RIU

Database provides link between rural groups and policy makers

Validated RNRRS Output.

A district-based information system in Ghana is opening up the policy process to debate, dialogue and consensus building. Previously, rural communities had often been indifferent to policies, meaning they were often not put into practice. The new system is a simple, participatory geographic information system (GIS). Its key features build on the local knowledge of the community, to collect data on natural resources and livelihood activities. Local networks of producers are encouraged to develop and state their demands for policy change and for information, and to organise platforms to put these demands to policy makers. The system is in use at the North Kintampo district assembly. The district agricultural department is also interested in using the method to develop its own district-wide surveys.

Project Ref: **NRSP19:**
Topic: **6. Promoting Success: Partnerships, Policy & Empowerment**
Lead Organisation: **University of Ghana, Ghana**
Source: **Natural Resources Systems Programme**

Document Contents:

Description, Validation, Current Situation, Current Promotion, Impacts On Poverty, Environmental Impact,

Description

Research into Use
NR International
Park House
Bradbourne Lane
Aylesford
Kent
ME20 6SN
UK

Geographical regions included:

Ghana,

Target Audiences for this content:

Crop farmers, Livestock farmers, Fishers, Forest-dependent poor,

NRSP19

A. Description of the research output(s)

1. Working title of output or cluster of outputs.
In addition, you are free to suggest a shorter more imaginative working title/acronym of 20 words or less.

Informing the Policy Process: Decentralisation and Environmental Democracy in Ghana

(Information systems, networks and platform for participatory decentralised NRM)

2. Name of relevant RNRRS Programme(s) commissioning supporting research and also indicate other funding sources, if applicable.

Natural Resource Systems Project

3. Provide relevant R numbers (and/or programme development/dissemination reference numbers covering supporting research) along with the institutional partners (with individual contact persons (if appropriate)) involved in the project activities. As with the question above, this is primarily to allow for the legacy of the RNRRS to be acknowledged during the RIUP activities.

R8258

4. Describe the RNRRS output or cluster of outputs being proposed and when was it produced? (max. 400 words).
This requires a clear and concise description of the output(s) and the problem the output(s) aimed to address.
Please incorporate and highlight (in bold) key words that would/could be used to select your output when held in a database.

The outputs were produced in 2005 in the Kintampo district of Ghana.

The outputs include a methodology for building a district-based **information systems** that collects comprehensive and systematic **data on natural resources** and productive/**livelihood** activities with participation of rural communities and the **lowest level of decentralisation,** who conducted the collection of data, inputting and analysis. This data is represented in a simple GIS that can easily be managed at the district level for policy planning. The key features of this **participatory GIS** build upon **the local knowledge** of communities of their environments and the **capacity** of their social networks and local institutions (including those which bridge local government and communities) to collect localised information. This initiative shows much promise in devising new and cost-effective ways of collecting data that fit the institutional structures of districts and decentralisation processes, and opening up policy processes to debate, dialogue and **consensus-building** within districts.

The second output encourages **local networks** of producers to develop and articulate their demands on policy, and to organise **platforms** where they place their **demands for policy change** and for **information** before policymakers. The project worked with two user groups, charcoal burners and yam farmers. The first group felt insecure in their livelihood activity, since they felt they were being unjustly blamed for deforestation without any

evidence being collected. The yam farmers felt marginalised from policy, in that there was no support for their farming activities or advisory services for their problems they faced. The platforms explored ways in which NR users could create pressures for policy dialogue and change and place demand on government services for information and support services, and inform development services of their needs.

The objective of these interventions is to facilitate more **informed policy processes,** in which information gathering derives from conditions on the ground and the perceptions of **user groups** rather than from perceived needs, anecdotes, and policy prescriptions transmitted from central state organisations. The aim is to encourage local government to pro-actively collect, coordinate, facilitate and manage information and encourage the exchange of information and **dialogue and civil society participation** in policymaking. This should result in natural resource policies that meet the needs of local communities and user groups, and encourage creative inputs in policy formulation. In the present situation, rural communities are frequently indifferent to policies, and this alienation results in policies failing to be implemented in any meaningful and comprehensive way.

