

**NATURAL RESOURCES SYSTEMS PROGRAMME**  
***PROJECT REPORT***<sup>1</sup>

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The way forward.  
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**Report Authors**

Brown, D. and Amanor, K.

**Organisation**

Overseas Development Institute.

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## **Annex 4: The Way Forward**

In recent years the framework for agricultural development and natural resource management has experienced considerable change. New paradigms for development are in the process of being developed.

### **4.1 Changing Paradigms**

The paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s of state-led modernisation through technology transfer, and dissemination via ‘trickle down’, are no longer applicable in current policy contexts. In the 1960s and 1970s the main agricultural strategies were based on development of state farms, inputs subsidies and soft loans. This approach supported the development of mechanised agriculture by richer farmers, and agricultural extension and delivery systems which promoted new technologies. During the 1970s agricultural modernisation entered into crisis, and support for the agricultural sector drained state resources and subsidies. These policies also had negative impacts on the environment, and encouraged dependence on state resources rather than a dynamic agricultural sector.

By the 1980s the agricultural modernisation project crumbled. The state could no longer financially support subsidies, and structural adjustment policies required divestiture of state enterprises, and an end to state intervention. Agricultural development paradigms based on transfer of technology gave way to participatory technology development, and decentralisation became a key to administrative reform. The new agenda emphasised poverty alleviation, natural resources management and sustainable development. The central concerns were with development processes that were inclusive, promoted equity and gender participation, and considered a variety of livelihood options.

Within the changing context of agricultural research and development, new approaches and new institutional innovations need now to be created. The major concern is to move beyond the extension of influence of a state sector or policy sector, through the distribution of new technologies and building up of a clientele of faithful supporters, to considerations of the improved quality of communication and dissemination of

information at all nodes of production and in multiple directions. New approaches are required that improve decision-making in natural resource management from local level producers to national level administrators. This requires new institutional innovations which promote feedback on the environment and production systems from various localities as well as information systems which regularly update themselves and which policy makers can use to learn about the conditions which people experience in their daily life.

These information systems should facilitate debate at various policy levels to foster more informed and appropriate policy options. The interface between administrative organs and perceptions of different people within the localities, and the learning processes that emerge from the interface at both these levels is what will ultimately determine if a sustainable development process can be implemented. Policy makers need to make policies which are informed by the experiences of citizens, and citizens need to understand the avenues through which they can create demands for appropriate policies.

Given the complexity of social arrangements, micro-environments and change, sustainable production systems cannot be conjured up in experimental stations and transformed to the localities as technological prescriptions. Neither can improved ecological management be implanted by the decrees of policy-makers who claim to understand all the environmental processes and problems. The premise for a better policy process is the setting up new information systems which are inclusive and involve a consultative process with a wide range of interest groups within the rural areas, and which bind policy-makers to downward accountability. These information systems need to collect empirical data on the different interest and livelihood groups within the various localities, the natural resource base and the economic potential of the various localities. They also need to reflect the perceptions and interests of the various groups within the localities.

#### **4.1.1 Institutional mechanisms**

The process of decentralisation within Ghana has suffered from numerous constraints and setbacks. It may have fallen short in achieving its aims and objectives. Nevertheless, it remains the only avenue through which rural dwellers come into contact with development administration and have any say in development planning.

While local-planning processes within decentralisation may be wanting, the shortcomings are not necessarily the product of decentralisation. They could as easily be blamed on bureaucratic culture in Ghana. The legal framework for decentralisation provides ample scope for accountability, for civil society participation in development planning, and for communities to develop their own development plans. The contradictions often come from the higher echelons of administration, from ministries, departments and regional co-ordinating bodies who issue top-down directives and expect the districts to comply; from government agencies who expect districts to implement government policy without a debate on the appropriate needs of the districts; from departments who think they are too important to decentralise.

The legal framework for decentralisation requires district departments to collaborate in developing district sector plans which are ratified by an Assembly with a majority of members. Unit Committees and Area Councils with an elected majority then initiate development plans which have been discussed with the communities. Strengthening these linkages has the potential of building upon civil society participation making district assemblies more accountable to a rural electorate.

#### **4.2 Other interventions**

Several donor projects now focus on strengthening the district planning process, attempting to enhance planning procedures by facilitating more inclusive consultation, more transparent procedures governing allocation of resources, an improved responsiveness to civil society groups. They include the following:

1. The *CIDA Community Governance Project* operates in the Upper West, Upper East and Northern Regions. Its objective has been to build capacities for

