

**Community empowerment and wildlife  
conservation - the Tafi monkey sanctuary,  
Ghana**

Final Project Report

To

**The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation  
[Rufford Small Grants]**

By

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[June 2006, Ghana]



### **Project summary**

The people of Tafi Atome in Volta Region, Ghana through their beliefs have for many generations preserved the endangered true mona monkey, *Cercopithecus mona mona* in a pristine rainforest, now vulnerable. Women are predominant in usage of resources that could threaten the existence of the forest, hence the monkeys. The sanctuary now provides good tourist destination but with benefits mainly to tour operators and government authorities. This project is targeted at using training and skill enhancement, environmental education and awareness, to empower women (as priority) to get involved in conservation and to diversify livelihoods, towards poverty alleviation.

### **Specific objectives are as follows:**

1. Innovation: To assist the local people in devising means of enhanced awareness in support of the sanctuary and the holistic participation and investment of inhabitants through networks of stakeholder forums.
2. Education and information: Development of environmental awareness toolkits (e.g. posters, and popular theatre)
3. Participation: Formation of environmental groups in schools and communities, and a multi-stakeholder community based management team to serve as a proactive response group to environmental issues
4. Wildlife management: Training in fire and forest management, tour guide, and basic range management skills
5. Skills: To accomplish training on diversification of livelihood options, basic hospitality industry and development of local art and craft
6. Policy: To support the people to come out with guidelines that can be used to inform local and national policy, and replicable in other parts of the country.
7. Livelihoods: To build a strong foundation and good working relationship that will pave the way for building on conservation and livelihood issues to be addressed during this project.

### **Objectives-related information**

#### Objective 1: Innovation

1. The local government authority has grassroots level groups, the “unit committees” that seek to advance the development objectives of the local government and are now being used by the local community to advance their own public conservation awareness and wildlife protection objectives. The local people considered “unit committees” as political organs, and their new



role from within the community to facilitate the protection of the monkey sanctuary and the environment has united the local people.

2. The presence of an aforestation committee on the ground had also initially been seen as owned by a few people and not the community in promoting the reforestation of the whole area including the sanctuary. However, this project gave the aforestation committee the opportunity to have a better interaction with the people and calling for their overall participation. There had been several opinions on why the majority the local people lent little support to the committee but these are now resolved and holistic participation is in progress.
3. Unusual of conservation in Ghana and even in the rest of Africa is the willingness of local people to give personal land for conservation but this will soon be accomplished for the monkey sanctuary. Several landlords have come to accept that they can contribute by giving non-farmed lands closer to the sanctuary for use as additional wildlife habitat and most importantly creating a wide corridor of land use through farming which is a major threat to the sanctuary.
4. From our field visits have emerged several non-project related issues, and on aspects of people's physical health and how to access public health services at no or very little cost. This was because the local people thought that the presence of the sanctuary could have made a clinic facility available in the community. The project has assisted in making sure that some needy families are taken through the process of having access to health insurance so that they can save their incomes for other livelihood activities.

#### Objective 2: Education and information

1. Schools, social and economic groups have benefited from the awareness creation programmes and initiating local environmental groups to pursue conservation education and awareness. A local theatre group uses its dance ensemble to highlight the importance of wildlife conservation and promoting the concept of cultural village in Atome. Linking the cultural village concept to wildlife conservation is currently being explored to provide visitors, government and non-government agencies the opportunity to rethink development, and nature and cultural tourism. At the moment, the two are far apart in Ghana hence our team is looking into the possibility of merging the two in a way that will benefit both, and not harm the other.
2. Trails in the sanctuary are currently being mapped out for appropriate naming using wildlife and environmental indicators so that whilst people go through the sanctuary, they will experience the self education opportunities that the trails offer. The community is in the best position to come up with information that is well informing to the community, visitors,



tourists, etc. Our project has offered logistic support to have the trails marked and identified appropriately.

### Objective 3: Participation

1. The majority of the activities and achievements were due to active participation and the responses of the local people. Worth mentioning here was the planting of trees on the degraded parts of the sanctuary as well as on the boundaries (e.g. bananas) to keep the monkeys within their natural habitat.
2. As part of the tree planting exercises, a married couple from the United States of America on their visit to the sanctuary have offered to sponsor the nursing and planting of 4,000 trees. The main objective of this is to ask anyone who visits the sanctuary to plant a tree and to request a community member to nurture the trees until it grows. This initiative has not only brought job opportunities to some members of the community but demonstrates to the people that recognition of the sanctuary exists beyond the community, the district, the region and even the country. This will serve as a great motivation for the local people to fully participate in the ongoing and future conservation activities.
3. Women participation was key to this project. It was acknowledged that the project brought a voice to, and participation of women in local level conservation in the community and hence the whole area. Women were consciously and actively invited to take part in discussions and decision-making at all levels where they will usually not be, thus dealing with the chiefs and the custodians of the sanctuary who were most feared. They women have realised that this was not case for those community leaders but they are rather open and willing to listen and accommodate. The implication therefore is that the women of the Sanctuary community now have confidence to express their views and concerns about the environment and hence wildlife conservation and aforestation matters. The active involvement of women at all levels of deliberations and management was inevitable because it has been hypothesized that women mostly utilize natural resources and hence the need to get them on-board. Women were however challenged in various aspects of benefit sharing and their contributions (to be discussed later in the document).