5. What is the type of output(s) being described here?
Please tick one or more of the following options.

Product	Technology	Service	Process or Methodology	Policy	Other Please specify
			X	X	

6. What is the main commodity (ies) upon which the output(s) focussed? Could this output be applied to other commodities, if so, please comment

The main outputs are a participatory GIS, which can be updated by the lowest level of decentralised organisations at the community level communities; and platforms consisting of workshops in which user groups and local government personnel meet to dialogue about policy and policy needs. Transcripts of some of the platform workshops have been published and disseminated. The outputs are not focussed on any particular commodity and could be expanded to include a wide range of other sectors and commodities. While the information system focussed on natural resources (including agriculture), it could equally be applied or expanded to embrace other sectors such as health, education, and social welfare and infrastructure provisioning sectors. The main emphasis is on institutional linkages, information exchange and capacity building.

7. What production system(s) does/could the output(s) focus upon?
Please tick one or more of the following options. Leave blank if not applicable

Semi-Arid	High potential	Hillsides	Forest-Agriculture	Peri-urban	Land water	Tropical moist forest	Cross-cutting
			X				

8. What farming system(s) does the output(s) focus upon?
Please tick one or more of the following options (see Annex B for definitions).
Leave blank if not applicable

Smallholder rainfed humid	Irrigated	Wetland rice based	Smallholder rainfed highland	Smallholder rainfed dry/cold	Dualistic	Coastal artisanal fishing
X						

*9. How could value be added to the output or additional constraints faced by poor people addressed by clustering this output with research outputs from other sources (RNRRS and non RNRRS)? (**max. 300 words**).*

Please specify what other outputs your output(s) could be clustered. At this point you should make reference to the circulated list of RNRRS outputs for which proformas are currently being prepared.

Additional value can be added to the outputs by clustering them with more upstream outputs, which attempt to make central government policymaking more responsive to decentralised initiatives. One of the major constraints on the outputs comes from pressures of central government to impose policy prescriptions on districts and make districts conform to government policies. This tends to erode downward accountability and strengthens bureaucratic top-down and centrist approaches. Complementary initiatives are required at higher administrative levels to promote a more collaborative approach to policymaking and problem resolution at decentralised levels. The key to enhancing policymaking processes is to strengthen the capacity of districts to collect and manage information and to independently deliberate on information from their districts for policymaking (rather than to implement centrist policies that do not reflect existing conditions on the ground). There are several initiatives at the national, regional, and district levels, which are concerned with information collection, with which these outputs can engage.

Value can also be added by policies within specific sectors which may be commodity oriented by making them more responsive to end user needs and opening the process of technology interventions and options to dialogue with user groups. For instance, at present, I am exploring linkages for the yam farmers' networks with researchers at Wageningen University, who are interested in enhancing crop genetic resources through creating innovative frameworks for supporting farmer experimentation in crop breeding. This would involve bringing in researchers from Crop Research Institute in Ghana.

The RNRRS outputs with which this output could be clustered would include those dealing with promoting participatory policy processes, knowledge management, data management, social capital, and access to information. This would include R7856, R7865, R8494, R8334, R8090, R8363, R8084, R8491, R7502/R6306.

Validation

B.   Validation of the research output(s)

*10. **How** were the output(s) validated and **who** validated them?*

Please provide brief description of method(s) used and consider application, replication, adaptation and/or adoption in the context of any partner organisation and user groups involved. In addressing the "who" component detail which

*group(s) did the validation e.g. end users, intermediary organisation, government department, aid organisation, private company etc... This section should also be used to detail, if applicable, to which social group, gender, income category the validation was applied and any increases in productivity observed during validation **(max. 500 words)**.*

The project worked with four partner groups: charcoal burners, farmers, representatives of the lowest levels of decentralisation, and local district administration. The project focussed on creating information systems through which better data on natural resources could be collected by policymakers within the district, and networks and platforms through which user groups could develop and articulate their specific needs.

