

Sacred groves versus gold mines: biocultural community protocols in Ghana

10

by **BERNARD GURI YANGMAADOME, DANIEL BANUOKU FAABELANGNE, EMMANUEL KANCHEBE DERBILE, WIM HIEMSTRA and BAS VERSCHUUREN**

Introduction

The Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) has been working with the Tanchara community in the Upper West Region of Ghana since 2003.¹ In 2004, an Australian mining company, Azumah Resources Limited, was granted permission by the Ghanaian government to prospect for gold in the Upper West Region. The possibility of finding gold attracted illegal miners to the area, scarring the land and polluting the streams with toxic chemicals used for gold extraction. Their activities also threatened the sacred groves in Tanchara – green clusters of indigenous trees and shrubs revered as sacred lands. Sacred groves are important sources of medicinal plants, and conserve soil and water supplies. Most importantly, they are home to the community's ancestral spirits, and play a key role in the community's spiritual life. Traditional regulations for the protection of the sacred

groves are enforced by the Tingandem, the spiritual leaders who are regarded as the true owners of land. They advise the Chief and the Pognaa, the Chief's female counterpart.

In 2010, in response to these threats to the sacred groves and water supplies – and for the first time in their history – a united group of ten Tingandem came together to protest against the mining activities. This article relates the events leading up to and following this protest, including how, with the help of CIKOD, the community was mobilised to recognise and document its institutions and assets, and work towards achieving its own development vision. Building on this work, the community developed a biocultural community protocol (BCP) as a tool to seek legal protection for its traditional knowledge and natural resources against the threat of gold mining (Natural Justice, 2009). The article draws out lessons for others developing and using

¹ CIKOD is a Ghanaian non-profit organisation. Board members include the Pro-Vice Chancellor of University of Development, the President of the National House of Chiefs, a Former MP for Nkoranza in the Brong Ahafo Region and a Queen Mother (traditional female leader) from Mampong Akwapim. CIKOD is coordinator of the ETC COMPAS network in Africa.



Photo: Bas Verschuuren, ETC COMPAS

Illegal gold mining affecting water streams.

BCPs to assert and defend community rights over natural resources.

Supporting endogenous development (ED)

CIKOD's approach to working with the Tanchara has been to help them strengthen their capacity for 'endogenous development', that is development driven by communities, building on their culture, knowledge, resources and institutions. Strengthening community capacity is complex and takes time because communities are diffuse, nebulous, social and cultural entities, with many diverse dimensions and groups. CIKOD believes that focusing on just one part of the community, for example youth, women or traditional leaders, is likely to generate conflict because some parts of the community are excluded. Strengthening ED for the benefit of the entire community means mobilising different interest groups, the traditional institutions and community-based organisations (CBOs). Traditional leadership, as an integral part of African society and one of the oldest institutions of

governance on the continent, needs to be integrated into the development process, whilst recognising that this may mean changing with the times to meet the challenges of today: transparency, gender equity, environmental conservation and empowerment of the poor.

A community organisational development process

When CIKOD began working with the Tanchara community, it facilitated a participatory process to enable the people to bring together information about their local/indigenous resources and assets, create a vision of their own development and develop action plans to achieve this vision, drawing on local/indigenous resources and other relevant resources from external sources. The steps in this process are outlined in Box 1. A key part of the approach was to understand and work within the communities' own worldviews, which underpin daily life and influence interactions with outsiders and outside knowledge systems (Box 2). Identifying the

communities' key assets – biological, natural, cultural, social and spiritual – was also an important prerequisite for community organisation and capacity building. This information was gathered by members of the community (Box 1).