### Objective 4: Wildlife management

1. The interaction with other NGOs within the area of the project has resulted in various collaborations and minimizing duplication and conflict of work. The Nature Resource Conservation Centre is directly involved in the management of the sanctuary whilst the



Friends of the Earth have been harnessing resources to ensure the management of the sanctuary's boundaries.

2. An all inclusive management committee to comprise of the managers of the reserve, the NGO workers and the community leaders has been suggested and will soon come into operation to harmonize the efforts of all stakeholders. Thereafter, proper wildlife and tourism management training can be given to such a committee. In spite of this, the afforestation committee currently in place is doing the fire management of the sanctuary and the surrounding forests.

#### Objectives 5 & 7: Livelihood and skill

1. Women were particularly targeted for this category of the objective towards their empowerment. It initially started at communal meetings on how best they can benefit from the presence of the sanctuary. A participatory investigation revealed that most women had enormous skill that need to be sharpened to the taste of especially tourists who frequently visit the sanctuary. The emphasis of this project however has been that the women received training in areas that can lead to sustainable livelihoods and or incomes even in the absence of tourism.
2. Women were taught to operate in cooperatives in their areas of specialties (e.g. farming, the hospitality industry, art and craft, etc) and were shown various avenues where they can access financial credits. The local government's district authority the "Assemblyman" offered to provide assistance to such women groups by leading them to appropriate quarters (already in progress). Progress has been made in getting relevant NGOs offer training in areas of local textile (batik) manufacturing. Other opportunities include the home-stay programmes for visitors to the sanctuary who wish to spend some time in the village and are prepared to stay with families rather than staying in hotels that are far from the site. Those who are ready for such an initiative have been identified and necessary steps and support pursued.

#### Objective 6: Policy issues

1. To date, there has not been any local level policy, or by-laws on the sanctuary. Although it is nationally gazetted as a protected area there is no clear category earmarked by the wildlife division to take care of such reserves. Discussions with the local opinion leaders were successfully carried out on the need for having policies to guide and guard access to the sanctuary. The areas considered included:
  2. Rules of conduct by both the resident population and visitors in the vicinity of the reserve.
  3. Rules of access to resources for subsistence purposes (e.g. medicinal plants).



4. Access to and ownership of intellectual property as several violations were identified by our team yet unknown to the local people.
5. The integrity and the right of the local people and wildlife as this could lead to the breakdown in trust and hence apathy towards the sanctuary.
6. Most importantly, to promote awareness and policies in aspects of bioprospection and biopiracy.
7. An extensive dialogue has been going on and it is important that several stakeholders are involved in the policy process most especially the district local government authority that has been benefiting in terms of revenue and for that matter giving enormous popularity to the sanctuary.
8. As part of such a policy, there is the need to have some supporting study to substantiate specific issues that might be arising during the whole policy process to be expanded into a strategic land use policy for the area. As a result, the outcomes of the scientific studies and surveys of interested parties from the University of Florida's Eckerd College will be used to partly support the policy during the drafting process. We think that a policy for the sanctuary and probably for land use in the whole area will perpetuate the existence of the sanctuary whilst promoting judicious use of natural resources within the whole area. It will also minimize the influence of tourists and illegal money-making activities of several tour operators through photography and videos.

### **Emerging lessons**

1. The mostly success stories of the project was due to the initial reconnaissance and for that matter the participatory planning that was carried out before the funding was sought. The outcome of this has been the trust, good response and feedbacks from the local people.
2. Openness and community level discussion and the respect for the peoples' culture and tradition have strengthened the trust between the project team and the local people. On the side of the local people, the project has unified them at all fronts.
3. The appreciation of the hospitality the local people was more important to them than what we sought to offer and they forever said "come again and soonest".
4. What the rest of the community thinks about a project, leadership or an important resource, the sanctuary in this case was only when the women spoke (thus empowered).
5. Innovative holistic conservation projects to remote communities will require a lengthy period of time to achieve results because the local people are cautious and slow to committing themselves. The period of the project was therefore woefully inadequate and our evaluation



shows that a minimum 3-year period would have seen most of the outcomes coming into complete fruition.

6. Allowing local people the time to always take project ideas to other levels on their own has been one of the strongest sides of the project.
7. Recognizing other on-going work at the project site and dialoguing with the people and organizations involved has resulted in a much stronger support for this project.
8. Acknowledging our mistakes during the implementation process has promoted openness, high level accountability on the part of both local people and project team, resulting in more avenues for future conservation work that were not originally part of this project (will be emphasized later).

In summary, these are the key lessons to share for now, and that “conservation projects conducted with openness and diligence results in unifying people, ideas and practice”.

