



Biodiversity Conservation

Guardians of the sacred caves of Forikrom, Ghana

Key points

- Endogenous development enables communities to utilize their bio-cultural resources to improve their material, socio-cultural and spiritual well-being through enterprise development.
- The sacred sites of the Forikrom represent biocultural capital and form a biodiversity refuge for indigenous plants and wildlife.
- Traditional and modern governance systems jointly foster peace and harmony in the community, leading to increasing number of successful developmental projects.
- In traditional ABS systems external investors have access to land and benefits are shared between the owners of the resources and the other users in the community.
- Bio-cultural Community Protocols are a strong tool for building on traditional ABS agreements when developed within the framework of the endogenous development approach.

Summary

Forikrom is a farming community situated in Ghana, governed by traditional authorities: chief, queen mother and the council of elders. The community has bio-cultural sites such as shrines, royal cemetery, holy mountains, holy caves and a bat sanctuary. Indigenous fruit trees and plants as well as wildlife such as monkeys, rabbits, birds, tortoise are found here.

CIKOD, as part of the ETC COMPAS programme on endogenous development, facilitated a resource mapping in 2004, which also made the community and government agencies aware of the value of sacred sites. A group of organic farmers received support from UNDP-GEF to add value to the natural sites and make them attractive to tourists: creating paths, documenting the history and significance of the sites. The Holy caves were the most popular and received about four hundred visitors per month who come to hold prayer camps there.

The community wanted to reclaim and revitalize their ancient ancestral caves and sacred sites as the legacy of the present generation for the generations yet unborn. The elders made by-laws to keep off encroachers; the youth and women provided manual labour and volunteered as tour guides. The spiritual leaders provided guidance on spiritual issues. The community now conserves their biocultural assets, safeguards their spiritual well-being and that of visitors before considering direct economic gains.



Chief, Nana Kwaku Agyapong:

"Our traditional abusa and abunu systems allow the owner and tenant to have a fair share according to their contribution. We have extended this system to include sharing benefits from other natural resources such as trees and minerals but also those derived from sacred sites. The social and spiritual benefits of our sacred sites are very important to us, even more so than the economic benefits. Therefore they should be taken into account of any biocultural enterprise development".



Case Study

Introduction

This case study shows how the people of Forikrom are equitably accessing and benefiting - from several ancestral sacred caves and their associated bio-diversity through locally guided development of eco-tourism. The activities are driven by community values and contribute to further conservation of the biological and cultural diversity of the region whilst improving the, social, material and spiritual well-being of the community. The overarching objective as presented by the community members was the need to reclaim and revitalize their ancient ancestral caves and other sacred sites.

Forikrom is a farming community of about 6,500 people located in the Savannah Transitional Zone, occupying an area of 60 km². Agriculture is a major source of environmental degradation due to indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides. Illegal logging has decreased tree species diversity and forest cover, exposing the community to excessive solar radiation, higher night temperatures, increased populations of nocturnal insects and incidences of malaria. Indigenous tree species have also been replaced by exotic species such as



A local Guide and a tourist at one of Forikrom's sacred formations part of biocultural eco-tourism project.

government in resource mapping and prioritization of their needs, subsequently; water, electricity and eco-tourism.

Well being Assessment

The community well-being assessment framework, developed by UNU and ETC/COMPAS, helps to describe community well-being based on how

cultural and spiritual importance of the project.

Conserving bio-cultural values

Sites of historical and spiritual significance were identified and prioritised for the eco-cultural tourism. These sites include a magic cave (Nkonyayibuo), a Bote shrine, a Royal Cemetery for chiefs and many other places for worship in the holly mountains including a bat sanctuary. These sites are of cultural importance because they represent sacred, magic and mystique relationships between people, the environment and their ancestors.

These biocultural sites also have considerable biodiversity value which although largely undocumented includes different types of indigenous flora and fauna. Common tree species include the ciber, dadie (black berries), Abisa (African plume, monkey guava), royal palm and others. Wildlife includes monkeys, rabbits, birds, hedge hogs, tortoise and many others such as bats have colonized the caves and the broader sacred areas. Innovations such as the use of bat dung in organic farming have also led to abandon traditional hunting of bats for food provisioning.

Customary and modern governance

Traditional system of governance (chief, council of elders, family heads and queen mothers) and the modern governance system (local government representatives) work closely together

Bio-enterprise development should be an endogenous process rooted in local visions of material, social and spiritual well being.

Teak, Eucalyptus, Royal Palm, Terminalia, Khaya, Cashew and Mango trees.

The Forikrom Eco-cultural Tourism project was established by Nana Kwaku Agyapong, - then chief of Forikrom - and his elders in 1997. The community cleaned up the sites and planted trees around these areas and received training as tour guides. Different sites were secured for traditional and modern religious tourists. Around 2004 the Forikrom chiefs and queens were trained in Community Institutional and Resource Mapping (CIRM) which helped in identifying community resources and traditional governance structures. CIKOD also trained traditional leaders and members of the formal local

members make decisions within the "freedoms given to them" based on their "capabilities" (including natural endowments, skills, norms, values and markets) and "worldviews" indicating cause-effect human-nature interrelations in material, social and spiritual dimension (see also; Subramanian & Pisupati 2009).

The well being assessment did not only assess the factors that facilitated the success of Forikrom's sacred caves ecotourism project, but also assessed the impact of the project on the well being of the community. Emphasis was placed on mechanisms of control and ownership of the project and the related benefit sharing provisions that secure the local vision of success for the project. The assessment specifically brought out the social,

and are united on the Fikrom project. They have fostered peace and harmony in the community, leading to increased success in a number of development projects in the community. As a result, community members are cooperative and eager to support the implementation of development projects with communal labour and financial means.

The Council of Elders support the Chief in the governance and administration of the affairs of the community. The Chief is also supported by the Queen Mother who in turn works with sub-queen mothers of the sub-chiefs in the community. Together they maintain the traditional value system, especially these days when formal school education is the norm.

The Chief and Elders perform a number of functions including:

- the settling of major disputes,
- management of conflict,
- ensuring security of community members,
- supporting development projects with authority,
- overseeing the spiritual well-being of the people and
- serving as custodians of traditional customs, norms and practices.

The traditional priest in the community serves as the spiritual guide for the people and also serves as a reference point for traditional herbal medicine. He also advises Chief and Elders on spiritual matters related to the community, especially in times of unexplainable disasters and calamities. The needs and concerns of the community are communicated to a government Assembly and the decisions and by-laws of the Assembly

This study counters the assumption that African countries lack entry points for ABS initiatives; traditional ABS systems in Africa are in place and should be the starting point.

are communicated and enforced in the community by a Unit Committee and Assembly member, in conjunction with the Chief and Elders of the community.

Community perceptions of bio-enterprise

Community members explained that although all the factors discussed are important for the promotion of the eco-cultural tourism project, the most important are the physical presence of the sacred sites and the traditional knowledge and institutions responsible them. Any intervention to promote bio-enterprise development must therefore prior consider these institutions and their knowledge base.

The community scored the most important factors for bio-enterprise development on a scale from 0-5 where 0 is unimportant and 5 very important.

Access and sustainability of bio-cultural assets. The sustainability and continuous availability of the sites is vital for the development and sustainability of the project.	5
Knowledge about the ancestral caves. Knowledge is held by the elders share it for documentation and to guide the youth and educate visitors.	5
Support from local institutions. These are the ultimate custodians of the sacred sites. Without their knowledge and blessings, the project could never be developed.	5
Support from Government Authorities. Although essential to the project is was found less important then traditional governance bodies.	3
Civil Society Partnerships. External organizations provided funding and technical support and hopefully publicity that would lead to improved marketing.	4
Market linkages. The community needs skills to market their biocultural assets to the outside world.	4
Equity. People would only actively participate if they have a fair share in the benefits accruing from the project.	4
Technology. Little need exists for modern technology as bio-cultural assets include protocol for their preservation and guidance for their development.	3
Service Institutions. A need exists to develop financial institutions that can support local entrepreneurship in the tourist sector to take advantage of the tourist flow.	3

Lessons and recommendations for decision makers

The lessons learned from this study aim to inform decision makers on knowledge and experience which communities already have about access and benefit sharing without external intervention. These lessons will contribute to inform the design of national and international programmes

Access and benefit sharing

The CBD provisions are promoting ethics and equity with regard to the sharing of benefits between the conservers of biological resources and those exploiting them. This study shows that in Africa, cultural, spiritual and social values are equally important to economic factors in access and benefit sharing agreements and bio-enterprise development. It counters the assumption that African countries lack entry points for ABS initiatives and proves that traditional ABS systems in Africa are in many cases centuries old and recognised by the formal government.

National action programmes on ABS are needed and will need to be designed through endogenous development processes based on local values and aspirations of well-being. This would ensure automatic enthusiasm, participation and

to facilitate the implementation of the CBD and ABS on the ground:

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ownership of communities thereby contributing to enhancing the sustainability of the national programmes.

Endogenous Development

This study confirms that national ABS regimes would naturally evolve if the endogenous development approach is adopted. Therefore, particular support is needed for endogenous development processes that strengthen community capacities to achieve local visions of success in relation to bio-enterprise development.

While the CBD discourse seems to aim ultimately at enhancing conservation of biological diversity most communities look at their resources from a broader socio-cultural and spiritual perspective. To illustrate these linkages the term biocultural enterprise development is suggested.

Biocultural Community protocols

Biocultural Community Protocols are essential for achieving ABS. African negotiators should therefore include

Factors determining success of bio-enterprise development

1. **Conserving of bio-cultural heritage** meets peoples spiritual and social needs and are the most important motivating factor. The economic value is added but is not the main concern.
2. **Access of bio-cultural resources to all people** secured community ownership. Community members of all faiths have equal access to and freedom to use the (spiritual) resources.
3. **Traditional authorities** are legitimate representatives of all clans of the community. They are supported by formal and local government institutions.
4. **Customary and by-laws accepted and respected** for conserving biocultural resources was instrumental in the successful implementation of the project.
5. **The *okomfo* or traditional spiritual leader** ensured that these laws are complied with and sanctions anybody who breaks any of them.
6. **Traditional festivals** are forums for all citizens to ensure transparency, accountability and thus sustaining ownership and participation.

and work towards having BCPs recognized and ratified in the context of the ABS negotiations. By extension, the endogenous development approach is the framework within which BCPs can be developed and successfully implemented and should be advocated for as part of the ABS convention.

References:

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- Guri, B. (2010) The guardians of the sacred caves and sites of Forikrom; Enterprise development, benefit

Revitalizing the communities ancient sacred sites for the past present and future generations is more important than generating economic benefits from the enterprise.



Forikrom Sacred caves sign next to the road

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