

COMMUNIQUE

EMPOWERING AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN GHANA

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR), the Green Livelihood Alliance (A Rocha Ghana, Tropenbos Ghana, Friends of the Earth Ghana), SNV, IUCN, Mondelez International Cocoa Life Program and the Shared Resources Joint Solutions, organised a national policy dialogue to discuss the implementation, successes and challenges of Community Resource Management Areas (CREMAs) across the country. CREMAs as a collaborative and inclusive natural resources governance and management framework was adopted to phase out exclusive conservation practices to recognize and foster local community participation and responsibility in the conservation of natural resources in Ghana.

The dialogue, held on 3rd October 2018 in Accra, was on the theme “*Empowering Communities to Manage Natural Resources Sustainably: A Review of Community Resource Management Area (CREMA) Implementation in Ghana*”. It brought together over 120 participants, including representatives of CREMAs, CREMA practitioners, representatives of state agencies, development partners, private sector actors and other stakeholders from all over the country. Key speakers at the event included the Deputy Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, Mr. Benito Owusu Bio; Assistant Country Director of UNDP Ghana, Mr. Louis Kuukpen; and the Coordinator of Green Livelihoods Alliance, Mercy Owusu Ansah. Other stakeholders also had the opportunity to discuss and engage in in-depth panel discussions. The panellists were Dr Andrew Agyare, Operations Director of Wildlife Division- Forestry Commission; Mrs Saadia Bobtoya Owusu-Amofa, Country Coordinator of IUCN; Felix Basing, Savanna Fruits Company; Okofrobour Dr. Yaw Agyei II, Omanhene of Mim Traditional Council, representing the Asuokwo CREMA and Mr Abu Juam, the Technical Director-Forestry, of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources.

Insights and experiences from across the country facilitated the identification and discussion of key issues, challenges and prospects. Action points critical for CREMAs to achieve their intended outcomes and vision were elaborated for shared action and implementation. The stakeholders at the dialogue made the following recognitions:

1. CREMA as an institutional framework for community participation in natural resource management in Ghana is progressively yielding good outcomes, with wide community and public acceptance as the way to go in securing Ghana’s remnant natural heritage.
2. CREMAs currently present Ghana with the only workable option to ensure participation, and transfer responsibility and benefits to communities in achieving emissions reductions for REDD+. CREMAs will also help to address the illegal logging and mining, and direct investment to support green commodity value chains critical for livelihoods, building resilience and prosperity in communities across the country.
3. The absence of a consolidated national legal framework, insufficient recognition and support from law enforcement and compliance agencies is limiting true empowerment of CREMAs and eroding the gains made so far. It is also reducing opportunities to achieve real reforms within the natural resource management sector.

The following presents agreed critical action points for rallying broad stakeholder efforts to make CREMAs work well:

Policy and Legislative Support for CREMAs

1. The Wildlife Resources Management Bill, which has gone through two rounds of parliamentary reviews under the past two Governments, should be passed into an Act with all urgency. The Act,

when passed, will reinforce the legal authority and scope of CREMAs to exercise their mandate to take responsibility and share in the benefits of managing natural resources at the local level.

2. CREMAs by their nature are community led and so naturally, they are part of the decentralized local government system in form and structure. CREMAs should therefore be integrated in the planning, implementation, management and evaluation of all district development planning processes for greater recognition and support.
3. Responsibility to manage resources should come with opportunities to share in benefits. Benefit sharing schemes that address these challenges should be agreed on and implemented to sustain community interest in taking up the responsibility of natural resource management. Tree tenure benefits in particular, need to be agreed on and implemented as soon as possible, to allow farmers who nurture naturally occurring trees on their farms to derive benefits.
4. There is the need for Government to carry out a comprehensive national evaluation of the implementation of the CREMA concept so far in Ghana. This is to help the implementers gain in-depth understanding of the challenges across different landscapes and build sustainable solutions to address them. It will also be an opportunity to identify success stories and share knowledge and experiences

CREMA Devolution

5. Political and elite interference in the management and use of natural resources, such as side-stepping community consent, re-assigning timber concessions to individuals and companies despite the issuance of certificate of devolutions to community members, does not promote transparency and inclusivity. It derails interest and shared responsibility and must therefore be curtailed.

Capacity Development of CREMAs

6. The dialogue recognized that most CREMAs have been created through time-bound projects. One of the reasons for the collapse of some of the CREMAs is that their executives are usually not able to perform their functions properly when these projects end or when the agencies/organizations that promoted the formation of the CREMAs exit the communities. To ensure long-term sustainability and proper governance of CREMAs, implementing partners should adequately build capacities of CREMA executives to effectively undertake managerial roles when they exit.
7. Similarly, capacities of Traditional Authorities and landowners are to be built and they should be involved from the onset of the CREMA formation to ensure support and ownership of the process.
8. It is recommended that implementing partners periodically engage with law enforcement agencies including the Ghana Police Service and the Judicial Services on forest and wildlife policies to facilitate timely prosecution of offenders and the protection of the rights of CREMAs.
9. There is a need for the establishment and development of a National Association of CREMAs, with all the appropriate institutional framework in place to foster and advance the cause of CREMAs in Ghana. This will provide opportunities for periodic experience sharing, and shared action for addressing challenges and leveraging technical and financial support in relation to law enforcement and compliance, financial sustainability, capacity building and building prosperity in CREMAs.
10. Women in communities play significant role in natural resource management in Ghana, and efforts to ensure their active and effective participation in decision making, management and sharing in the benefits of CREMAs should be deliberate and encouraged. A key lesson on engendering women's' participation at the local level and in CREMA governance is the introduction of quota systems/ affirmative action.

Financial Sustainability of CREMAs

11. Where they exist, CREMAs should be the frontline actors in the creation of jobs within the agriculture and forest development programs in Ghana and should therefore be integrated in

national programs as they are developed from time to time. For example, participants strongly commend government in its effort to create jobs at the district level by engaging the youth in agriculture and afforestation programmes. However, it would be more desirable if government works with CREMAs in areas where such afforestation programmes are being implemented to enable the CREMAs generate additional funds and help promote conservation.

12. Furthermore, government and development partners should continue to prioritize support for CREMAs and factor them in the development of national interventions such as the Forest Investment Programme (FIP) and other programmes on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+). This would bring financial returns to CREMAs and reward them for the trees planted over the years that are sequestering carbon.
13. CREMAs are encouraged to engage District Assemblies to discuss possibility of tapping into timber royalties they receive for community development
14. Achieving financial sustainability for the sustainable management of natural resources should be the central goal of all CREMAs and partners who support in their development. Facilitating agencies should support CREMAs to add value to community resources to generate revenue to ensure financial sustainability. CREMAs can be supported to identify marketable products, to develop business plans that ensure sustainable business practices. Private-sector led green investments for high-end and new commodities can contribute to changing the economic fortunes of CREMAs.

The participants, while recognizing government’s efforts over the years to address the concerns of the CREMAs, will appreciate swift response to address challenges facing the CREMAs, taking into consideration the recommendations outlined above. These actions, when implemented, are expected to empower more communities to manage and conserve natural resources towards sustainable development.

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Organizing Partners of the CREMA National Policy Dialogue