The process has been successful in mobilising the community to work towards the vision they identified, and in enabling them to present their vision to external actors (government officials and development organisations), and request support. Since 2004, community forums (*durbars*) have been organised by the Chief every Easter and Christmas to review activities and present projects to these external agencies. Sons and daughters working outside the village have also been invited to contribute to the development of the village. In 2007, field programmes were agreed for revitalising sacred groves, strengthening traditional authorities (male and female), traditional crop varieties, organic farming and zero tillage (see CIKOD, 2010).²

Monitoring the community's capacity for endogenous development

In 2010 and 2011, community meetings were held in Tanchara to reflect on how their capacities for endogenous development had changed since 2003, when CIKOD first began working with the community (Figure 1). Scores were agreed through community discussions with representatives of the youth, women, traditional authorities, elders and Tingandem. The Chief's and Pognaa's capacity to mobilise the community had both substantially strengthened due to the recognition gained through the organisational development process. The women are now better organised to support each other and undertake farming as an economic activity, and their role and voices are increased, heard and respected in community meetings. Respect and understanding

² Zero tillage is a way of growing crops from year to year without disturbing the soil through tillage. It increases the amount of water and organic matter (nutrients) in the soil and decreases erosion. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No-till_farming

Box 1: Community organisational development process

Preparation of CIKOD field staff: A staff retreat to discuss attitudes and knowledge for promoting endogenous development: how to work within the worldviews of the community? (see Box 2). Staff identified challenges and proposed ways to address them.

Awareness-raising and gaining the consent of the Tanchara community: Meeting between CIKOD and the Chief and elders to explain the approach, then a community meeting to introduce CIKOD to the wider community and gain prior informed consent (PIC).

Formation and preparation of the community team: Five people selected by the community (two women, three men). Discussion to identify indigenous institutions, traditional authorities, formal institutions (e.g. NGOs) and livelihood assets used by different groups. Checklist of questions developed in the local Dagara language.

Training the community team: Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools introduced, including focus group discussions, individual interviews, field observations, transect walks and resource mapping. The team role-played tools with the community, receiving lots of feedback, then agreed a timetable for visiting different sections of the community and reporting back.

Carrying out the community institutions and resource mapping (CIRM): Five days gathering information about the community's institutions and biocultural resources. All ten Tanchara sections visited, as well as the Tindana of each section, and the Paramount Tindana. Information gathered collated with help from a staff member from the University for Development Studies, and gaps in the data identified. CIKOD staff recorded some resources identified on video.

Reporting back: Information modified and verified at a community meeting. Report adopted as a community document.

Community visioning: Community resource map developed, then discussion using the map. Where was our community 10 years ago? Where is our community now? Where do we want our community to be in 10 years? Responses captured by CIKOD staff and presented to the Tanchara community as a vision statement.

Action planning: How do we use the resources identified to make this vision come true? What practical activities must we carry out? When do we want to implement these activities? Who will do what and how do we ensure we carry out our responsibilities (community contract)? Development activities then prioritised and time-frame and community contract developed.

Box 2: Learning about worldviews

Worldviews and concepts of life: The relationship of mankind to nature and the spiritual world: creation myths, the divine beings; the role of ancestors, sacred persons, animals, places and objects; the concept of nature; and relationships of cause and effect.

Indigenous institutions: How local institutions regulate community decision-making, the management of resources and experimentation with new practices; understanding roles, responsibilities and attitudes of indigenous institutions in experimentation and innovation processes.

Indigenous practices and use of knowledge: Important practices relating to the management of natural resources, agriculture and health. What are concepts and explanations for the practices used by the local population? And how do they relate to western explanations and concepts? How do people learn, teach, experiment, innovate?

Interaction: How do local or indigenous knowledge systems interact with outside sources of knowledge? What is the focus of education, research and extension, religion and health?

Changes in the worldviews of the local communities: Identify changes that are the result of external influences and changes that are a result of internal adjustments to ecological, technological, commercial, political or demographic change. To what extent is experimentation and learning influenced by, or mixed with, the western worldview? What are the contradictions or tensions: erosion of indigenous knowledge and indigenous institutions, creative adaptation, conflicts or parallel systems, underground knowledge?

Options that exist for endogenous development of local communities: What is the vision of success in terms of desired changes for ED? What are key capacities for revitalised ED? What strategies, tools and techniques can strengthen community capacity for ED?

Source: Edited version of 'Appreciating the diversity of worldviews', pp. 81-107, in: *Learning Endogenous Development, Practical Action (2007)*.
Online: www.compasnet.org

of the importance of biodiversity, the sacred groves and the Tingandem who guard the groves has also substantially increased. This growing capacity and confidence of the community in its ability to mobilise and negotiate with external agents was to prove vital when faced with the threat of gold mining on its land.