Building an information system for use in district planning involved the collection of comprehensive information on natural resources, entry of the information into a database and management of the database by personnel within the district within the existing institutional framework of district administration. A pilot study was initiated in one sub-district. This worked within the institutional structures within the sub-district and the interface between the sub-district and the communities within the sub-district. . The sub-district administration and volunteers from within the communities carried out the survey, data entry into a computerised GIS system and learned how to manage the database and analyse data. The research team monitored the process, providing training and technical backstopping. A methodology was developed from the pilot and extended to a second sub-district, with members from the pilot sub-district acting as the trainers of trainers. This ensured the replicablility of the methodology and its capacity to be extended and adapted in other areas. Key personnel within the district administration were involved in training and were kept informed about the developments of the project. The main role for the district administration was in coordinating the datasets of the sub-districts and maintaining a central database. The district administration has recognised the value of the collected data. It is interested in extending the survey to the other sub-districts within the district.

The networks and platforms sought to complement this activity by creating fora in which farmers and charcoal burners from different areas within the district would come together to discuss their problems and perspectives and develop a programme of demands which they would place before policymakers, including support for particular livelihood activities, demands for information and for policy change. Two different structures were used. In the first, the user groups were supported in developing their own research and placing their agenda before policymakers for policy change. In the second, intermediary organisations including NGOs, agricultural extension services, and research institutes were brought in to explain their agendas and activities and find ways of helping the end users to organise and solve their problems. Both approaches have their merits and problems. In the first case, while the networks were able to develop a comprehensive programme, the cost of network meetings (particularly of transport from inaccessible settlements), makes it doubtful if the network can sustain itself without external support. In the second instance, the intermediary organisations tended to deflect and co-opt the major problems of the user groups and to transform their agendas. Nevertheless, in both instances, it was relatively easy to mobilise end users to participate in dialogue on analysing their situation constructively.

11. **Where and when** *have the output(s) been validated?*

*Please indicate the places(s) and country(ies), any particular social group targeted and also indicate in which production system and farming system, using the options provided in questions 7 and 8 respectively, above **(max 300 words)**.*

The outputs have been validated in the Kintampo districts of Ghana from 2003-2006. The social groups targeted include small-scale farmers cultivating yams within a bush-fallowing system and small-scale charcoal burners within the forest agricultural interface of the smallholder rainfed system. The research also targeted representatives of the lowest level of decentralised administration and the district administration who are responsible for serving the end user groups.

Current Situation

C.   Current situation

12. **How and by whom** are the outputs currently being used? Please give a brief description **(max. 250 words)**.

The outputs consist of processes and methodologies rather than technology packages. The information system outputs are being used in the North Kintampo district assembly. They are attempting to use the database and GIS maps for planning purposes. They are also intending to expand the dataset to cover the whole of the district. The district agricultural department is also interested in using the methodology to develop its own district wide surveys. The simplicity of the methodology and its low transaction and financial cost has interested the district in further development.

The workshop reports from platform workshops - which represent the interests of charcoal burners and farmers, and the problems that the district faces in the gathering and use of information in policy - have been distributed to national level policymakers.

13. **Where** are the outputs currently being used? As with Question 11 please indicate place(s) and countries where the outputs are being used **(max. 250 words)**

The information system outputs are being used in the Kintampo districts of Ghana**,** within the District administration, sub-district councils, and by the Agricultural Department. The networking and platforms resulted in the organisation of a Kintampo Charcoal Burners Association, and a farmers network which have the potential, with external support, to continue to grow and place demands on policymakers.

14. What is the scale of current use? Indicating how quickly use was established and whether usage is still spreading **(max 250 words).**

The methodology for the information system was developed in one sub-district and the data collected and inputted into a database for all the communities within that sub-district in a nine month period. The exercise was completed within the second sub-district within a six month period. If the project (which was under three years duration) had continued, expansion could have occurred into the third remaining sub-district and from there into other district councils. The Kintampo district is interested in expanding the information system to the third sub-district and integrating it into a district system. Once a district system has been established, replication is likely to occur more quickly, since it can then be replicated from one district to another based on a district-focused

methodology rather than the sub-district focus we used. Current work on the information system in the North Kintampo District Assembly is hampered by a lack of technical and financial support.

