

## Project Update: December 2015

The second phase of the project involved the application of the knowledge gained during the tree nursery training (in the first phase), and a direct engagement of participants with the natural environment in two educational field trips. The participants have been given seedling quotas to raise towards the watershed planting in the third phase. So far, some of the young enthusiastic participants have been able to successfully use the knowledge gained to raise about 2000 healthily growing *Cassia siamea* seedlings. Instead of commercially available black polypots, the participants innovatively used littered sachet water bags, thereby contributing to reducing environmental pollutants. The enthusiasm with which some of the young students are raising their seedlings is breathtaking and very encouraging. It shows that the attitude of many people to the environment can be changed, and their interest for environmental conservation aroused if they are strategically engaged and taught to know the direct and indirect benefits of doing so.

The educational field trip was to the Muni-Pomadze Ramsar site, located right in the project area (Winneba). It was interesting to note that, all the participants had been living in Winneba for at least 10 years, but none had ever visited the Muni-Pomadze conservation and tourist attraction site before, neither did they know about the migratory birds that use the Ramsar site. With practical activities, participants were engaged to know at first hand the importance of wetlands, what a mangrove forest is, and the various ecosystem services that flow from wetlands. In additions, the participants learnt about sandy beach ecology and the direct effects of destroying or degrading such ecosystems on their lives, as inhabitants of Winneba. Participants also tried their hands on how to measure salinity and temperature of the muni-lagoon, around which a mangrove forest was being raised.

At the end of the day, the participants were very concerned about the need to rehabilitate and mangrove forest and maintain the mangrove ecosystem, because they had understood the interesting dynamics within the mangrove ecosystem, the ecosystems services that flows from it, and how its degradation will have a direct effect on their lives.



One of the participant's tree nursery close to their house.



Left: PI explaining a point about the sandy beach. Middle: Some of the participants trying their hands on how the salinity of the Muni lagoon is measure with a refractometer. Right: Some participants trying to find ecosystem services in a word maze in a timed challenge during the field trip.