Box 3: Assets identified by the Tanchara community members

- **Biological assets:** threatened tree species, crop and animal species, medicinal herbs.
- **Natural assets:** clay deposits, natural water sources, raw materials for local crafts, natural sites for water collection.
- **Cultural assets:** traditional architecture, local crafts, traditional artefacts, indigenous technologies, traditional medicine in the community.
- **Social assets:** festivals, health centres, educational facilities, social centres, markets.
- **Spiritual assets:** shrines, sacred groves, forests, tree, water points.

The mining threat and the community's response

In 2000 the Ghanaian government granted rights to prospect for gold in Nawdoli, Lawra and Jirapa districts in Upper West Ghana. The communities in these areas were not informed or involved in this decision. Nor were NGOs such as CIKOD, who were working with the communities. The rights that were granted encouraged illegal gold prospecting from 2007, threatening the Tanchara's sacred groves. Naa Yaa-yin Niber, a traditional leader of Tanchara relates what happened next:

Our main concern [was] a mining company that [was] about to enter our community. I called a community meeting, so everybody would know about this mining issue. These days nobody wants to look like a fool, so I gathered my people together and now we are united and ready to prevent future problems.

The Tingandem formulated a statement protesting about the activities of the illegal miners and asking the government to safeguard their sacred groves and sites from both legal and illegal mining. All the Tingandem appended their thumb prints on this paper and asked CIKOD to send this to the appropriate authorities for their attention and action. CIKOD responded by facilitating discussions in the community,

Photo: CIKOD



Tanchara community meeting to discuss gold mining and the BCP.

Figure 1: Tanchara community self-assessment of changes in capacity, comparing 2003 and 2010

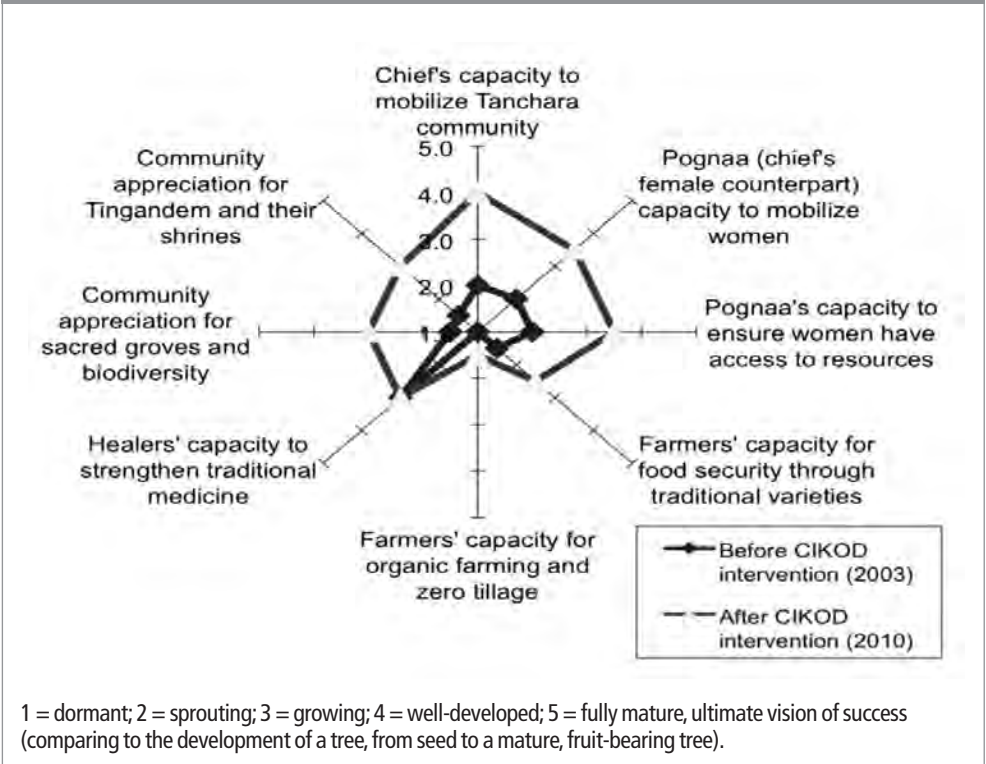




Photo: Peter Lowe

Naa Yaa-yin Niber and his council of elders.