The user group networks spread rapidly. While we initially focussed in three settlements, the charcoal end user groups rapidly expanded into thirty different settlements largely through the initiatives of group members, in all the sub-districts. This was largely because the groups provided end users with a forum that was badly needed but not supported in policy processes.

15. In your experience what programmes, platforms, policy, institutional structures exist that have assisted with the promotion and/or adoption of the output(s) proposed here and in terms of capacity strengthening what do you see as the key facts of success? **(max 350 words).**

The aim of this project was to create platforms and programmes that link end users with policymakers at the lower ends of decentralisation, and to fill a perceived void. The structures of decentralisation, particularly those at the lower level, have been key factors in the promotion of the outputs; in creating a bottom up framework for the management of information and ensuring that information needs and demands flow up from the community-level. The key factor in strengthening capacities is to root interventions within the existing institutional structures, which link civil society and communities with government, and build up from these institutional linkages into the institutional framework of local government. Within local government, the tendency is for the administration and administrators to look for external solutions coming from higher administrative hierarchies and to dismiss the potentials within existing institutional structures. While districts have difficulty in building and maintaining highly skilled staff, existing personnel often have much knowledge of local conditions, which tends to be multifaceted, and social capital. Within the hierarchy of district administration, the higher echelons of administration are characterised by more technical and commodity oriented knowledge and less local knowledge. However, it is frequently easy to teach technical skills than to have a detailed knowledge of the surrounding. The local knowledge and social capital of communities and the lower levels of sub-district administration are important resources for development and the building of information for policy. The institutionalisation of local knowledge within the framework of decentralised policy processes has the potential to facilitate more informed policy processes. This requires a step-by- step process of gradually building new capacities within the framework of rural administration, and aiding rural administrations to increase their management potential in ways they recognise as contributing to their work and mandates. For instance, the Director of the Agricultural Department in Kintampo quickly recognised that he could use the same approach we had developed to conduct a survey into livestock within the whole district.

Current Promotion

D.   *Current promotion/uptake pathways*

*16. **Where** is promotion currently taking place? Please indicate for each country specified detail what promotion is taking place, by whom and indicate the scale of current promotion **(max 200 words).***

Currently, the Kintampo North district is attempting to extend the work we carried. However, it lacks technical and

financial support for this process. Although government supports information processes within the districts, it does not have any clear programmes to support this process. Many of the information supporting initiatives that were supported in the Brong Ahafo district by DFID and GTZ have collapsed as a result of the focus on Direct Budgetary Support.

The networks are also experiencing difficulty in operating since they have no access to support. Although civil society initiatives exist, it is difficult for remote groups to gain access to civil society support facilities and to have sufficient knowledge to approach them with their own agendas. Although we have put these groups in touch with NGOs, the NGOs often have different agendas from the user groups. Local NGos working within communities and are oriented towards service provision rather than advocacy or making interventions within policy processes to promote bottom-up processes. There is a possibility of extending the farmers network through a programme concerned with genetic resource development, which has recently succeeded in getting funding.

17. What are the current barriers preventing or slowing the adoption of the output(s)? Cover here institutional issues, those relating to policy, marketing, infrastructure, social exclusion etc. (max 200 words).

The regional structures, which are mandated to provide technical backstopping and support for information in policy processes, tend to play a weak role in strengthening decentralised policy processes, and the capacities of the districts to manage information in planning processes. They tend to impose central government prescriptions or demand information for their policy units rather than create and strengthen functioning systems for information gathering, analysis and policy deliberations in decentralisation based on the transparent use of information at all levels of administration. It is critical to strengthen the capacities of the regional coordinating councils to provide support for district policy processes and to convey the needs of the districts to central government and to support local level initiatives, which can often be appropriate, creative and innovatory.

18. What changes are needed to remove/reduce these barriers to adoption? This section could be used to identify perceived capacity related issues (max 200 words).

Central government needs to recognise the importance of building planning capacity within districts. This requires the strengthening of both information gathering processes and the capacity to use them in transparent policy deliberations. A prerequisite for this is a two-way communication of information between government and end users. This requires central government to refrain from transmitting policy prescriptions to districts to implement and to build the capacity of districts to manage and communicate information for policymaking. This requires capacity to be built within the regional coordinating councils to facilitate democratic policymaking involving representation from user groups, and structures within district administrations for the use, management and communication of information in policymaking.

19. What lessons have you learnt about the best ways to get the outputs used by the largest number of poor people? (max 300 words).

The outputs need to be built onto the existing capabilities of rural people and the lower levels of administration and fit into the existing institutional structures. They need to build upon the existing knowledge. From this perspective, it becomes easier to build upon existing capacities to overcome existing human resource and institutional constraints in the context of existing constraints and bottlenecks rather than attempt to implant new

ways of doing things from external perspectives and abstracted reference points. Skilful networking that builds upon existing skills and capabilities, social capital, community organisations, and local knowledge within small areas, can often achieve more than more highly trained staff with questionable motivation dealing with much larger areas. While it is important to build up new techniques from the bottom-up within existing institutions it is also important to seek to make policy interventions for change at higher levels of administration, since bureaucratic resistance and reiteration are often entrenched as a result of the top-down prescriptions of central government, which prevent local officials critically assessing existing policy processes. However, attempting to reform policy processes at higher levels without working out innovations within the existing institutional framework and capabilities of actors, results in serious constraints, in which policy change may become a matter of rhetorical rather than institutionalised.

Impacts On Poverty

E.   Impacts on poverty to date

20. Where have impact studies on poverty in relation to this output or cluster of outputs taken place? This should include any formal poverty impact studies (and it is appreciated that these will not be commonplace) and any less formal studies including any poverty mapping-type or monitoring work which allow for some analysis on impact on poverty to be made. Details of any cost-benefit analyses may also be detailed at this point. Please list studies here.

At present, there are no studies of the impact on poverty since there are no discernable impacts of the project on poverty. The project attempts to create a policy framework that can address the interests of the poor, rather than to directly address poverty. For the research to have an impact on poverty there needs to be a full functioning information system that is used transparently in policymaking and a process through which user groups can get their voice heard within the policy process and make representations. At present, there is an interest with creating information systems, but no use of information in policy making and no institutionalised procedures through which end users are assured representation in policy processes. However, the recognition of the importance of information in district planning, and the rights of user groups to platforms do constitute an important and necessary step in any movement towards a policy process that addresses the needs of the poor.

21. Based on the evidence in the studies listed above, for each country detail how the poor have benefited from the application and/or adoption of the output(s) ***(max. 500 words):***

- *What positive impacts on livelihoods have been recorded and over what time period have these impacts been observed? These impacts should be recorded against the capital assets (human, social, natural, physical and, financial) of the livelihoods framework;*
- *For whom i.e. which type of person (gender, poverty group (see glossary for definitions) has there been a positive impact;*
- *Indicate the number of people who have realised a positive impact on their livelihood;*
- *Using whatever appropriate indicator was used detail what was the average percentage increase recorded*

Not applicable, since there are no discernable impacts on poverty at present.

Environmental Impact

H.   Environmental impact

24. What are the direct and indirect environmental benefits related to the output(s) and their outcome(s)? (max 300 words)

This could include direct benefits from the application of the technology or policy action with local governments or multinational agencies to create environmentally sound policies or programmes. Any supporting and appropriate evidence can be provided in the form of an annex.

The main environmental benefits include better monitoring and knowledge of natural resources and changes in the natural resource base; and more realistic natural resource management and policy processes that are based on empirical evidence about resources, rather than rhetoric.

25. Are there any adverse environmental impacts related to the output(s) and their outcome(s)? (max 100 words)

No, the outputs promote better information about natural resources, which can only contribute to better management.

26. Do the outputs increase the capacity of poor people to cope with the effects of climate change, reduce the risks of natural disasters and increase their resilience? (max 200 words)

The outputs are very relevant for addressing the capacity of poor people to deal with climate change, the risk of natural disaster and to increase their resilience. The outputs aim to create platforms through which poor people can report their problems and demands to policymakers. They also aim to build the capacity of districts to monitor changes in the natural resource base through the maintenance and updating of information. Accurate information on natural resources, use of natural resources and changes in natural resources are critical for supporting the coping and adaptive strategies of the poor.