

Node: Suite Summary^{1,2}

Ghana: Public governance mechanisms for NRM

Context

Southern Ghana consists mainly of areas that were originally tropical forests. But the extent of forest has been much reduced over the last 150 years or so, as increasing areas have been converted to farms, some for the subsistence of the growing population, others to grow cash crops such as oil palm and cocoa. Some of the forest has been set aside by legislation as forest reserves and conservation areas. Much of the rest of the landscape now shows a mosaic of cleared plots and secondary forest regrowth.

Livelihoods are built almost entirely on the use of local natural resources in farming, forestry, charcoal production, and hunting and gathering. There are historically high levels of population mobility and land transactions, linked to short term labour migration and long term migrant settlement. In this context, livelihood strategies are crucially influenced by gender, age, and status as either settler or 'indigene' (all of which are themselves major determinants of poverty and vulnerability). Livelihood activities related to charcoal burning have been a particular area of contention within communities. The view presented by chiefs and some district officials is that charcoal burners are environmentally destructive. This is strongly repudiated by poorer charcoal burners, many of whom are young people and women.

Since 1987, the government of Ghana has embarked on policies of local government devolution and participatory forest management. Decentralisation of local government in theory provides for more democratic and responsive environmental policy making. However, questions have been raised concerning both the effectiveness and the local legitimacy of such new governance mechanisms.

These questions have formed the basis of this Node: suite.

Research Topics

- How do policies to manage NRs affect the livelihoods of people in the forest-agriculture interface (FAI)?
- How have such policies been generated and what is their evidence base?
- What has been the role of different institutions for NR management in the formulation of policies?
- What are the most effective mechanisms to improve the quality of information available to decision makers at all levels of the policy process?
- Is there evidence to support the contention that small-scale charcoal burning is destructive of the natural environment?

¹ This document summarises NRSP's work in one of its Uptake Promotion Node: suites. For further details and links to project and project documents see <http://www.nrsp.org.uk/6.aspx>

² This document presents research funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.

Projects

Since April 2000, three projects have been undertaken in this Node: suite (see below for project links). These projects are:

- R7577: Environmental policies and livelihoods in the forest margins of Brazil and Ghana (March 2000 – March 2002).
- R7957: Poverty dimensions of public governance and forest management in Ghana (March 2001 – March 2002).
- R8258: Informing the policy process: decentralisation and environmental democracy in Ghana (January 2003 – September 2005).

Of these projects, R7957 was a scoping study for the subsequent R8258, which was carried out by the same project team.

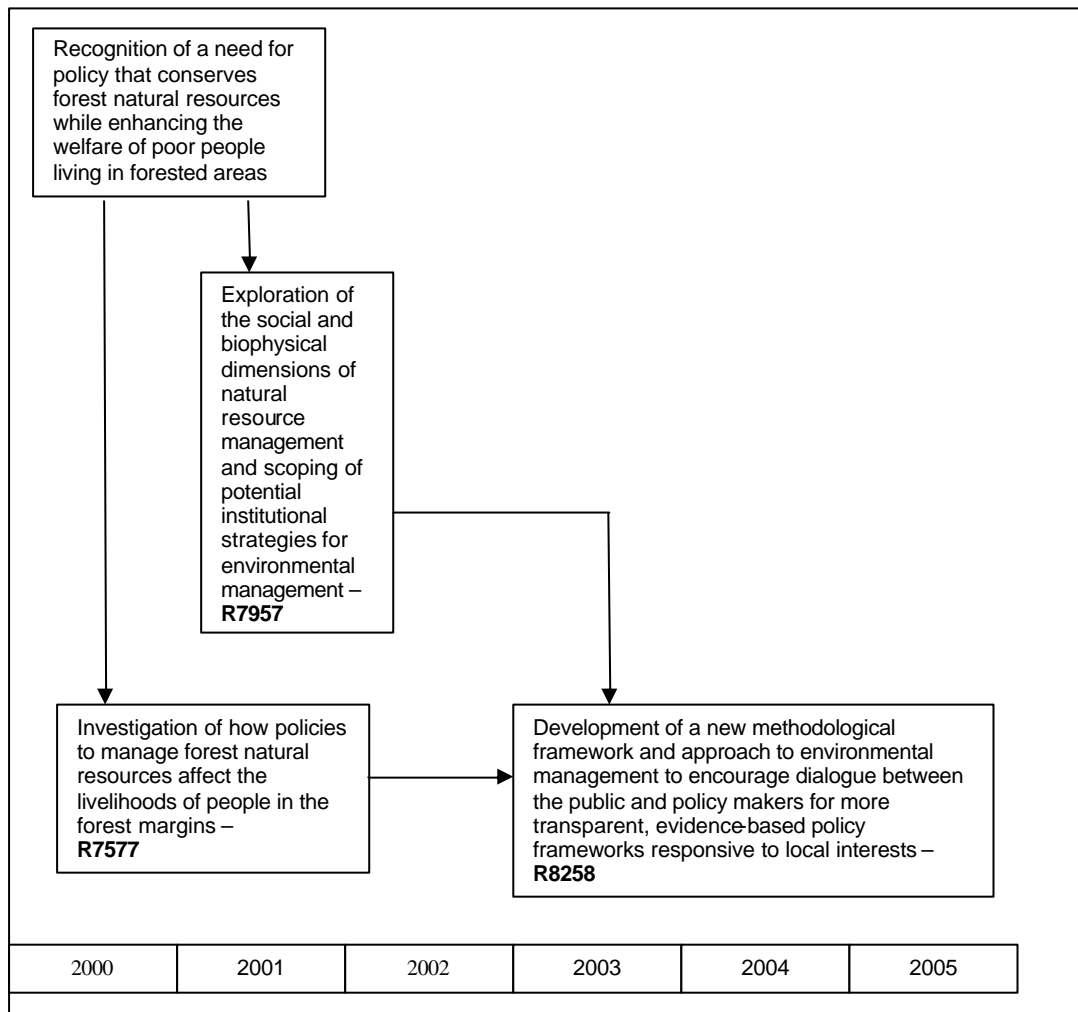
The projects have all been located in the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions of Ghana, predominantly in Wenchi and Kintampo districts. They have used a range of methods in order to provide answers to the questions above. These have included analysis of policy documentation, interviews with key policy-making stakeholders, formal survey, qualitative data collection, remote sensing, a study of land cover change, and the development of an information centre, farmer networks, and forums for discussion.

