



Governance of restoration and institutions: Working with Ghana's Community Resource Management Areas

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ABSTRACT

Restoration is occurring worldwide in a variety of landscapes. In Ghana, Community Resource Management Areas (CREMAs) are employed by the government and communities to address participatory management outside protected areas, including a focus on forest landscape restoration. Recent research in one restoration-oriented CREMA in western Ghana revealed internal governance issues including accountability and transparency which reduced the CREMA's ability to facilitate restoration on cocoa farms. Since then, through action learning, the community has been working to improve governance. This case study details that process and shows how working with CREMAs on these governance issues could enable restoration to occur. Lessons for policy and practice are presented.

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1. Forest restoration in Ghana

Restoration is occurring in landscapes worldwide in response to land-use and environmental pressures. Many countries are working towards achieving restoration goals through commitments to the United National (UN) conventions (Aronson & Alexander, 2013).¹ Governance of restoration work remains a challenge for many practitioners; yet improving governance can create enabling conditions in which restoration can occur (Mansourian, 2016). The ways in which restoration is being facilitated varies by country and is often managed by local institutions. However, in most cases, working with institutions on improving governance to enable restoration is not well documented and therefore, the benefits of working with institutions in this context remain poorly known. Here we focus on a case from Ghana involving participatory management. This case is relevant both for managing and restoring natural

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¹ Such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification or as a contribution to REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Degradation and Deforestation+) through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

resources in Ghana's rural landscapes and for improving the internal governance of some institutions responsible for restoration in these landscapes.

In West Africa, people have been using Ghana's southern, humid forests for millennia. Today, this forest, located in the Guineo-Congolian Center of Endemism for plant diversity, has multiple land uses based on agriculture and forestry. On-farm, timber and commercial fruit trees are sometimes planted on shade-grown cocoa farms to create agroforestry concessions. One land use in particular, cocoa farming, has intensified in south-western Ghana in response to land availability and modern technologies whereby migrating farmers may create new, full-sun cocoa farms on old agroforestry plots (Ruf, 2011). In order to understand the potential for restoration in this forested area, a spatial, data-driven restoration assessment was performed in Ghana in 2011. Unsurprisingly, this assessment identified significant challenges. However, restoration is a priority for the government of Ghana with restoration efforts including the establishment of plantations, the Modified Taungya System (i.e. regulated agroforestry in protected areas), and improving agroforestry systems through a forest landscape restoration approach which focuses on improving ecosystem services and human well-being at the landscape level (Maginnis et al., 2014). Working with smallholder farmers to increase tree cover on their farms is thought to help reverse the trend from forest cover loss (Oduro, Mohren, Peña-Claros, Kyereh, & Art, 2015).

2. Working with local institutions to enable restoration in Ghana

Around Ghana's forest reserves and some protected areas, Community Resource Management Areas (CREMAs) have been developed by the government to help address conservation issues on community lands and as part of a natural resource decentralization process. In some CREMAs, on-farm restoration is the focus. Farmers are encouraged to plant trees in order to increase productivity and carbon stocks and diversify incomes including from other commercialized tree species (e.g. *Terminalia superba* and *Allanblackia parviflora*). Such work contributes to the restoration of functioning agroforestry systems. Working through collectives, such as a CREMA, is a novel way to reach numerous smallholders across a landscape, offering the means to achieving Ghana's restoration objectives as stated in its national plantation strategy, as well as the country's 2 million hectare pledge to the Bonn Challenge, a global restoration commitment. The Ghana Forest and Wildlife Policy 2012 and Ghana's National REDD+ Strategy support the CREMA approach as a potential delivery mechanism for REDD+ actions at the local level. Furthermore, the government of Ghana identifies CREMAs as an important 'participatory model' and claims that the CREMAs will create the 'right conditions' for democratic participation, and opportunities and financial incentives for local communities to participate in forest conservation and management. This case describes issues of governance and restoration at two levels in western Ghana: the CREMA as a governance mechanism at the landscape level and the internal governance issues within the CREMA itself at the site level.