### **New opportunities and challenges for conservation**

1. Equipping the already existing structure used as a visitor reception (donated by community) to provide services as a conservation education centre and museum with audio-visuals equipment, wildlife library and computers (to allow community access as part of the benefit-sharing).
2. Conservation / small game farming activities to offset pressure on existing wildlife and provide diversified livelihood portfolios that provide replacement for wildlife in the sanctuary (e.g., mushroom cultivation, snail, grasscutter and rabbit rearing, fish farming, etc).
3. Medicinal plants and fruit nurseries.
4. Flora and fauna survey of the whole area as there could be more species in the threat category such as the monkeys that will need to be protected by the communities.
5. A study into the conservation genetics and biology of the monkey species.

### **Issues and problems**

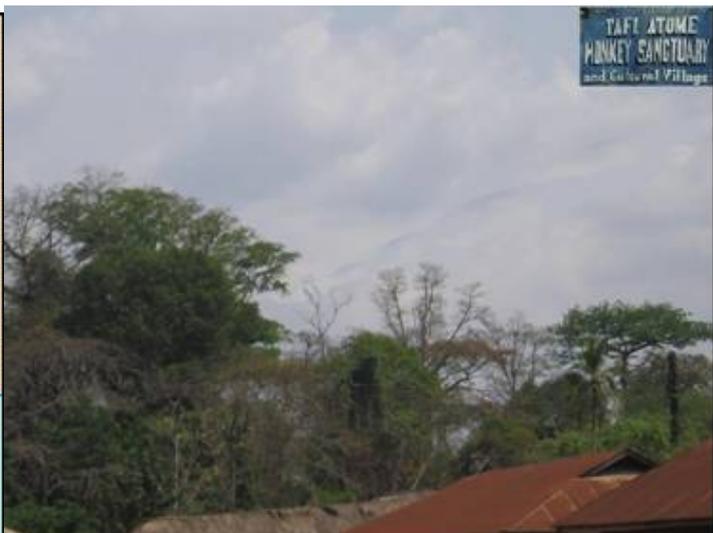
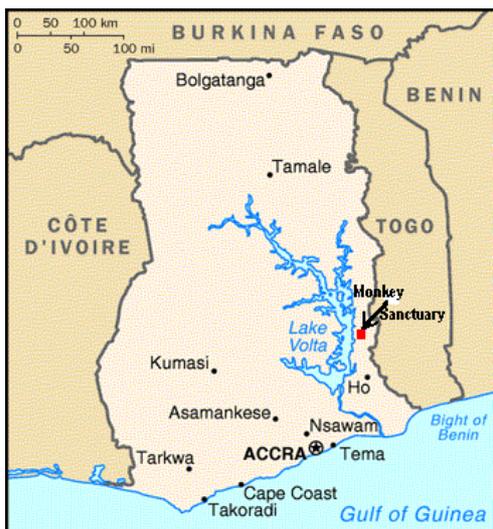
1. The funding period was in fact too short to respond to the positive feedbacks that we received. Hence an extended funding period to 3 years would make a big difference.
2. Most emerging conservation challenges were outside the funding scope of project.
3. The several emerging issues and challenges that interested else also overstretched our resources.
4. The terrain of the access route to the project site was a challenge and because a hired transport would have cost far more than budgeted for, our partners, the Community Resources Periscope had to offer additional assistance in terms of providing a vehicle.

**Finances**

Funding source	Type of contribution	Duration	Amount / value (£)
Rufford small grants	Cash	Beginning of project to date	4,664.00
Community Resources Periscope	Human resources and vehicle	Beginning to end of project	1,125.00
Community Resources Periscope	Cash	From January 2006	896.00
Total			6,685.00

**Conclusion**

One clear factor that has changed the impression of the local people about conservation was the fact that the project was led by a woman because the conservation profession has been noted to be dominated at lower and small-scale levels by men. That alone was a great motivation for everyone to get on board. I am therefore highly indebted to The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation for giving other people the opportunity to experience conservation in action from some other perspective. It is my hope that one day this sanctuary and the community as a whole will enter into small scale game and conservation farming to make the reality of conservation benefit-sharing come true.

**Some striking images from the project**

*Left:* Map of Ghana showing the position of the project site. *Right:* Beyond these roofs in Tafi Atome, Volta Region Ghana lays the magnificent forest that hosts one of the rarest and threatened sub-species of monkeys in the world.



Young banana trees growing on the boundaries of the sanctuary. Some members of the afforestation committee interacting with Ms Akpalu in 2005.



To the local people, every moment counts as blessing for the sustainability of the sanctuary. Here the spiritual custodian of the sanctuary (in spectacles) prays for success.

### **Acknowledgement**

On behalf of the team, I wish to thank The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation for providing a grant for this project. The Community Resources Periscope has also invested a lot financial resources and other resources including staff that we do appreciate. To all individuals that were involved both locally, nationwide and abroad, I am very grateful. Thanks Ben for all the timely photos and the video coverage. To other NGO representatives that gave us the opportunity to interact with them, thank you for your willingness. I thank the chiefs, elders and people of Tafi Atome especially Prosper Gayibor for the support.