

NATURAL RESOURCES SYSTEMS PROGRAMME
PROJECT REPORT¹

DFID Project Number

R8258

Report Title

Introducing the DEAR project.
Annex H of the Final Technical Report of project R8258.

Report Authors

DEAR Project

Organisation

ODI and Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana.

Date

2005

NRSP Production System

Forest Agriculture Interface

¹ This document is an output from projects funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.



The **DEAR**
Project

Info sheet

DECENTRALISED ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION RESEARCH

No1

INTRODUCING THE DEAR PROJECT

WHAT IS THE DEAR PROJECT?

The Decentralised Environmental Action Research (DEAR) Project seeks to promote local level popular democracy in managing the environment. By this we mean that people should be involved in the decision making about development, and about the natural resources they use to make their living or livelihood.

WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT?

The environment consists of natural resources which people depend on for their living and for their health. This includes the crops that people grow in the soil, the forest resources and earth they use in building their dwellings, the water that we drink, and the maintenance of healthy surroundings that ensure we do not fall sick. Environmental policy is about making sure that these resources are used for the benefit of the majority in the society and that some people do not spoil these resources for others, such as by poisoning water with chemicals or greedily harvesting resources for sale that other people cannot get some.

Where democracy works in managing these resources there is social justice and the way society manages these resources enables everyone to get some benefit. When democracy is not working the rich and powerful often capture these resources for themselves. Frequently they blame the poor and less powerful for not managing these resources well and use this to justify limiting their use of resources and taking it away from the poor. When democracy is working well people are involved in a debate about how the natural resources should be managed. They are involved in making decisions that affect their lives and policies that reflect their interests and demands.

In Ghana a system of local level democracy exists based on decentralisation and the District Assemblies and Area Councils. Those who are eligible to vote in a district vote for Assembly Members to represent their interests at the District Assembly, and they vote for representatives to Unit Committees. They are supposed to vote for members of their community who they think can best put across their interests to the government and government agencies. If these people fail to represent their interests, if they abuse their position and engage in corrupt activities, or if they are arrogant and fail to listen to the people they can be voted out of office at the next election. This is democratic accountability.

The Unit Committees in several neighbouring settlements elect some of their members to represent them at the Area Council and the District Assembly. The Area Council and District Assembly have several committees which make policies in different areas. One of these committees is the Environmental Committee. According to the laws on decentralisation, when the Unit Committees and Area Councils decide to make a policy they are supposed to hold community meetings in which members of the community suggest what their needs are. When the Unit Committees and Area Councils decide to make a policy or regulation or introduce a development programme, they are supposed to meet with the community to find out the various views of the people who make up the community and if the policies are acceptable.

The aim of the DEAR project is to encourage dialogue about how natural resources are managed and to ensure that the people who use these resources have a say about how they are managed.

All too frequently there is a lack of dialogue. The government agencies do not encourage the people and Area Councils to express their needs. Rather they wish to impose policies on the communities, and byelaws that ban certain activities or tell people how to manage their resources. This is done with little understanding of the ways in which the people do things and the problems they are attempting to deal with. Instead of encouraging dialogue and debate they encourage the chiefs to make byelaws controlling and banning certain activities, and taking resources away from the poor.

To achieve dialogue the DEAR project works with various groups within the community and helps them to come together and organise so that they can develop a common programme to put to the policy makers. The DEAR project will then organise meetings between the user groups and policy makers at the Area Council and District Assembly to discuss the problems they face and ways of solving them.

LOCAL LEVEL DEMOCRACY AND INFORMATION

The DEAR project believes that information is central to better management of natural resources and for the development of local level democracy. Natural resources can only be managed successfully if the district authorities know what resources occur in their district, who is involved in the use of the resources, if there are any conflicts about the use and control of these resources, and the main social and environmental issues around these resources. The DEAR project is working with Area Councils to help them develop inventories of resources in their district and an understanding of the issues that arise around the use of these resources. The DEAR Project has been working with the New Longoro Area Council in helping it to collect information on natural resources in the Area, which it will be able to use in planning. The DEAR Project has provided training for members of the Area Council in entering and analysing data using computers and keeping the information in the form of maps of the area or Geographical Information Systems. This information system can be developed by the District Assembly and applied to the whole district.

Information is only useful when it is shared. The Area Councils need to provide their citizens with information on where they can get help in their livelihoods. The Area Council

also needs to collect information from citizens on their needs. The role of the District Assembly and the Area Councils in information collection is now recognised by the government. The districts are required to collect data on all sectors including environment and agriculture and to regularly update this data. The District Planning Coordinating Unit is responsible for holding quarterly Meetings with Area Councils to discuss planning and information needs.

