



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF A ROCHA GHANA
(ARG), DR. SETH APPIAH-KUBI AT ARG'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY**

Madam chairperson

Deputy A Rocha Board Chair

Your excellency Australian High Commissioner, Mr Andrew Barns

Your excellency Ambassador, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Mr Ron Strikker

Your excellency Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Miss Katja Lasseur

A Rocha Ghana Board Members

CSO Colleagues

All invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen

As a conservation organization our core values as A Rocha Ghana have been predicated on five C principles, and these principles have been the bedrock for all our conservation models

We are:

Christian- underlying all what we do is our faith in the living God who made the world, loved it and entrusted it to the care of mankind

We are a **Conservation** a group.

We also work with **Communities** and are community-based.

We are **Cross-cultural** and therefore draw on the insight and skills of people from diverse cultures both locally and around the world.

And the last **C**, madam chair, is that we seek the **Co-operation** and work in collaboration with a wide variety of organizations and individuals who share our concerns for a sustainable world.

Madam chair, this year we felt we could add a 6th **C**, a temporary **C**, a **C** for celebration.

Celebration of our 20-year journey, a journey of a small local organization set up with no much expertise and resources.

It's been said of celebrations, madam chair, that "every moment of life is either a test or a celebration". But we will put it this way, "that every moment of life is a test and a celebration". This we have learnt in our not too-smooth-always 20-year journey.

But as we gather here this evening to celebrate every success in our journey, we will be careful and not to forget to also enjoy those scars of failures in our 20-year journey

For madam chair, for an organization like us, setup with no much expertise, and resourced, even failure was on the agenda.

Everyone here this evening has contributed one way or the other to our work, directly or indirectly. And if you are wondering how you have been part of us, just see me after the program is over and I will show you how indebted we are to you for your contribution.

A Rocha Ghana, started out of a petty argument among a group of friends after a Sunday church service. At the core of their argument was the question “shouldn’t creation care be part of our Christian faith and practice?”. In other words, should caring for God’s creation, God’s world, not be a Christian’s responsibility in consistent with Genesis 2:15?

How come we do not hear this in our liturgy, in our sermons and in our order of service? Even if we sang about creation and its beauty, we did not take any practical steps about its preservation or sustained beauty.

To my friends, “God is interested in every square millimeter of his creation. It all matters to him for he created it, he sustains it and one day he will recreate it.”

Their argument madam chair, mimics the words of Abraham Kuyper, the 20th century Dutch theologian, journalist and prime minister, “there is no square inch in the whole domain of human existence, over which the Christ who alone is sovereign does declare, “That is mine””, unquote.

Fortunately, these friends resolved their argument peacefully with a vision to set up a group to do this. Underneath their vision was a commitment that, **if it had to be done, then it should be done in a practical manner.**

Therefore, in November 1999, Eden conservation society was registered as a local conservation organization. In 2003 Eden became part of the A Rocha international network of organizations working to show Gods love for creation, therefore the name change.

Over the years, Madam chair, it has been a journey of **hope** and **determination**. with no resources and funding, friends took turns to host us in their spare space in their offices. Friends like Mr. Yaw Afor and Mr. Michael Mensah were helpful. We had our first funding of 100 cedis in the year 2000 from a VSO volunteer - James Pender, after his internship with the Forestry Commission in Ghana.

We have however been fortunate, madam chair, to have a dedicated Board of Trustees since our infancy up to our youthful years now.

Board meetings were held in the office of Most Rev Dr. Aboagye Mensah, the then Board chair and president of the Methodist conference of Ghana.

Madam Chair, I will refrain from further mentioning names as I have already mentioned that A Rocha Ghana is indebted directly or indirectly to everyone in this auditorium. I will crave your indulgence however, to refer to 2 persons - one an individual, the other an institution; whose contribution to our history is written in gold.

The first person is Dr. Moses Kofi Sam of the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission, who could not be with us this evening due to ill health. With his expertise in conservation, especially in species and habitat protection, Dr Sam was the go-to expert anytime we needed any technical and expert direction. Not only did he provide technical guidance from time to time, but as an adjunct lecturer at the Faculty of Renewable Natural Resource, Nkrumah Kwame University of Science and Technology, he encouraged the students he mentored to join the A Rocha Club at the faculty and also suggested to them they could work for A Rocha after their National Service, even though the organization did not have budget at the time.

Current A Rocha staff members such as Daryl Bosu, the Deputy National Director, Emmanuel Akom, Jacqueline Mbawine, Prosper Antwi-Bosiako, to mention a few were his students and mentees.

Madam Chair, our story will not be complete without mentioning the sterling contribution of our friend and partners, the IUCN- The Netherland Committee.

Our paths crossed as separate organizations in 2007 when we made an unsolicited funding application to them on Biodiversity enhancement through poverty alleviation project for the communities in the Mole ecological landscape.

As an IUCN National Committee supporting IUCN members in the Netherlands, the Netherlands Committee of IUCN also extended support to some IUCN members not only in Ghana, but other IUCN organizations in West and East

Africa, Asia and South America. Our partnership with them have been very pivotal.

Madam Chair, like a child born to parents of humble background rather than with a golden spoon in their mouth, A Rocha Ghana has emerged as a committed environmental NGO providing practical conservation interventions aimed at contributing to the sustainable management of the important ecological habitat and species and contributing to the livelihood enhancement of deprived communities.

Over the last 20 years, A Rocha Ghana has initiated and sustained programs aimed at strengthening the capacity of communities to be resilient and adapt to current trends in climate change and other environmental threats.

Madam chair, our program portfolio spans,

- On-the-ground conservation actions,
- Engagement of private and public sector businesses on environmental sustainability
- Community livelihood programs
- Schools and Youth conservation and environmental education programs,
- Interfaith dialogues and mobilization for community conservation action and
- Advocacy.

Our current interventions include the

- setting up of the first conservation trust fund for the CREMAs of the Mole Ecological Landscape
- We have constructed **Warehouses** for the storage of collected organic shea nuts in Bawena, Murugu and Lingbinsi CREMA areas in the Savanna Region, with a further two under construction at Gurubagu and Wawato and eight others coming up soon

- We are also setting up a Shea Processing centre in Murugu to add value to the nuts collected by our community women.

Madam Chair, just in the coming week, we will be cutting the sword for the construction of three organic cassava processing plants at Kpulumbo, Bawena, and Murugu, under our organic cassava initiative with our partner Organic Marketing for Development (OM4D) for the farmers in our CREMA areas in the Savannah Regions.

In the Atewa area, Madam chair, where the communities have suffered massive degradation as a result of galamsey, we are using the phytoremediation approach to rehabilitate and restore the integrity of the mined sites under our “Life after gold” initiative.

Phyto-remediation as a process uses various types of plants to remove, stabilise and destroy contaminants to help restore the fertility of sites that have been degraded by mining. By this approach, we have levelled the site and planted legumes, which will be mixed with the soil to fix nitrogen. The next step will be to plant nitrogen fixing shrubs and then commercial trees. The approach seeks to bring back production function of the soil and to also restore its quality.

Madam Chair, as we look back at our past and look around at our present, we are careful and mindful of looking ahead into the future, the future of our global world, the future of our country Ghana, so far as the management and governance of our natural resources are concerned and the future of A Rocha as an organisation.

Globally, the issues of

- climate change,
- deforestation,
- biodiversity loss
- and food security

are urgent issues that require decisive action of the global world to stem the negative consequences of these issues. Commitment to the United National global Agenda for 2030 – The Sustainable Development Goals is key.

Specifically, in Ghana, Madam Chair, the situation of our environment is very challenged if not in a dire condition.

- The on-going legal and illegal mining in our forest reserves
- The Rosewood menace in our fragile Savanna ecosystems
- Challenges with empowering communities to manage their natural resources
- Lack of progress on benefit from trees community members and farmers nurture on their farms
- Lack of initiatives to encourage community-based climate adaptation, to mention a few

Madam Chair, evidence abound in several research outcomes, that for every \$10 investment in climate adaptation only \$1 goes to the community where adaptation is mostly needed. This has to change if we are to make any progress in the effort to stem the repercussions of climate change.

I can go on and on Madam Chair, but I want to pause here and thank all of you for coming to celebrate with us. Sit back, relax and reflect with us.

Thank you.

Years Anniversary