in which it was agreed that the Chief should approach the Paramount Chief to discuss the gold mining problem. CIKOD undertook to do a study (in May and June 2010) of the impact of gold mining on the well-being of the communities.³ The study was discussed at an advocacy and validation workshop in June 2010, attended by the chiefs, the district assemblies and CIKOD. The district assemblies became involved because the gold mining threat is likely to affect the whole of northern Ghana.

Following the workshop, a regional forum on gold mining (July 2010) was organised by CIKOD, the district assemblies and the Upper West regional house of chiefs. The purpose of the forum was to assess the impact and agree on a joint statement to highlight strategies to deal with the situation. For the first time, the country representative of Azumah Resources Limited, the gold mining company, also participated. At the end of the forum a joint communiqué was issued, demanding that Azumah listen to communities, and calling for a public hearing to consider the current

and potential effects of their activities on communities.

Whilst all of this was happening, work was also going on to raise public awareness on the issue. A weekly local radio programme enabled community members to call in and voice their concerns. This had a serious impact on the gold mining company, which was unhappy with the negative publicity it was receiving.

Developing a biocultural community protocol

CIKOD also introduced the idea of developing a biocultural community protocol (BCP) as a tool for the Tanchara to negotiate with external parties and assert their rights. BCPs are tools to address conflicts facing communities and external users of the same area that share and use genetic and natural resources and associated traditional knowledge. A first draft of the BCP was drafted in April 2011 by a Canadian intern working for CIKOD. This drew on information gathered during the ongoing community development work, including mapping of the sacred groves, wetlands

³ This was funded by the Natural Resource and Environment Governance (NREG) programme of the Dutch embassy in Ghana.

and burial grounds, and traditional decision-making structures. The draft was then discussed with community groups – men, women, elders, youth and traditional leaders – to ensure that all parts of the community had a say. The draft documented the community's cultural values, vision for endogenous development, customary rights and responsibilities, and institutions and processes for PIC.

Currently (end 2011), the 'gold mining BCP' needs completion with information on legal rights. CIKOD has begun working with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) in Ghana to document community rights according to customary laws and international/national laws, so that this can be included in the BCP. The anticipated legal recognition of customary laws in Ghana, as promoted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Nagoya Protocol (Article 12), will be a significant boost in the Tanchara's efforts to assert their rights. After its completion, the protocol will be signed by the Chief, the Pognaa and the Tingandem, and hopefully by the District Chief Executive and Paramount chief.

Following the communities' protests, gold mining by Azumah Resources has been postponed to 2013. This is a very significant achievement for the Tanchara community.

Lesson and challenges

The community strength developed through the community organisational development process laid the foundations for the development of the BCP. Taking endogenous development seriously means going at the pace of the community, especially the elders, and ensuring that traditional authorities are aware of their developmental roles and are accountable to the community. It is known that the gold mining company has tried to bribe other chiefs, bypassing the broader community's views and consent.

Whilst traditional authorities and

customary laws have been revitalised during this process, it is important to evaluate these laws and practices, and educate the community where these fall outside national laws or are detrimental to some sections of the community. In this case, this was part of the work of the lawyer from CHRAJ. For the process to be valid, it is critical to gather the views of all members of the community, not just the elders.

Documentation of the community's cultural resources and biodiversity by the community has been key to the community re-valuing these resources, which they had previously taken for granted, and has highlighted the communities' role as stewards of biodiversity.

Whilst an internally focused community organisation process involving research and visioning is essential for developing a BCP, the involvement or endorsement of local and national government is also needed if it is to be a strong tool for legal empowerment. The Tanchara community has been very successful in enlisting the support of local government structures and including all stakeholders in the process of mobilising and challenging the gold mining company from the very beginning.

