

## ONE YEAR OF IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMATIC APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT: LESSONS LEARNT BY THE KUMASI WOOD CLUSTER ASSOCIATION

The Kumasi Wood Cluster Association (KWC) has a mission to promote partnerships that support environmentally sound, socially beneficial and economically viable development of small and medium sized forest enterprises (SMFEs). KWCs conviction is that a concerted action of actors achieves greater effectiveness, recognition and impact, and therefore pursues active partnership with relevant forest sector actors in the promotion of sustainable forest management in Ghana. The Ghana Sustainable Forest Management Programme (SFMP-G) thus came in handy, offering the enabling environment and impetus for KWC to further demonstrate this conviction.

The SFMP-G brings together six organizations in a concerted effort towards the common goal of promoting responsible forest management and improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people. The core objectives of the programme include the following:

- To advocate for the incorporation of appropriate forest management in land use practices, formulation and implementation of comprehensive national climate change policy as a means to achieving sustainable forest management in Ghana.
- To facilitate and advocate for equitable forest benefit sharing and good governance for forest fringe communities.
- To promote public education and discourse on Ghana's forest and wild life policy, laws and programs for the enhancement of forest governance.
- To promote the sustainable production, utilisation and marketing of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) by FFCs
- To create awareness and train forest enterprises in the production and utilisation of timber and other forest products from sustainably managed forests through forest certification.

Besides KWC, other partners of the programme include the National Working Group for Forest Certification (NWG), Rural Development and Youth Association (RUDEYA), The Wassa Amenfi Traditional Council, Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products (ASNAPP) and Friends of the Earth- Ghana (FOE).

One year on after implementing the SFMP-G program, the Kumasi Wood Cluster as a core partner of the programme has garnered substantial experience and learnt important lessons worthy of sharing to guide and inform broad stakeholders implementing related partnership programmes.

### **KWC's contribution to the partnership**

The activities of the KWC component of the SFMP-G targeted at small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs), forest-fringe communities (FFCs), civil society and government agencies including the Timber Industries Development Division (TIDD), Forest Services Division (FSD), Resource Management Support Centre (RMSC) all under the Forestry Commission. KWC contributed to the partnership in many ways. Firstly, as required for a robust partnership, KWC as a founding partner participated and contributed diligently to all discourses leading to its establishment. She is a member of the Steering Committee and has been highly visible at meetings and programmes of the SFMP-G. Secondly, KWC took its responsibilities seriously by conscientiously carrying out strategic planning and other assigned activities, including monitoring and reporting on project implementation to meet the objectives of SFMP-G. KWC's other roles toward the partnership included developing tools, manuals and information kits for awareness raising and capacity building on legal and sustainable exploitation of natural resources, including wood and NTFPs. The cluster also took a lead role within the partnership to guide and train target audiences (private and public sectors, civil society and educational institutions) in legality assurances systems as well as certification standards and comply with them.

### **Engaging with stakeholders**

In implementing the KWC component of the partnership, the cluster engaged with stakeholders generally through dialogues, consultations, sensitizations and trainings on issues leading to legal and sustainable forest management. Different stakeholders were engaged differently. For instance, timber companies belonging to the category of small and medium forest enterprises were trained and sensitised on the interpretation and field implementation of the Ghana Forest Management Certification Standards (GFMCs), Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT), and general sustainable forest management. SMFEs that have voluntarily opted for certification were assisted and coached to gain knowledge and relevant skills to pursue certification.

FFCs were engaged by sensitising and training them on benefit sharing arrangements as well as social responsibility agreements. Moreover, local committees were formed to help in negotiations of social responsibility agreements (SRA) and trained in forest certification and Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) issues as well as their expected role in sustainable forest management. Forest communities were again helped to identify plant Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) of economic importance, engage in sustainable collection, do proper post-harvest handling and link them to sustainable marketing outlets. Furthermore, in collaboration with the National Working Group on Certification and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Kumasi Wood Cluster provided training for Forest Certification Officers and local experts.

To assure that the stakeholder engagement remained effective, KWC developed monitoring framework for verifications, assessments, reporting and providing feedbacks on program

objectives and activities. KWC in its responsibility to implement the monitoring plans undertook follow-up visits to project sites, engaged in telephone calls, arranged meetings to exchange information and requested for feedback from stakeholders. Periodic reports were generated to assess and inform program implementation.

## **Implementation challenges**

The stakeholder engagement process did not always sail through as desired. For instance, in some cases, it was difficult having free and ample access to management and employees of SMFEs during work hours to achieve effective training and coaching on legal and sustainable issues regarding their work. Moreover, it was difficult to engage with most forest communities during the day's working period of 8am to 5pm. The waning trust and confidence of FFCs and civil society in programs that promote sustainable and good forest management practices also posed a challenge. This situation is attributable to the murky environment unwittingly created by duty bearers. The low pricing of some NTFPs also served as a disincentive for FFCs during their training in the collection of wild plant NTFPs.

Other practical challenges KWC encountered during the implementation of the SFMP-G included the loss of key staff to bigger and financially endowed timber companies during KWC organised training sessions for the companies.

