

## **Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources: - A Case Study in the Hohoe Municipality, Ghana**

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### **Introduction**

The biological diversity of our environment is crucial to sustaining human livelihoods: that is why people strive to preserve it. Its preservation requires conservation of the relevant habitats and ecosystems. Many of the world's important ecosystems and those most worth protecting are in the developing countries - where because of the prevailing poverty they are often subjected to a high level of competing landuse pressure.

This is why sustainable management of natural resources is so important for the conservation of biological diversity. But in many developing countries, low priority is given to assuring effective conservation of biological resources resulting in a corresponding insufficient level of capacities. Thus involvement of local communities in conservation activities becomes essential to ensure long-term conservation.

This paper reports on conservation activities involving local communities in the Hohoe Municipality in the Volta Region of Ghana that are making significant contributions to the development of ecotourism in the area. Information for the paper was collected through visits to these ecotourism sites and from interviews with opinion leaders and farmers in the rural communities and review of various reports of public and private sector organizations.

### **Results and Discussions**

Like most other areas in Ghana food production systems in the Hohoe Municipality, are under threat and, with them the accompanying local knowledge, culture and skill of the food producers due to loss of agricultural biodiversity

For example half of the breeds of many domestic animals have been lost .More than eighty (80) percent of crop varieties have disappeared from the fields of the local farmers

There are many causes of this decline but the major ones are (i) rapid explosion of population (ii) rapid expansion of housing and green revolution agriculture and (iii) intensive timber lumbering for plywood production, some production systems using genetically modified species.

In spite of this decline in agricultural biodiversity the Hohoe Municipality has many ecotourism sites. These are the Wli, Aflabo, Tagbo and Tsatsadu falls. Other ecotourism sites are the mountains Afadjato and the Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary.

The Hohoe Municipality involves the local communities as much as possible in the management of these ecotourism sites to ensure that they are kept well while the ecological and cultural resources in their environment are conserved.

At these sites, indigenous knowledge involving taboos and the institution of local laws have helped to conserve biodiversity. For example the forefathers of the current villagers at Liatu Wote considered the Tagbo River sacred and some of the belief is still conserved. For instance no fishing is allowed in the river as the spirits of their ancestors are thought to live in it. Washing on Fridays is also prohibited because on this day, the spirit of the river and its children bath. Also dogs are taboo in the village, because inhabitants believe they can see the spirits and scare them off with their barking.

Another example is the Tafi Monkey Sanctuary (a sacred grove) which is a traditional conservation area backed by statutory enforcement in co-operation with local communities. These monkeys are found in a remnant patch of forests, which has survived fire and human disturbance around the village. These monkeys are regarded as gods and as such the natives do not kill them. They are protected by tradition.

However, in the late 1980s these beliefs were almost abandoned when Christianity became the main religion and the villagers lost

reverence for the animals. Thus in 1993 to protect the monkeys and the forest they live in, a sanctuary was created in 1993 by a coalition of villagers, public institutions and NGOs

To ensure that biodiversity in the Hohoe Municipality is conserved, the GNAFF in Affiliation with Majestic Agribusiness Center in Hohoe have initiated the following long term strategies in partnership with CTA, The Netherlands:

- Sensitization of stakeholders on environmental protection and degradation;
- Organization on priority information themes (PIT) to identify potential problems, set priorities, analyze decision making and development of community action plan;
- Supporting local communities with pilot micro-enterprises and other income generating activities including agriculture;
- Holding environmental awareness days on land degradation and forest conservation;
- Establishment of woodlots in the communities;
- Supporting the use of appropriate and safe agrochemicals to conserve biodiversity;
- Sensitization of communities on gender issues in biodiversity conservation.

## Conclusions

Community-based ecotourism is on the rise in Ghana as the country positions itself to become the prime destination for visitors to Africa.

Ecotourism contributes to the management and protection of some national parks, 'wilderness areas' and wildlife; creates jobs for community members and allows them to directly participate in determining how the generated income will be reinvested. For the ecotourism, it allows you to enjoy the fauna and flora in their natural environment with minimal damage to the environment.

There are other sacred groves and ecosystems protected by local people that are widespread not only in the Hohoe Municipality but also in the rest of the Volta Region. These can further be developed for ecotourism in the local communities to enhance rural development

The GNAFF will contribute to this effort by packaging information on biodiversity in local content for dissemination through film shows, drama, print media, television and radio. In this way biodiversity will be conserved for generations to come.