The main challenges encountered in the BCP development process included:

- There is currently no legal backing in Ghana for customary laws and BCPs.
- Customary laws are not obeyed by the youth because of western religion and education.
- The community had no information on district assembly bylaws, national laws and international agreements that Ghana had signed in relation to community rights. (As noted earlier, CIKOD has brought in legal expertise to tackle this problem.)
- The community is still unclear about the importance of having a written BCP document for negotiation with other stakeholders. This is because the BCP as it stands is not a legally binding instrument; it depends on the goodwill of the stake-

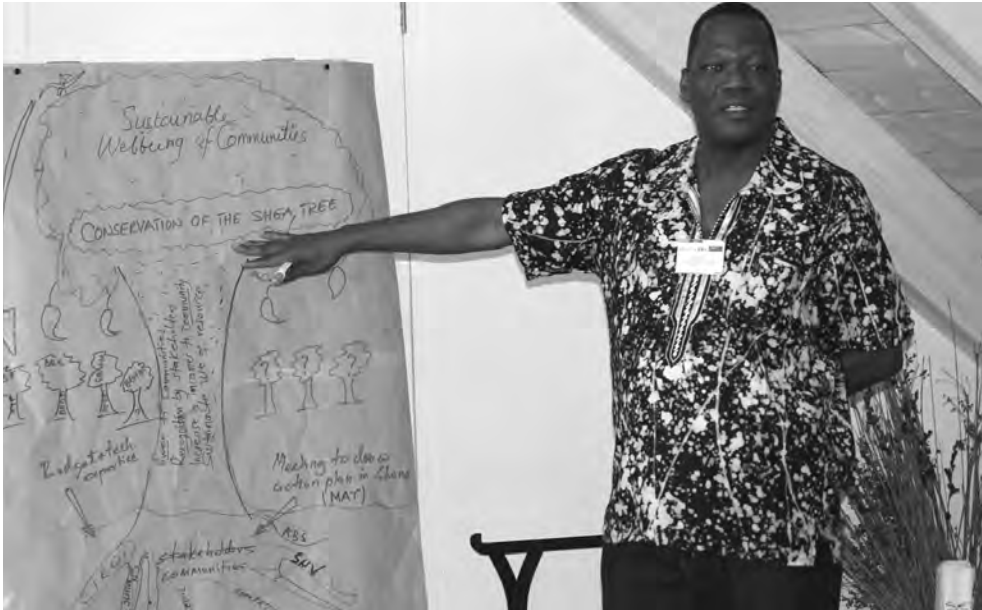


Photo: Natural Justice

A 'rich picture' in which Bernard Guri of CIKOD explains how the biocultural community protocol is expected to contribute to sustainable community well-being.

holders. To address this challenge, CIKOD has introduced the concept of stakeholder platforms. As part of the BCP development process, research is being carried out by the University for Development Studies to identify the various stakeholders and their interests in gold mining in the community and to promote dialogue for acceptance of the demands in the BCP. This, it is hoped, will increase the credibility of the BCP and encourage stakeholder compliance with the demands in the BCP, even though the BCP is not legally binding.

Despite these challenges, the community has undoubtedly developed confidence and skills as a result of developing the BCP, but it is unclear if in future they will be fully able to negotiate on their own with a BCP document without external support. Although BCPs do not yet have legal recognition in Ghana, they can still be powerful negotiating tools if they are recognised by all the relevant stakeholders.

Ways forward

The postponement of gold mining to 2013 gives time for CIKOD and the communi-

ties to finalise the Tanchara BCP. Other potentially affected communities in northern Ghana will also be able to develop BCPs much more easily and quickly as relevant laws and bylaws will already have been clarified. These communities will also need a community development process. CIKOD is already using the same BCP tool to defend the rights of female sheanut pickers in their dealings with commercial buyers. It will build on the lessons learnt in the Tanchara BCP process.

From November 2011–September 2012, a new action research programme around BCP work in Ghana and Kenya will apply specific methodologies and tools for analysing power dynamics in multi-stakeholder processes (see *Tips for Trainers*, this issue). Local researchers will investigate how BCPs are empowering communities to negotiate their rights. They will look at ways of levelling out power and reconciling different interests. The outcomes of this research will then feed into other BCP processes.

