

## **Towards responsible forest management – A profile of the Kumasi Wood Cluster Association.**

Established in 2004, the Kumasi Wood Cluster Association (KWC) has the mission of promoting partnership that supports environmentally-sound economic development of Small and Medium Forest Enterprises (SMFEs). This is done through clustering, mobilizing and strengthening SMFEs to attain the minimum requirement for entering and remaining on the export market.

At the moment, three such enterprises constitute the cluster. (1) The Bibiani Logging and Lumber Company Limited, a wholly Ghanaian owned company established in 1946, employs over 380 workers and exports over 80% of all products to such countries as Germany, United Kingdom, China, the United States of America and Nigeria. (2) Sunstex Company Limited, incorporated in 1986 and employing about 90 workers, has over two decades of valuable trade links with American and European buyers. (3) Ghana Veneer Processing Company Limited (GVPCL), established in 1992 and owned by the Government of Ghana employs about 49 workers. These enterprises have entered into a partnership arrangement and are being guided by regulations to operate the cluster.

Inspired by the principles of sustainable forest management and having recognise the value of forest certification as a tool for present and future marketing of their wood products, these enterprises have sought to pursue Group Certification based on the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards for forest management and chain of custody certification.

The Kumasi Wood Cluster Association holds the vision that sustainable and profitable functioning and development of SMFEs shall be guaranteed by effective and efficient utilization of resources available to them. In keeping with this vision, KWC supports efforts that seek to promote the wise use, optimization and development of forest resources. In doing this, KWC uses an integrated approach of adequate human capacity building, organisational strengthening, linkages with relevant forest sector actors including SMFEs, and the promotion of viable alternative livelihoods for forest dependent communities in particular.

### **Human Capacity Building**

Our human capacity building efforts have mainly sought to expound programmes that aim to reduce illegalities associated with timber harvesting, efficient processing of a varying range of wood products and their associated trading in the responsible manner that would reduce global warming and environmental damage. The European Union's Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) and the Forest Certification programme are cases in point. KWC has embarked on rigorous awareness creation and sensitization of relevant actors on these initiatives. For instance, recognizing that the

constellation of media platforms in Ghana provides the requisite leverage for reaching wide stakeholder groups, KWC has trained forty (40) media personnel in parts of Ashanti, Eastern and Western Regions to better inform the general public and facilitate discussions on FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement and Forest Certification programmes through their networks.

This aside, KWC also takes interest in strengthening actors in forest adjoining communities to improve their negotiation positions on the mandatory Social Responsibility Agreement (SRA) payable by timber contractors for community development during timber harvesting. Over the years, KWC has proactively supported the formation of local SRA committees (LSRACs) in three districts, namely Sefwi Wiawso, Sefwi Akontombra and Atiwa.. Among other things, the capacities of the committees have been built to competently discuss and prioritize community developmental needs, negotiate and sign SRAs with timber companies on behalf of their communities.

### **Organisational Strengthening**

KWC is convinced that strong organisations are required to process and apply relevant information to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the utilization of forest resources in the country. To this end, KWC has received sponsorship from the International Tropical Timber Organization ITTO, and is putting in considerable effort to build capacities of Small and Medium Forest Enterprises (SMFEs) to implement internal wood control system (IWCS) consistent with legal timber trade requirements in Ghana. At least staff of seven (10) small-scale timber companies in the Eastern, Western and Ashanti Regions have benefitted from this effort. There are new regulations already enforced in the United States of America (Lacey Amendment Act) and soon to be enforced in the European Union (EU Timber Regulation) which place responsibility on timber and timber products exporting companies to ensure that the timber used and the processes of production, transport and trade of the products are carried out according to the laws and regulations of their country of origin. While exporters must by their action demonstrate due care in ensuring that they apply all regulations, it is by collecting, analysing and keeping efficient and purposeful information and data that they can show that they have carried out their business legally and can sell to the USA and European markets. SMFEs by their set up often lack financial and human capacities to meet such regulations on their own. KWC's implementation of the IWCS is meant to assist them develop information collection templates, both manual and computerized and be trained to apply them. Besides meeting the regulations, analysis of the data collected improves their management decision making.

KWC has also supported the development of a training curriculum for Legality Assurance and Reduced Impact Logging in Ghana through support received under the FAO-ACP-

FLEGT Support program. The cluster has supported the Furniture and Woodworkers Association of Ghana (FAWAG), Woodworkers Associations of Ghana (WAG) and Artisanal Wood Processors' Associations in organizing awareness creation programmes for their members.

## **Linkage**

KWC's added value, perhaps, lie in our ability to serve as a rallying point for relevant forest sector actors to operate in a joint arrangement toward supporting sustainable forest management. Having realized that a concerted action of actors achieve greater effectiveness, recognition and impact in the promotion of sustainable forest management in Ghana, KWC pursues active partnership with relevant forest sector actors. A case in point is the Sustainable Forest Management Partnership - Ghana (SFMP-G). The programme brings together seven organizations in a concerted effort towards the common goal of promoting responsible forest management and improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people.

This approach supported by the Inter-Church Co-operation for Development (ICCO) seeks to encourage local development partners to co-operate in multi-stakeholder settings, to jointly create and implement a program of sustainable forest management. The advantages in linking up with other actors include the creation of complementarity and synergy. This way, partners identify ways in which they can achieve more individually and jointly, by working in tandem with each other, finding the most effective ways to develop and sustain synergy across each other's programs and projects. Other partners of this programme include the National Working Group on Forest Certification, 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).

Beyond this, KWC had a memorandum of understanding in place to network with Rural Development and Youth Association (RUDEYA) to promote good forest governance, equitable forest benefit sharing and forest certification. In pursuance of this, the network sought funding from KASA to address identified forest governance and benefit sharing gaps. Working together this way has helped raise the awareness of about thirty (30) forest communities involving about 5,000 farmers on burning issues including Modified Taungya System, Social Responsibility Agreement (SRA) and Forest Certification.

## **Promotion of viable livelihood options**

The enhancement of livelihood options for forest dependent people receives the critical attention of KWC. This is partly due to our conviction that when made viable, these alternative livelihoods have the potential to wean community actors off the forests, reducing incidence of deforestation and forest degradation.

In this regard, the Kumasi Wood Cluster has over the past months carried out a number of activities together with ASNAPP towards the promotion of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) to forest adjoining communities. The aim is to enhance community participation in forest management through sustainable collection, processing and marketing of these products in different project areas and to improve their livelihoods. Several community consultations, mobilization and sensitization on plant NTFPs of economic importance have been held for over hundred (100) wild collectors and agents in the Sefwi Wiawso and Mpraeso Forest Districts of Ghana.

Surely, eight years of creating the enabling environment for improved sustainable forest management in this complex but critical arena has not come without challenges. Nevertheless, these fade into insignificance when we reflect on the positive contributions KWC has made in the forest sector. KWC has now grown in capacity and experience and has therefore diversified its scope of activities and programmes. Apart from its forest management and chain of custody certification, it is also undertaking other forest and environmental related projects which are all geared towards sustainable forest management and environmental protection.

KWC remains committed to deepening our collaboration with other relevant forest actors while working towards the promotion of wise use, optimization and development of forest resources. Potential partners and stakeholders are encouraged to identify possible areas for collaboration.