## **Meeting the implementation challenges**

To manage the challenge associated with reaching FFCs between 8am and 5pm, KWC put in place interventions including engaging the communities early in the mornings before they left for their farms or late afternoon after returning from their farms. Also FFCs were sensitised on the issues of the pricing of plant products by comparing cultivation and management practices of wild NTFPs to other traditional plant products of economic importance.

Moreover, employees of timber companies were engaged immediately after their noon break and /or whilst they are on the job working. This meant such training sessions were short, concise and having to be repeated severally to have desired effects. High ranking officials within the decision making category of government agencies were invited to some of KWC's programs. To engage management in discussions, meetings were held in the evenings after the normal working hours.

## **Results of implementing the KWC component of the SFMP-G**

Efforts to implement the activities of SFMP-G and to manage related challenges yielded some positive results. Firstly, KWC has gained credibility and improved its relationship with forest stakeholders, especially the industry. For example, at one point in time, KWC was requested by the monitoring team of the EU to bring the timber industry together for discussions on the implementation of the FLEGT/VPA.

This aside, the interest of FFCs in the collection of wild NTFPs has soared. For instance, new NTFP collectors have emerged in some communities and, in some cases, are able to collect up to 700 kg kombo nuts (nuts of *Pycnanthus angolensis*) locally called “Otie Aba”, on a pilot basis. The opportunity is now to be utilised in subsequent seasons and replicated in new areas.

KWC’s efforts in the SFMP-G have also led to the establishment of local social responsibility agreement committees for two communities at Sefwi Bopa and Sefwi Betenase communities fringing the Sefwi Wiawso Forest District. A similar committee exists at Tiawia caring for the interest of five communities fringing the Esukawkaw Forest Reserve in the Mpraeso Forest District. The former successfully negotiated for repairs of their road and the payment of their 5 percent stumpage fees with the Bibiani Logging and Lumber Company.

Three timber companies – Bibiani Logging and Lumber Co. Ltd., Sunstex Co. Ltd both in Kumasi and Ayepa Wood Processing at Nkawkaw – have started using an excel template developed by KWC for the internal wood tracking control system (IWCS) which is a requirement for Chain of Custody certification and FLEGT/VPA licensing.

These results, for all intents and purposes, contribute positively to sustainable forest management in Ghana. For instance, FFCs now have knowledge and interest to guard the forest by controlling the incidence of illegal logging since they do not benefit from such activities. Moreover, SMFEs have the awareness to monitor harvests and yields given for logging operations, thus excluding harvest of small diameter trees or exceeding quantities given out for cutting.

Even though it has been slow for SMFEs to buy into certification because of its technicalities and high costs, gradually, the timber industry understands that the market is also insistent on good forest and business practices and they must conform. A test case will be when two SMFEs that are now undertaking controlled wood and chain of custody certification succeed. It will demonstrate the feasibility of certification among SMFEs for others to also adopt it.

FFCs in areas where KWC training and information sharing on legality and certification were carried out are now gradually knowing procedures to follow to optimise benefits to be gained from their forests and to seek redress in disputes and complaints with timber companies regarding abuse of their cultural values and destruction of properties and resources.

## **The impact of the SFMP-G on KWC**

Some staff of KWC have understood the issues relating to FLEGT/VPA better as they interact with staff of other partner organisations involved in the subject matter. The partnership has built the capacity of KWC to the extent that the organisation is gradually taking on responsibilities in other areas of sustainable forest management such as NTFPs issues. The implementation of the program has also impacted positively on staff in the areas of project proposal writing and training in fund raising.

In terms of effective project implementation and management, staff of KWC have also learnt effective monitoring through the development and use of a monitoring framework and tools through their involvement in the SFMP-G. KWC would not have learnt about all the plant NTFPs of economic importance in the wild which are now known in relation to their sustainable harvesting, post-harvest handling, market outlets as well as their cultivation potentials.

### **Meeting the human resource needs**

To meet the human resources needs for the project implementation, KWC made in-kind contribution by upgrading the knowledge and skill base of staff through internal arrangement, and by supporting their training both in-country and overseas. Human resources available for the implementation of the KWC component of the SFMP-G included KWC staff of five professionals, link managers in companies receiving KWC assistance, members of KWC Board, professors and researchers from academia and forestry research institutions, and volunteers of FFCs who serve as opinion leaders, associates, Steering Committee members of SFMP-G and its project coordinator as well as specialised staff in cluster member organisations.

Where project staff could not provide crucial project services outsourcing met the challenge. For instance, activities such as printing of toolkits and brochures on certification and FLEGT/VPA and the translation of brochure on certification into the Asante-Twi language were outsourced to give it a professional touch.

### **Other important lessons learnt**

KWC has learnt that for effective project implementation, a baseline data collection on target audience is crucial. This allows for measured doses of approaches that best meet the specific needs of targets for proper response.

KWC has also learnt that partnership with other organisations can yield shared expertise with little or no cost. Moreover, when approach to project implementation is pragmatic, it can result in maximum use of the joint efforts of the partners.

Through the partnership it was learnt that to make FFCs understand the concepts of certification and FLEGT/VPA, the use of illustrations are better than trying to explain the technical terms.

In retrospect, and given another opportunity to implement similar project, KWC would undertake many more project activities jointly to make a bigger impact due to the combination of synergies from partners. Also activities would be replicated in all program areas of partner organisations for better impact.