In addition to this, CIKOD will be working with the community on develop-

ing a community strategy for the conservation of the sacred groves in partnership with the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative. The Tindangem, traditional leaders and the communities' youth will be making field exchange visits to other communities in Ghana that have successfully managed to protect their sacred groves. The process of developing a community strategy for the conservation of their sacred groves and resources has put into practice the communities' traditional knowledge and practices that are also part of their BCP. As the community will be developing its own conservation strategy for its sacred groves and biocultural heritage it will also be alerting the mining company and government actors to the international guidelines of the CBD, UNESCO and IUCN, specifically designed to assist external companies and institutions to work with sacred places (Wild and McLeod, 2008; Secretariat of

the Convention on Biological Diversity 2004).

The conservation planning process itself is based on the communities' own biocultural resources and will lead to a locally relevant conservation strategy. Together with CIKOD, the community will seek all information required in order to create an endogenous and informed planning process which may potentially also include new allies and stakeholders that support the conservation strategy. The envisioned outcome of this process is not just the conservation of the sacred groves but also to support the sustainable use of the community's natural resources together with other actors. The latter can be achieved through developing socio-economic activities that form alternatives to mining such sheanut harvesting, attracting eco-tourism and creating productive buffer zones around the groves.

CONTACT DETAILS



Bernard Guri Yangmaadome
Executive Director
CIKOD
PO Box CT4131
Accra
Ghana
Email: benguri@cikod.org,
bernguri@gmail.com
Website: www.cikod.org



Daniel Banuoku Faabelangne
Regional Coordinator
CIKOD
PO Box CT4131
Cantonments Accra
Ghana
Tel: +233 208332241
Email: fdanus@yahoo.com
Website: www.cikod.org



Emmanuel Kanchebe Derbile
Lecturer
Faculty of Planning and Land Management
University for Development Studies
UPW3, Wa Campus, Wa, UWR
Ghana
Tel: +233 244516896
Email: derbile_uds@hotmail.com

⁴ See: <http://sacrednaturalsites.org>



Wim Hiemstra
ETC COMPAS: Comparing and Supporting
Endogenous Development
The Netherlands
Email: w.hiemstra@etcnl.nl
Website: www.compasnet.org



Bas Verschuuren
Co-Chair, IUCN WCPA Specialist Group
Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas
Researcher and Coordinator, EarthCollective
Website: www.earthcollective.net
Coordinator, Sacred Natural Sites initiative
Website: www.sacrednaturalsites.org
Email: basverschuuren@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- CIKOD (2010) *Study on traditional women leadership (Pognamene / Haala-Kuoros) in three districts in Upper West Region in Ghana.*
- CIKOD (2010) 'Ghanaian communities protects sacred groves from mining.' Online case study: www.sacrednaturalsites.org/sites
- Guri, B. and D. Banuouku (no date) 'Process for engaging in a win-win scenario for gold mining in Upper West Region of Ghana.' Report to KASA, Netherlands Embassy Accra, Ghana.
- ETC COMPAS (2007) *Learning endogenous development.* Practical Action. Online: www.compasnet.org/blog/?page_id=386
- Lowe, P. (2010) *Tanchara.* Video produced on traditional male and female leaders in Tanchara, Ghana. See: www.cikod.org, Peter Lowe Photos.
- Natural Justice (2009) *Bio-cultural community protocols: a community approach to ensuring the integrity of environmental law and policy.* Compiled by Natural Justice with support from UNEP Division for Environment, Law and Conventions: Nairobi, Kenya.
- Practical Action (2007) 'Appreciating the diversity of worldviews.' In: *Learning Endogenous Development.* Online: www.compasnet.org/blog/?page_id=386
- Wild, R. and C. McLeod (2008) 'Sacred natural sites: guidelines for protected area managers.' Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines 16. IUCN and UNESCO: Gland, Switzerland.
- Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2004) 'Akwé: Kon voluntary guidelines for the conduct of cultural, environmental and social impact assessment regarding developments proposed to take place on, or which are likely to impact on, sacred sites and on lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities.' CBD Guidelines Series: Montreal.