The first project, R7577, aimed to develop a better understanding of how policies influence livelihoods, with the intention of enabling policy design that enhances welfare and reduces poverty.

The scoping study, R7957, aimed to produce a better understanding of the biophysical, social and institutional dimensions of NR management in the FAI. To this end, local perceptions of environmental change, the history of environmental management and current farming practices in six settlements were investigated. In addition, the functioning of the structures of decentralised government, the District Assembly and its component Area Councils and Unit Committees was examined in one district. Assessment of biophysical change involved use of remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS) techniques. The GIS analysis was checked against local people's perceptions to analyse historical changes in the relative cover of agricultural lands and woodlands.

Project R8258 built on this scoping study. It involved components of action research in its aim of creating policy frameworks which were more transparent and evidence-based, and more responsive to local interests. The project also worked to provide new knowledge to enable poor rural people to improve their livelihoods. The focus of this work was on key areas of environmental conflict, namely fire control, charcoal, and fuelwood production. By engaging closely with communities and elected local authorities, the project was grounded in the structures of democratic decentralisation in Ghana. It was thus well placed both to better understand and influence the policy making process.

Project links within Ghana Suite 1: 2000 - 2005



Outputs

Findings

R7577 found that in Ghana there is a wide range of policies and programmes that affect the use of natural resources, including those designed to conserve them. Most of these have been formulated centrally, some with donor encouragement and financing. But little of this policy was effectively implemented in and around the communities studied. Even when there were local norms to conserve the environment, these were almost always set aside when they conflicted with economic activity. Local decentralised bodies lacked the resources, capacity and experience either to implement national environmental policy or to produce local by-laws appropriate for their jurisdictions.

Hence the impact of environmental policies on livelihoods was limited. That said, the existence of rules and regulations that could be applied sporadically, often in campaigns, constituted a hazard to some local occupations (like charcoal burning), a potential source of corrupt payments, and risked bringing national regulations into disrepute.

These findings were largely supported by those from the scoping study, R7957. The project found that perceptions of environmental change within the region have become intertwined

with received wisdom about small farmer practices. This gives rise to ‘crisis narratives’ concerning the lack of sustainability and destructiveness of traditional agriculture, which are at odds with the empirical data on land use gathered in this research. One of the problems is that such crisis narratives are not evidence-based, but are sustained by a number of features of the local political environment, including competition for both resources and political control.

The findings from R7957 (and to an extent R7577) were fed into the design of the project R8258, ‘Informing the Policy Process’. As an important aim of this project was to improve information flows, considerable basic data concerning farming practices was collected. One key finding was that there is significant evidence for vegetation regeneration after charcoal production when this involves coppicing, a practice usually followed on yam farms. The narratives of destruction are more relevant to larger-scale farmers, who are much less likely to use coppicing. Such information is important for small scale charcoal producers who can use it to support their own perspectives, particularly when interacting with district level personnel.

The project is beginning to provide evidence that, with improved information and coordination of farmer networks and platforms, it may be possible to influence decentralised environmental decision making from the bottom up.

Research messages

- There is little point in formulating environmental policy at central levels if this is not implemented locally. Moreover, there is little evidence that such policy takes local circumstances, be they ecological, economic or social, into account.
- Having regulations on the books that are rarely applied or monitored carries the danger of random and arbitrary implementation, particularly in ‘campaigns’, with policy being seen locally as oppressive and unfair. It creates uncertainty and thus probably reduces investment. It also creates opportunities for corruption.
- There is a delicate balance to be struck between centralised and decentralised policy making and implementation. At the moment, the balance is still in favour of the centre. Some shift towards a more decentralised and participatory approach should yield benefits.
- The new decentralised legal framework in Ghana provides opportunities for greater accountability and civil society participation in decision making. Strengthening the linkages between Unit Committees, Area Councils and the District Assembly is vital to ensure this potential is reached.
- Currently, decentralised policy making still reflects ‘crisis narratives’ and the perspectives of vested interest groups. In order to address this, improvements in the scope and quality of information available to the lowest level of decentralised structures is important. This implies the development of information systems that both the public and policy makers can use to learn about the conditions which affect farmers’ lives.
- Institutional innovations are needed that will create strong platforms to enable negotiation by the users of key resources.
- Promoting effective networks of poor rural farmers has considerable potential to shift power relations and influence policy at the district level, but building such networks carries high transaction costs - this is a major justification for external intervention.
- Networking needs to be accompanied by rigorous in-depth research if it is to function effectively to allow resource users to influence policy.

Key research products

- Amanor, K.S. and Brown, D. 2003. Making environmental management more responsive to local needs: decentralisation and evidence based environmental policy in Ghana. ODI Forestry Briefing Papers, no.3. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Amanor, K.S. and Pabi, O. 2004. Space, time rhetoric and agricultural change in the transition zone of Ghana. In (eds) Guyer, J. and Ambin, E. Time and Generation in African Land Use: Temporal Heterogeneity in Long Term Studies.
- Brown, D. and Amanor, K. 2002. Poverty dimensions of public governance in Ghana. Final Technical Report for project R7957. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Brown, D and Amanor, K.S. 2004. 'Decentralising environmental management; beyond the crisis narrative'. ODI Opinions, No 13 (www.odi.org.uk/opinions).
- Wiggins, S. 2003. Environmental policies and livelihoods in the forest margins of Brazil and Ghana. Final Technical Report for R7577. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Wiggins, S, Kofi, M and Anchirinah, V. 2004. 'Protecting the forest or the people? Environmental policies and livelihoods in the forest margin of southern Ghana. World Development, vol. 32, no. 11:1939-1956.

Impacts

The principal outcomes of this suite relate to the work of R8258. Most significant is the improved capacity of local people to articulate their information needs. This has been evident in the rapid spread of a 'charcoal burners' network'. In addition, District Assembly members and decentralised service delivery personnel are using the Information Centre, and attending project-organised platforms and meetings.

A workshop was held in June 2005 in conjunction with the District Assembly. This was attended by representatives from the Agriculture and Forestry Departments, and regional representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Uptake beyond this has to date (January 2006) been limited. However, R8258 is at the time of writing in discussion with the Agriculture Development and the Crop Research Institute regarding the findings. Unfortunately donors that had been active in the region, including DFID, withdrew, so linkages to donors at a regional level were not possible.

At a national level, the Ghanaian Project Leader has extensive links with both donors and government, which will be important for further uptake work. Among these, the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (CIKOD), funded by CARE, the Forest Sector Civil Society Strengthening Facility (CSSF), which is DFID funded and related to the Forest Sector Development Project (FSDP), and Integrated Social Development Centre, Accra (ISODEC) are likely to be important avenues for uptake promotion.

Further work

R8258 has recently completed, so consolidation and analysis are now the key foci, in addition to ensuring sustainability of the information centre. Means need to be found to maintain the outreach at community level, such as the farmer and charcoal networks, which have considerable potential to generate a shift in power relations at the district level.

R8258 struggled to influence significant parts of the print and broadcasting media for want of funds to purchase copy and air time. However, there is growing competence for video production in Ghana and this may be a useful promotion pathway to the general public.

A book due to be published by ODI will present the findings from both R8258 and the earlier project, R7957.