs working on forest and natural resources conservation in the area; Wassa Amenfi East District Assembly; Forest Watch Ghana and the FSD of the Ghana Forestry Commission based in the district to support smooth implementation of the project.

Inception Workshop

An inception workshop was held in January 2015. The workshop was attended by the project team, the local volunteer team, representatives from CSRAD as well as NGC. Representatives from the Saamang Traditional Authority, community members from Saamang and the other communities in the Saamang stool land fringing on the Montononso Sacred forest such as Kokonso, Gyampewa and Kumawu also attended. Specific roles to be played by the different stakeholders of the project were discussed and



Project team leading the inception workshop

agreed. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team was formed with membership from the key stakeholder groups present at the workshop. A framework for monitoring and evaluation of project activities to safeguard achievement of outcomes was developed based on the specific targets and timelines agreed on/contained in the proposal.

Formation and Training of Local Volunteer Team (LVT)

A five member LVT (four males and one female) was formed to support implementation of the project. The team was composed from the youth of Saamang based on their interest and willingness to actively support the implementation of the project. A workshop was organised and used to train the LVT on facilitation skills (to enable them lead certain aspects of community meetings, etc.), nursery establishment and management, sustainable forest conservation, forest and wildlife policies. These were done to enable them actively contribute to the implementation of project activities. The training was jointly done by the project team and a Range Supervisor from the FSD in the district.

Ecological Survey of Sacred Forest, Nursery Establishment and Stocking

With the active support of the FSD, LVT and local experts, the project team led a survey of the diversity of the flora and fauna species found in the sacred forest. The compilation of the diversity of flora species identified in the sacred forest informed the types and quantities of seedlings needed to establish the community nursery.



A community nursery has been established in Saamang to provide the needed seedlings for restoration and enrichment planting in the sacred forest. Local materials needed for the project were provided by the community and supplemented with other materials acquired by the project. The nursery establishment and stocking was led by the LVT with active role of the Saamang Women's Group and with technical backstopping provided by the project team and the FSD. At least 6,500 native tree seedlings of economic, medicinal and cultural significance were used to stock the nursery.



About 5,200 tree seedlings have been planted in the sacred forest through enrichment planting with seedlings from the community nursery. The planting which was done from July to early September 2015 was led by the LVT.

Capacity Needs Assessment & Local Capacity Building

A questionnaire was developed on 5th and 6th February 2015 by the project team and used in conducting capacity needs assessment in terms of forest and wildlife laws/policies as well as forest conservation strategies. The needs assessment was done by the project team from 17th to 20th February 2015. The outcomes of the needs assessment formed the bases for the capacity building of the Saamang stool land community members and traditional authority on national forest and wildlife policies and their rights within those policies which can be asserted to protect the sacred resource. The four communities' capacities were also built on the new draft national forest and wildlife policy of 2012 and the opportunities within which the policies which they can assess as well as sustainable community based forest conservation practices. These achieved through community forums and stakeholder engagements.

Development of Community Natural Resource Vision and Sacred Forest Conservation Plan

The project team with support from the LVT, CSRAD and NGC organised and facilitated four rounds each of focussed group discussions (separately for men, women, youth, traditional authority) and community forums in the four communities of Saamang stool land. The first two rounds of focussed group meetings and community forums (held in March and April 2015) has led to the development of Community Based Natural Resources Vision for Saamang.

In line with this Vision, is the active conservation of the Montonnso sacred forest. Hence, the other two rounds each of focussed group meetings and community forums (held in May and June 2015) were used to initiate dialogue processes and consensus building that has led to the development of the Sacred Forest Conservation Plan (SFCP). The rules and regulations contained in the SFCP for the conservation of the Montonnso Sacred Forest has been documented. The community forums were attended by the key community stakeholder groups and representatives from CSRAD, NGC and the FSD. The next two rounds of community forums, slated for October 2015 is to finalise and validate the natural resources Vision and the SFCP.



A team member facilitating a focussed group meeting with (left) men and (right) women



A team member facilitating a community forum for consensus building on rules and regulations for developing the SFCP at Saamang