In practice, the District Assemblies and Area Councils have limited information on what happens in the districts. As a result of this planning is often not based on data and information, but assumptions that often come from the national level. This is particularly the case in managing the environment.

The DEAR Project is working with the Kintampo District Assembly and the New Longoro and Babato Area Councils to develop an information system for the management of natural resources.

THE CASE OF CHARCOAL PRODUCTION

Charcoal and woodfuel are cases where policies are made that harm the livelihood of people without being based on firm evidence. These policies try to limit the use of trees for woodfuel or encourage people to plant trees for woodfuel. The solutions are not appropriate because they are not based on an understanding of how people use woodfuel. It is assumed that there is a woodfuel crisis because population is increasing and because increasing amounts of woodfuel and charcoal are sent to the urban markets. It is assumed that this growth of woodfuel markets must lead to deforestation, since tree growth is assumed to be slow. However, what is not understood is that woodfuel production is integrated with farming. A lot of charcoal and woodfuel production comes from wood that is cleared in the process of farming. One cannot make a farm without cutting trees.

In the yam growing areas there are often high densities of trees on farms, since farmers preserve lots of trees to use for staking the yams. These trees are burnt to get rid of the tree canopy to enable the yam to gain sunlight and the burnt trunks are used as stakes. Later they can be cut for charcoal. Although charcoal is also produced in the bush, more probably originates from farmland. It is difficult to distinguish what trees are cut for farming and those that are cut specifically for burning. Since this is the case, it cannot be proved that charcoal burning in itself is responsible for cutting of trees or deforestation.

Many of the species used for charcoal are numerous. They are hardy and regenerate rapidly from coppice. More trees may regenerate than were originally there. This may result in more small trees today than in the past but less big trees. However, if these trees are carefully managed this may result in a well wooded environment in the future. Enhancing the preservation of coppice regrowth may be a better strategy for the future than cultivating plantations of fast growing exotic trees. like teak. The advantage of preserving coppice is that it results in a diversity of different species at different stages of growth, which can support continuous use and which are well adapted to local conditions. Establishing plantations with trees planted at regular distance involves stumping existing trees and results in a monoculture – the same species planted over a large area. Preserving and managing coppice may be a better strategy in the future. Rather than

painting an alarmist picture, we should study the situation and build upon the best and most promising practices of rural producers.

The DEAR Project is working with charcoal burners in the Kintampo district, to develop an understanding of charcoal burning and its effects on the environment, to develop a set of best practice guidelines for charcoal burning and to develop a programme of demands that charcoal burners can place before the District Assembly and government agencies.

10 PRINCIPLES FOR DECENTRALISED ENVIRONMENTAL POLICYMAKING

1. Base policies on evidence from localities rather than assumptions.
2. Collect information for making policies and make it available to policymakers, technical staff, democratic representatives and citizens. Encourage the harmonisation of information and data within the district, discussions and debates about information and policies, and demands among decentralised agencies for information from other district agencies to guide their work.
3. Encourage debate among different natural resource user groups and encourage them to make inputs into policies by holding consultations.
4. Make information available to citizens, producers and natural resource user groups so that they can engage in debate, reflect on policies, exercise choice and make demands for relevant policies.
5. Recognise the rights of all user groups to a livelihood, and rights to different perspectives. All users of the environment transform it to make a livelihood. There should be compromises between different groups rather than victimising and blaming particular groups as destroyers of the environment who need to be controlled. Avoid blaming politically weak groups and the poor.
6. Do not try to force policies on people through introducing byelaws without debate, bringing in the military and police to threaten people. This only results in frustration, disappointment, and resentment, in communities flouting regulations and laws and in corrupt practices.
7. Encourage democratic participation in policy-making at all levels of decentralisation
8. Encourage the sub-district structures to collect information on natural resources, to hold consultations with the various communities and Unit Committees to make relevant policies. Since the Area Councils are small and the representatives on the Unit Committees and Area Councils know their area and the people it is often relatively easy for them to assemble information quickly.
9. Build up exchange of information between Area Councils (sub-districts), district administrations and decentralised agencies for more appropriate policy-making and implementation.
10. Place demands on higher level government services for finding solutions, building information capacities of the district, and implementing policies.

DEAR Project, P.O. Box 293, Kintampo. Visit DEAR Centre House No E282 (off turning opposite Methodist Church)..

DEAR Project, C/o Prof Kojo Amanor, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra

