



INNOVATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL POLICY REFORMS UNDER THE GHANA FOREST INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Introduction

Successful management of off-reserve landscape in Ghana has been unattainable largely because of the complexity of tree tenure and weak policy to address the issue. The willingness of farmers to participate in the management and protection of forest is key in landscape restoration and a contributing factor to possibly halt further degradation. The expected level of participation by farmers in safeguarding off-reserve forest will be positive only when there is a security of tenure to ensure they benefit from tending and from investing in management approaches that improve the landscape cover.

Through the Ghana Forest Investment Programme, the security in the form of economic compensation to farmers is being addressed through reform in the uncondusive policy.

The underlying Factors and the Need for the Reform

Lack of incentives is the main reason farmers are unwilling to fully participate in the protection and management of off-reserve landscape. The current policy on tree tenure is regarded as a disincentive to farmers and sustainable forest management. Majority of farmers as occupants of off-reserve landscape are described as migrants and not landowners. They play a vital role in the nurturing of naturally occurring trees. Yet, they are not included in the list of beneficiaries when the same trees they nurture are harvested. The laxity in enforcement of compensation to farmers when timber contractors destroy their farms during logging is another contributing factor. These farmers would therefore, destroy the forest and rather increase agriculture productivity to support their daily subsistence.

Against the backdrop, reform in the current non-condusive policy governing tree tenure rights and benefit sharing arrangement was necessary to address the shortfalls and ensure an incremental change in the tenure features that would facilitate the achievement of sustainable management of private and communal lands.



Stop slash and burn agriculture

Status of the Reforms

There has been extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders including farmers in the reform process. The realization that farmers are an integral part in the protection and management of the forest and as such must receive a stake from timber harvesting was the starting point in the reform process. The reform has outlined benefits for farmers who nurture naturally occurring trees on their farms and has assured farmers that they have an ownership right over planted trees.

Currently, a timber tending toll agreed among stakeholders is being finalized to back the implementation of the policy and is expected to further motivate the farmers to nurture and maintain trees on their farms. The timber tending toll ensures that farmers are compensated by Industry Players (Timber Companies) before harvesting trees they have nurtured.

Rolling out of the tree registration strategy have boosted the confidence of the farmers in the overall goal of the policy reforms. The tree registration form is designed to collect information on the role played by farmers in the nurturing of naturally occurring trees and also establish ownership for trees planted. A database is housed within the Forestry Commission to capture and store these information and the programme is working with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to pilot the registration in selected programme Districts. The Forestry Commission will roll out the full implementation based on the lessons from the pilot.

Impacts of the Reforms on the Landscape

The main drive behind the reform is for farmers to adopt sustainable forestry practices. The reform process is not fully completed but through the engagements of farmers in the consensus building process, the various awareness campaigns on the progress of the policy and expectations, farmers are already exhibiting good management practices. The attitudinal change by farmers because of the reform is good for the landscape. Farmers are no longer removing naturally-occurring trees on their farm to increase agriculture productivity but are rather nurturing already existing trees and are planting new ones. Furthermore, forest users confidence have been boosted with the piloting of the registration of tree. Farmers have equity in the nurtured trees and it serves as collateral. This has contributed significantly to the adoption of the proposed management practices of the farmers and the behavioral change on the landscape.

Wayforward and Conclusion

Though the reform process is not complete, the buy-in has been overwhelming and the programme is beginning to see the impact on the ground. This policy reform supported by the programme is not jurisdictional but national hence the programme intends to extend the awareness campaign and consensus building to non programme areas.



Plant more trees in farms