

# Reforestation of the Abutia Plains by Indigenous Communities in the Volta Basin (Ghana)

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## Final Report

PD 48/98 Rev.1 (F)

### **I. Introduction**

The project was approved by the Council at its Twenty-fifth Session in November 1998 in Yokohama, Japan, and full financing was pledged at the same Session by the Governments of Switzerland and Japan. The Agreement regulating the implementation of the project was signed on 20 October 1999 and the first disbursement of funds was made on 21 December 1999. A 12-month extension was granted until December 2004 by the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the Committee on Reforestation and Forest Management, based on an official request including proper justification, a detailed workplan and a budget.

### **II. Project Objective**

The project intended to support community-based reforestation activities in order to arrest and reverse the deterioration of tropical forests in territories belonging to the indigenous communities in the Abutia Plains. Specific objectives were: 1) to develop and implement a reforestation plan for the rehabilitation of 1,360 ha of degraded forest lands, using Teak with fruit trees; 2) to support the development of indigenous capacity to protect and manage community forest resources.

### **III. Project Strategy and Activities**

The strategy adopted by the Executing agency for the implementation of the project is summarized as follows:

#### **3.1 Reason for Selection**

The selection of the project area was based on the fact that the land was previously covered by natural moist semi-evergreen forest on rich brown well-drained soil. The forests in this area played an important role in the stabilization of the Volta Basin. The reforestation project was in line with the Government long-term aim of expanding the nation's forest cover. Past evaluations indicated that the land area was capable of carrying teak plantation.

### **3.2 Technical and Scientific aspects**

Technically, the area was so degraded that natural regeneration was not possible, rather artificial regeneration was the best option. The assistance of the Agro-forestry Unit and the Forestry Commission expertise in nursery management and plantation establishment were utilized. Local communities and a NGO (AFERM) provided personnel in carrying out the clearing, pegging and planting of the seedlings. The communities undertook the construction of fire belts and fighting bushfires.

### **3.3 Economic Aspect**

Direct economic benefits in the form of timber to the wood industry can be expected from the teak trees at age 20 to 25 years. Early thinnings have provided firewood to the community. The project provided employment to local communities thereby improving their livelihoods. The project also provided regular income from the fruit trees of agro-forestry. The income generated by the communities from the sale of timber and non-timber products contributed to ensuring the sustainability of the project outcomes.

### **3.4 Environmental Aspect**

Environmentally, it was envisaged that the greening effects of the teak plantation will improve the overall environmental values. The forest cover will in the long term stabilize the water resources and promote, support and improve the agricultural production in the region.

### **3.5 Management Aspects**

In the management aspect of the project, AFERM implemented the project in close collaboration with the Forestry Commission and the Agroforestry Unit of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. The organizational structure made room for the Project Steering Committee (PSC) as the highest decision making body of the project and the Project Implementation Committee (PIC) to supervise project activities and discuss progress and constraints.

## **IV. Project Achievements and Outputs**

The project had four outputs, which contributed to achieve the two specific objectives. All four outputs have been achieved and are summarized as follows:

- 750 hectares of teak plantations in pure stands have been established for future supply of timber to the communities, industry and export. In all over 800,000 teak seedlings were raised and planted. The average surviving rate of planted trees was about 70%;
- Eight (8) project nurseries had been established at Abutia Kpota, Abutia Teti, and Sokode Gbogame where all seedlings required by the project were raised;

- Three dams had been constructed by the project and contributed to lessen problems with drought and allowed dry season farming;
- 600 hectares of agro-forestry plantation of teak integrated with fruit trees and cassia siamea had been established. The fruit trees provided short term monetary returns to the communities;
- The indigenous communities were trained in agro-forestry techniques, plantation establishment and management. A Community Forest Management Committee, made up of elected and trained representatives of fringe communities were established to manage the plantations.
- As part of the project's objective to gradually build up local indigenous environmental capacity, eight local workshops were effectively organized. The workshop beneficiaries included: 14 local environmentally-oriented groups, schools, and churches; and 200 environmentally conscious individuals. Some of the practical subject areas discussed during the workshops included: analysis of local environmental problems, current Forestry Commission regulations, analysis of local land tenure systems, plantation site selection and surveys, seed collection and selection, nursery management and practice, seedlings transplant and nurturing, tending and beating up of plantations, and agroforestry techniques and management;
- Forty five institutions made up of local communities (Abutia Kloe, Abutia Tete, Kpota, Ando, Togbave, Agodeke, Kissi-Flui), families, and individuals had established successful private tree plantations (mainly teak) as direct demonstration. This improved and publicized the results of ITTO-sponsored Abutia Plains Reforestation Project;
- The project contributed in supporting the community to prevent the encroachment in the Abutia Hills Forest Reserve and the Kalakpa Nature Resource Reserve, thereby arresting and reversing the deterioration of the two tropical forest reserves belonging to the indigenous communities in the Abutia plains; and
- The training of the communities in snail and grass cutter rearing, as alternative sources of animal proteins in order to reduce the illegal hunting pressure in the Kalakpa Resource Reserve and to contribute to increase their income.

## **V. Target Beneficiaries Involvement**

The target beneficiaries included the local communities and the indigenous villagers living in around the Abutia plains. They provided the labour for the demarcation of the land, clearing, raising of seedlings, planting and the general maintenance of the plantations. In the short term, the indigenous people acquired the capacity to manage and protect community forest resources, whilst improving their livelihood. In the long term and in accordance with the new Ghanaian forest policy, the project had supported the local communities for the arrangement in the benefit sharing that will provide 65% of the forest plantation revenue to the communities.

The Ministry of Mines, Lands and Forestry (MMLF) and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) were the other beneficiaries. They assisted the project during and after the implementation of the project by providing technical expertise in Forestry and Agro-forestry practices.

## **VI. Lessons Learnt**

### **Development Lessons**

The Abutia Plains Reforestation Project has been a pioneering success in terms of community involvement in restoring an over 1000ha degraded forest lands in the Abutia Plains. The collaborative nature of the project, which was based on participatory rural appraisal methodologies to identify local needs, facilitated the involvement of local communities in the implementation of the project through a local NGO.

Factors which will most likely affect project sustainability after completion will be the Abutia Community Forest Management Committee's (ACFMC) inability to generate funds for the tending of the plantation, since plantation tending is a capital intensive aspect of plantation establishment. Another adverse actor could be litigation among the leadership of the ACFMC. Since the Committee is represented by people from among each of the communities, it is agreed by consensus to rotate the Chairmanship of the ACFMC among the representatives.

### **Operational lessons**

The project was designed for 4-year duration but numerous planting failures as a result of droughts at the early years of the project delayed the project. However, at the closing stages of the project, the Project Manager, decided to distance himself from other members of the PIC, because of internal conflicts.

All the parties involved in the projects collaborated effectively in the implementation of the project. The initial challenge faced by the executing agency was the serious disagreement with certain leaders over the price paid for the land already released for the project. The resolution of the conflict by the FC resulted in legally documenting all agreements pertaining to land acquisition.

Again the Sociologist undertook the socio-economic survey in the latter duration of the project. Thus, the regular meetings and open dialogues with forest user groups and local people for the assessment of behavioral and attitudinal aspects of the villagers was lacking at the initial stages of the project. Conflict arose with the local settler farmers on the use for crop farming of part of the land allocated for reforestation. The project demarcated some plots of the acquired land for the settlers to farm, and acquired an area of equal size in Abutia Teti in order to undertake the rest of the reforestation program.

## **VII. Dissemination of Results**

The results of the project were disseminated through a range of different mechanisms, including:

- Training seminars and workshops;
- Information and awareness campaigns conducted through farmers and village associations, religious institutions, and traditional chiefs; and
- Regular consultations among stakeholders.

The Completion Report and Technical Reports are available from the ITTO Secretariat upon request.

## **VIII. Recommendations Related to Future Work**

In order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of similar projects in the future, the executing and collaborating agencies recommended the following:

- Proper studies should be conducted prior to the project's start in order to select and ensure that the lands are free from litigations;
- The design of any community reforestation project should be participatory with wide consultations and communications with local entities;
- A project to reforest an area of 1,360 hectares should have a permanent Assistant Project Manager to manage the project in case the Project Manager is indisposed and could not function well; and
- Future projects should consider the position of Public Affairs officer to strengthen the public relations functions of the project.

## **IX. Concluding Remarks**

As the ITTO Secretariat has received the Project Completion Report, the project PD 48/98 Rev.1 (F) was reported as completed, pending receipt of an acceptable Final Financial Audit Report.