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**COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, LOCAL
ENTERPRISE AND NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE**

Sophia Akushie Wittmann

In recent times, efforts at ensuring more responsible use of natural resources, as well as methods in conserving these resources have gained increased attention particularly in ensuring responsible usage towards securing their future existence. Locally, the worth of these resources cannot be undermined. Particularly for rural communities in Ghana, natural resource in terms of forests and water bodies provide the main source of income and livelihood. Conservation issues however pose a challenge to several communities where natural resources face the threat of extinction based on poor governance. These include practices such as forest clearing for charcoal and water body pollution through farming practices amongst others.

Addressing issues bordering on the protection of these resources however demands continuous efforts from stakeholders in the achievement of conservation through the exercise of sustainable practices. In supporting this process within its programmes geared towards enhancing rural economic growth, SENCAB gears its activities towards bringing together relevant stakeholders in its awareness enhancing programme in three chosen pilot communities; Akutuase, Kwamoso and Lawra in the Western, Eastern and Northern regions respectively. In revitalizing the need to secure appropriate governance and transparency structures for natural resource protection, SENCAB, beginning in 2012, has initiated a series of focused sensitization sessions in its pilot communities.

In Akutuase in the western region, SENCAB has laid focus since 2012 on supporting indigenous groups realize their economic potential, integrating their use of local resources in a governed manner in the execution of enterprise engagements. To this end, SENCAB has laid emphasis on engaging with traditional leaders in creating a platform to draw in stakeholders from local government authority as well as key entrepreneurial personalities in initiating the process of corporate social responsibility in resource management and governance from both local and district levels.

Initial Achievements

In April and November 2012, SENCAB furthered the need for awareness creation in natural resource protection where meetings were held in the Kwamoso and Akutuase communities. Interactions were held with community traditional heads, opinion leaders and key local entrepreneurs in identifying specific local resources around which management and governance should be intensified as well as mapping out strategies towards the execution of laid out conservation methods. In furthering the process, SENCAB recently organized an initial awareness creation session in the Kwamoso district within the eastern region, with the aim towards supporting community initiative in working together with other stakeholders to reduce the incidence of forest mismanagement and pollution of water bodies amongst others.

Background to the District

The Kwamoso community is located in the eastern region of Ghana, approximately 10km from the eastern regional district capital, Koforidua, on the Mamfe- Koforidua main access route. The population is made up of approximately 2,295 inhabitants with a slightly higher ratio of women to men. Community natives hail from Akropong Akuapem. The major tribes within the Kwamoso Akuapem community comprise the Akans with minor groups of Ewes, Ga adangbes and northerners. The community was historically founded with the grouping of the traditional Obedemase, Domeabra, Nyarwonsu and Bewase settlements with initial economic engagements including trading in palmwine and food stuffs with traders from the district capital as well as from Accra.

Currently, major economic activities within the community include crop farming, poultry rearing and petty trading. A minor section of the community are engaged within the public sector particularly within the teaching and nursing fields.

A smaller section as well engage in artisan activities. Crop farming activities include cassava and maize cultivation and processing, palm oil cultivation as well as vegetable farming. Poultry farming, which includes rearing of animals such as sheep, goats and pigs is widely engaged in on a small scale basis. In terms of oil palm cultivation, the community is historically noted in view of the establishment of the second largest state oil palm plantation.

In terms of infrastructure, the community is inadequately resourced. One clinic serves the community, with challenges being met in terms of unstable medical staff. A clearly demarcated market area with permanent structures is not available. In terms of education, two private schools with poor infrastructure as well as one public school serve the community. School structures currently in use do not have the capacity to serve the entire community.

SENCAB's choice of the community in awareness creation for natural resource conservation lies in the wanton use of natural resources such as water bodies, forest reserve and vegetation in farming practices. In bird and animal hunting activities, farmers often engage in setting fires to smoke them out of their holes and nests, as well as using light explosive chemicals on tree tops. Water bodies flowing directly below the affected vegetation are often polluted with rest of chemical as well as further destruction of vegetation. In cultivation activities farmers often tend to use water bodies nearby cultivation areas for the cleansing of equipment used for spraying of crops amongst others thereby chemically polluting water sources parallelly serving domestic purposes.

Initial Achievements

Focusing on the Kwamoso community, SENCAB has made inroads into creating awareness on the need for appropriate governance of local resources through initial sensitization sessions. Partly supported through donation towards initial execution of the sensitization process, SENCAB recently successfully organized a sensitization session bringing together traditional representation as well as key informants in awareness creation. In the session, a range of issues arising from respondents within the interactive sessions were gathered as base for focus in the further development of workshop sessions through the use of tools developed. The general issue identified through observation was that the level of transparency between government forest officials and other stakeholders such as local groups and traditional authority needed to be improved to support responsible use of water bodies and forest reserve by local entrepreneurs.

Based on these observations, SENCAB has identified further areas of work to be achieved. Firstly, local entrepreneurs engaged in natural resource use as well as local groups within the community representing civic engagement should be proactive in their engagements towards ensuring responsible use of resources with collaboration from forest and resource governance bodies whilst advocating for transparency in community resource governance matters.

Interactions revealed little knowledge on governance processes at the district level regarding community water bodies. It is obvious that an improved regulation of resources and transparency system in the control of resource use implies working towards applying the laws and provisions set for resource governance. Interaction revealed lack of communication over the years regarding demand from local civil society groupings and local entrepreneurs in enhancing their advocacy capacities towards traditional authority and the district assembly in terms of accountability for resource revenue disbursement as well as development of special responsibility, control and watch over resource use.

Loss of water bodies invariably implies reduction in the availability of pipe borne water for the community. Currently, amongst the six water bodies around the vicinity of the community, a couple have been abandoned due to irresponsible use and eventual drying out. Additionally, the state farm pond in the vicinity of the community is currently blocked due to lack of proper care and irresponsible use, implying the need for excavation and silting to enable use by the community. Currently, though the community experiences minimum challenges in terms of encroachment on their sacred forest, there is the need to initiate awareness for protection to strengthen the role of traditional authorities in this regard.

This implies creating the avenue through the provision of the necessary platform to devise effective means in measuring the adequacy of community resources towards enabling corresponding sensitization to be accomplished for the target group. In creating the platform there will be the need to take cognisance of the knowledge gap between community groups and local authority representation in ensuring appropriate knowledge transfer for efficient collaboration in the management of resources.

Bridging of the knowledge gap between local government and traditional authority as against entire community representation will need to be further addressed. Taking cognisance of the advocacy gap, it is pertinent that traditional authority and district assembly representation, in spearheading communal interests, strengthen advocacy in establishing direct interaction with stakeholders such as the extraction companies operating within the community- palm oil and timber,- as well as effectively liaise with the forestry commission representation in keeping up to date information on the management and use of community resources. This is all the more relevant in view of the fact that adequate management of resources particularly in the forest sector ensures regulated management of revenues accrued by the forest commission representation locally, invariably contributing to finances for the development of the community. The onus thus lies on local government representation, as well as the district house of chiefs representing traditional authority at the local level to assume a more forward role.

In addressing these concerns, SENCAB intends further acts towards creating a platform with community stakeholders. In this vein, SENCAB has taken initial steps with local government authority as well as the traditional council and key enterprise group personalities in its scoping exercise undergone with the community in July 2013. The CIRM¹ framework in providing a comprehensive research frame will thus be used to support an improved data collection system for natural resource management within the community.

Delving deeper into the community profile implies further collation of socio demographic characteristics. Further identification of the cultural and economic perceptions of the inhabitants on resource conservation will support the diagnosing of the existing state of interaction for the purpose and in the identification of new strategies for enhanced conservation.

A deeper scoping will be made within the community in the identification of local institutions and entrepreneurial groups existing within the community, the roles they currently play and their degree of functionality in supporting the process. Further identification will be made in defining what roles they can further play. In the process, core identification will be made of existing natural resources with concentration on forest and water bodies, as well as innovations identified for sustainability and management, communication and innovative processes. Information on current challenges and how they have been dealt with as well as current linkages and interaction achieved and how they can be strengthened are issues to be reached through detailed focus discussions. Attaining results in the process is expected to be achieved through coming up with a final consensus on resource conservation agreed on by stakeholders.

¹The Framework for Community Institutional and Resource Mapping (CIRM) represents a frame supporting the efficient mapping of community resources for local development and borders on identifying socio cultural elements which can be harnessed in developing project design.