A CREMA is a geographically defined area which is made up of two or more communities that have been given authority by the state to manage their natural resources sustainably according to agreed legal, constitutional and management frameworks which support the integration of natural resource management with already existing local production systems such as agroforestry. There are currently 29 CREMAs across Ghana, at different stages of establishment, covering a total area of 491,000 ha. Of these, 20 are fully operational (Blomley, unpublished data).

The CREMA model provides a mechanism for community-led landscape planning and decision making. Landscape restoration activities such as the integration of indigenous trees on cocoa farms and some commercial tree plantations of fast-growing exotic species are being undertaken. While initially CREMAs established by the Ghanaian Wildlife Division targeted the co-management of the wildlife in and around protected areas, CREMAs now have extended their focus to any natural resource the local communities deem fit for conservation and crucial for their livelihoods. In the transition and savanna regions of Ghana where wildfire prevention and control, livestock grazing and wood fuel production are of critical importance, CREMAs provide opportunities for community monitoring teams as well as community managed woodlots for sustainable fuel wood production and management of grasslands according to agreed sustainable grazing protocols. A more communal approach to resource management, utilization and benefit sharing is a viable and common practice. In the high forest zone however, where this case study occurs, resources are more individually owned and landscape restoration activities such as integration of indigenous trees on farms (mostly cocoa) and some commercial tree plantations of fast growing exotic species are being undertaken.

3. A restoration-focused CREMA in the western region of Ghana

In 2004, a CREMA was established in the western region, with an area of 90 square kilometers, encompassing 20 communities

which contain approximately 10,000 individuals in 1600 households. Only 18% of the population has chosen to be a member of the CREMA. For participating households, more than 60% of the income may be attributed to the sale of cocoa, with 68% of the farms growing shade-grown cocoa (Westerberg et al., unpublished data). This CREMA is located in a landscape that includes part of the only surviving high forests of Ghana with reserves being part of Ghana's Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas and global Key Biodiversity Areas.

The establishment of the CREMA was supported by a small grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to an Accra-based NGO. Securing tenure for planted trees on private farms was one of the main objectives of the project. The NGO situated itself as an advocacy organization that carried farmer's requests to the government and became the CREMA Secretariat. Later, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) played a substantial and sustained role in the CREMA's formalization by providing technical and financial support.

According to the Ghanaian Forestry Commission's 2006 directive on the registration of private plantations outside forest reserves, trees planted by farmers on their land belong to them, but must be registered. Rights to naturally occurring trees are, however, still vested in the state. This has discouraged many farmers from nurturing and protecting trees on their farms. Backed by advocacy of IUCN, the Ghanaian government took steps towards the privatization of tree tenure by allowing the Forestry Commission to issue a certificate to farmers to register the ownership rights of planted trees. Although tree tenure is yet to be backed by legislation², CREMAs, such as this one, promise that farmers can obtain benefits through tree planting and private titles to the trees they have planted. This is an important change from previous tree-planting activities carried out under the aegis of the Forestry Commission. In 2010, this CREMA was granted a Certificate of Devolution by the government which transferred the authority for management and utilization of resources within the CREMA to the people in the participating villages.

While important strides have been made in securing tenure for planted trees, the governance structure of the CREMA in this case was weak and constrained by both limited resources and decision-making powers. The Constitution of this CREMA states that all individuals residing within the area and having land-based livelihood interests can become members. But empirical evidence suggested that those who identified as members did so on the basis of their tree-planting activities, interest in the environment, attending 'forestry'-related meetings, and their position in the rural social hierarchy. During research on the governance of the CREMA, the villagers expressed dissatisfaction, had low expectations of their elected representatives and the government, perceiving them as unresponsive and unaccountable. Furthermore, even though the Accra-based NGO was able to obtain external funds, the research indicated that there was a lack of a real transfer of financial and decision-making resources to the CREMA members; that it depended on external funds and project-based engagement by NGOs; that there was inadequate accountability by local leaders; and that the lack of elections allowed the leadership to be concentrated with the same group of actors. Thus, in spite of the government's stated commitment towards more inclusive forestry policies and reforms to decentralize resource management, some non-accountable local institutional arrangements in forestry were empowered in the name of participatory forestry and decentralization in Ghana (Baruah, 2015).

² A new Wildlife Bill which will provide legal backing for CREMAs is before the Ghanaian Parliament for approval.

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