

VISIT TO FORM GHANA Ltd. FOREST PLANTATION IN THE ASUBIMA FOREST RESERVE-AKUMADAN

Introduction

On 22nd January 2012, a team from KWC central office visited the forest plantation of FORM Ghana which is a pilot model plantation in Ghana and has achieved the FSC forest management certificate (The only plantation in Ghana to have this certificate). FORM Ghana being a forest plantation specialist provides services in reforestation and plantation management. The plantation used to be a natural forest reserve located in the forest savannah transitional zone. However, due to over exploitation coupled with severe bush fires in the 1980s the whole place was degraded. The plantation was started in 2001.

The ultimate aim is to establish 10,000ha of hardwood plantation but planting is done at 1000ha annually.

The forest reserve is surrounded with farmlands which have also been reduced to grassland due to the same reasons given above.

Ownership

It is a partnership venture with FORM International, Penta Ltd. which is a Ghanaian company and other foreign investors, Wenco Ghana Ltd., the Dutch Agency for International business and cooperation (EVD).

Nursery

The group toured the nursery which is a high quality model where different species of both indigenous and introduced origins were at various seedling stages.

Some of the species were: Awiemfosamina (*Albizia ferruginea*), Mahogany (*Khaya Spp*), Odum (*Milicia excelsa*), Wawa bima (*Sterculia rhinopetala*), Kusia (*Nuclea diderrichii*), Wata Puo (*Cola gigentea*), Wawa (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*)(raised from cuttings), Cedrela (*Cedrela odorata*), and Teak (*Tectona grandis*). However, most of the seedlings were Teak and for the plantation initial Teak seedlings were from Ivory Coast.

Currently the nursery can produce enough seedlings for commercial purposes but that is not being done yet.

Other Facilities

There is a training / conference hall, canteen for the workers and clinic for emergencies and other minor ailments.

Currently the workers are on a minimum daily wage of GHS4.00 and they are also given one heavy meal daily. Other benefits are the payment of their NHIS registration, SSNIT and their PAYE.

Field Visit

The team had a field trip to see the plantation. The road leading to the reserve is well constructed with all the necessary road signs. For easy identification of one's location within the reserve, all the road networks have also been named using the letters of the alphabets.

The visiting team had the privilege of seeing fields ranging from two years with opened canopies to ten years with closed canopies and very impressive and encouraging to see. In the areas with the closed canopies, prunnings and trimmings had been done.

The initial stand was 10ft x10ft (3mx3m) for the first 2-3yrs with intercropping of food crops by farmers as the growth is much better. As compared with other national plantation programmes like the HIPC initiative which is planted at 10mx10m with no inter-cropping and thereby poorly managed.

Fire Belts and Fire Towers

Along the road, fire belts have been created by leaving open spaces of about 2 metres, between the road and the planted trees. The opened space is preferred as experience by management of the plantation is that when there is vegetation covering the fire belt any fire will burn the vegetation easily and subsequently get into the plantation. There are indigenous species like Yorke, Mahogany, Chenchen and Wawa planted after the open spaces forming the fire belts. The plantation trees then come after these species.

Even though the original forest was totally degraded, there were a few like the Wata puo, Baobab, Mansonia, Wawa, Potrodom, Bombax and Wawa bima scattered all over the plantation. These were being enumerated in to help management of the plantation know how many there were.

For easy management of possible fire outbreaks, fire towers have been mounted at vantage points on high rise grounds to give an aerial view of the whole plantation. These are called fire towers which are manned by trained staff of the plantation. They have been trained to detect fires from afar and to determine the direction of the fire. If there is a potential danger, the fire team (armed with a vehicle loaded with water in containers and other fire fighting gadgets) is notified and they move towards the direction of the fire to fight and quench it.

The visiting team identified some Cassia spp. and they were told that the FD of FC planted them as fire belts years back.

Wild Animals and HCVFs

When a question was posed to management on the above issues, the team was informed there were no known HCVFs due to the degradation nature of the original forest. Wild animals like monkey, antelopes and bush bucks (deer) are usually not in the plantation because of the sound made by the fallen leaves during movements. Rather, they are found in the buffer zones.

Thinning

Out of the original 11,000 trees planted in 2001, some were suppressed and some died out. In thinning out the trees, some of the indications used are: branching, double stems, forking and knots. If these are not prevalent then on counting the tree every fifth tree is thinned out. Thinning is not done among the boundary trees to help in the closing of the canopies along these places. The first thinning was done after 8 years and the second in the tenth year. Currently thinning has been done to 600 trees/ha and this will be further reduced to about 400 trees/ha. The team was informed that management hopes to thin to a density of about 250 trees/ha.

Uses of Thinning

Even though the market is not readily available, some of the thinning could be used for poles, firewood and charcoal. However, this is not being done as the last time they thinned out, they had to transport the outputs to those who showed interest and there by had its negative financial implications on the company. On the issue of charcoal making the major risk is the possible fire outbreaks so management is being careful.

Harvesting

Final harvesting could be from twenty years when the average diameter could be about 20cm. However for a diameter of about 35cm then the trees should be 22-25 years which will also give a higher value.

Social Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)

When asked about SRAs, the team was informed there was one in place on benefit sharing among the following stakeholders: Communities, Forestry Commission, Offinso traditional council and the local people.

Future Projects

Mr. Gustav Adu, then raised the issue of a possibility of bringing all holder farmers under the same umbrella and taking them through the issues of certification and VPA for better sales prospects. The idea was lauded by the management of FORM and so it was agreed the concept would be visited again at a later date.

Visiting Team

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Recorded by Esi A. Banful

