

## **Project Update: March 2016**

### **Introduction**

The national level discourse on the long term status of the Atewa Range Forest reserve and implications for thousands of people who fringe and depend on the reserve is gathering momentum. The first Rufford Small Grant funded activities including ecosystem assessment of the services of Atewa Range Forest reserve and the development of management options. The Second Small Grant is funding actions that feed into a national level discourse which will result in a decision on the long term management status of the reserve by building the capacities of selected fringe communities to engage meaningfully and in a non-destructive way in the management of the reserve thereby providing co-benefits of conservation and enhancement of livelihoods of the people.

Currently, a number of studies funded by other donor partners is on-going. This is to provide credible, quantitative context for any decision that will be taken. The prospects are good. It is envisaged that Atewa Range Forest Reserve will be elevated to the status of a national park with a number of attendant ecotourism opportunities for community-private-public partnerships that will inure to the benefit of both nature and man.

This project which is funded by the small grants has been well received and has good will among by stakeholders in general and the pilot communities in particular. Project activities have progressed successfully albeit with some challenges notably is the long drought period that Ghana experienced extending into March 2016. This affected seedling raising and tree planting actions. This will be recovered in the coming months.

### **Achievement per schedule**

1. Community entry, project introduction and other start up activities.

The project team (project leader and assistant) undertook a community entry and introduction of the project during the reporting period. As local protocol demands, the team visited the traditional rulers (chief) palace to introduce the project and then met with the communities for a series of meetings to discuss the project goals and objectives and the proposed activities for the rest of the months and how to get their involvement to make the project a success.

The detailed report from each of the communities in terms of the discussions is below.

The estimated population of the town is about 3500. The community is headed by an Odikro (delegated chief). The taboo days are Thursdays (this means it is ideal to hold community meetings during these days in order to have maximum participation). Due to the first phase of the project and activities by forbearers such as Arocha-Ghana, the community is enlightened about the benefits of the forest and so welcomes the idea of making the forest a national park. They are however not happy with the current lack or limited participation in the management of the Atewa forest. They welcomed the new project with open arms and are grateful that their request for assistance in getting seedlings to plant has been taken on

board through the second project. They also seem poised to exploit all available opportunities for eco-tourism should the forest be turned into a national park.

#### Akyem Apapam

The community has an estimated population of about 3000. The community is very close to the forest and to the source of River Densu and Ayensu. The major occupation is farming and small scale mining. However more youth are going into small scale mining with disastrous consequences for the environment. The community also observe Thursdays as taboo days. The community welcomed the new project. The main concern of the lack of employment opportunities and therefore the option of eco-tourism is very much welcomed.

#### Kyebe Sagyimase

The population of the community is about 2700. The town has a major entrance into the forest. The major occupation is farming. However there some few hunters and chainsaw operators in the community. The taboo days in the community is Thursdays. There seem to be a potential objection to making Atewa a national park as some community members oppose the idea. They claim they have limited lands for farming and therefore they would be happy if their farmlands are extended into the forest. They welcome the idea of getting seedlings to plant. More environmental education has to be carried out here.

#### Akyem Bansa

The town has a population of about 3500. It has a sacred groove where all the kings of Akyem are buried. Tuesdays are taboo days. This community complained of destruction of their land as a result of illegal small scale mining (galamsey) activities. They also said their water is polluted as a result of the galamsey. There is need for more environmental education in this community. They were very happy about the new project and pledged to fully participate.

### 2. Discussions with the Business Advisory Center (BAC) representatives of the District Assembly

The project team has held initial meetings with the Business Advisory Center (BAC) of the District Assembly. The project will liaise with the center to develop tailor made training of selected entrepreneurship venture for the communities to capacitate the community members to take full advantage of the ecotourism potential of Atewa forest reserve. The materials are currently in development and the training programmes which will take the form of community meetings but in a more structured and detailed manner will commence in the coming weeks.

### 3. Initial assessment of the quantities of seedlings needed by farmers for planting

The team has undertaken an initial assessment of the quantity and species of tree seedlings needed by farmers to plant in their farms to create the buffer zones in order to reduce the pressure on the forest reserve. The raining season has started and plans are advanced to cart the seedlings and supply to the farmers for planting to begin in the coming weeks.

4. Discussions with suppliers and training of farmers on tree nursery

The number of seedlings required far exceeds the 2500 seedlings this project will provide. We are liaising with the Forestry Commission and other private tree seedling growers to undertake training for the farmers to raise their seedlings for planting. This will be followed up in the coming weeks.

5. Development of information and environmental awareness materials for environmental clubs in the schools

The project team has met with some NGOs working actively in the area to develop complimentary awareness materials for educating environmental clubs in the primary and high schools in the district. The materials are in print and will be used for awareness creation in the coming weeks.

**Activity plan for April to June 2016**

The activities planned for the next few months include the following:

1. Tree seedling supply and planting by farmers (to create the buffer zone).
2. Training on ecotourism potential and how the communities can take advantage of it.
3. Training on tree seedling raising.
4. Environmental awareness through the environmental clubs in primary and high schools.
5. Policy dialogue and discussions at the national level to incorporate the lessons learned from the project to inform decision making that will inure to the benefit of the communities.