- decentralised planning in six pilot districts. It has provided training in development and financial planning to the Six District Assemblies and implemented demonstration infrastructure programmes for the assemblies to manage.
2. The *DANIDA Support to District Assemblies* operates in the Upper West and Volta Regions. The programme focuses on the health sectors in districts in these regions and seeks to provide support for strengthening administration and management at the district level to foster a more participatory and accountable development. It has largely been concerned with building information systems on the districts and enhanced planning procedures.
  3. The *DFID Support for District Assemblies* operates in the Brong Ahafo Region. The programme is situated within the agricultural sector offices, but is concerned with improving the cross-sector linkages within the district administration, and linkages between these sectors and the district assembly to produce a more integrated and effective planning system which is more responsive to the needs of the rural population. The programme focuses on the linkages within the district administration and not the linkages between the district assembly and civil society. It does not work with Unit Committees. Its ultimate success will thus depend upon other projects facilitating linkages between the district administration and civil society, creating demands from the various localities on district services and the district planning process.
  4. The *GTZ Programme for Rural Action* focuses on village communities in three select districts in the West Gonja, Kintampo, and Hohoe districts. It operates at two levels. It seeks to improve planning procedures within the districts and promote a participatory planning process that involves local communities in articulating their development needs the district level. It works with the Unit Committees within villages, training Unit Committee members in using community animation techniques - which are essentially drawn from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). These PRA techniques are used to discuss problems and potential solutions at community meetings and develop a set of prioritised and ranked projects from which the Unit Committee can develop project proposals to

be submitted to the district assembly for funding. At the district administration level the programme works to establish a set of transparent procedures and criteria, through which projects submitted by Unit Committees are screened, vetted and selected for funding. The aim of the process is to create a demand-driven participatory planning process with accountability and transparency that responds to local level needs, and ensures that district funds are not used for political objectives or rent-seeking.

While the GTZ Programme for Rural Action is the most comprehensive in building linkages and accountability between rural dwellers and policy makers, its reliance on PRA techniques is oriented to the support of the community infrastructure programmes on which it focuses. This approach may have serious constraints when applied to natural resource management. Here, different interest groups exist that are frequently locked in conflict and competition, and the local community is likely to be socially highly differentiated. In this situation, attempts to develop a rapid analysis, to gain a consensus that prioritises plans of action, to foreclose debate, disagreements and negotiation may all have negative outcomes. Minorities, women and other less powerful groups in the community may be inhibited from attending the forum, from expressing their interests and points of view, and the consensus of the community becomes that of the politically dominant group or that group with the closest links to dominant political and policy interests. Those groups with insecure access to natural resources and lack of access to information, knowledge and technology, are most likely to be disadvantaged at a community forum. Those with most access to natural resources, information, knowledge, government services and technology are going to be the most confident and able to dominate the forum. Without *a priori* research which can identify social processes and their implications for development initiatives, the social representation of a community forum remains unknown.

With the advent of PRA as a research tool researchers have tended to focus on developing more flexible and process oriented modes of planning in which participatory planning is organised as a research tool. The researcher's main role is that of facilitation:

to bring the expertise of knowing how to facilitate a process of negotiation and identification of problems and solutions to the process. The implication is that people cannot act in a rational communicative way without someone capable of facilitating the process (Leewis, 2000). However, as Leewis argues, scarcity or conflict over resources may in reality prevent people from taking part in a communicative platform process. Any attempt to bring closure to these conflicts may marginalise particular groups and enable those interests who have been able to persuade the policy-maker/researcher that they represent the authentic voice of the community (or that they are the most congenial inhabitants) to establish ascendancy.

The justification for using PRA techniques has in the past been the need for rapid analysis, as well as a critique of the slowness of conducting surveys. However, the technology available to researchers today opens up avenues for rapid processing of survey methods. The proviso is that the traditional hierarchical relations within a research team (field interviewers, data in-putters, statistical analysts, and report writers) are transformed. In carrying out such research, a variety of techniques is used including informal discussions, more formal group discussions and individual survey questionnaires.

In the present instance, for example, while the informal and groups discussions were instrumental in identifying issues, the questionnaire survey revealed many surprising findings. When these were fed back to groups within the community, these findings were often confirmed, elaborated upon or provoked intense debate in which different positions emerged. This process not only enlightened our research process but also provided communities with knowledge which they could reflect upon and information on which they could elaborate their perspectives.

For instance, the finding in the survey that more farmers were growing maize at Mansie was surprising to the research team. When fed back to groups of farmers at Subinso, it was confirmed, but prompted them to make an analysis of the different conditions of production at Mansie and Subinso, the problems that had emerged from the use of inputs

and tractor ploughing, the responses of farmers at Subinso to these problems. It also facilitated a debate and reflection of how Subinso was linked into the wider agricultural economy and policy environment. It should be possible to build upon these processes to create information for the further development of research and for the benefit of farmers to build their bridging ties and linkages to wider policy processes.

### **4.3 Entry points for community action**

A potential alternative entry point into a community is to act as a provider of information. On this approach, the first objective of collecting and disseminating information would be to gain a better understanding of the social groups within the communities, their livelihoods, their policy perspectives and their interests. A second objective would be to provide information to these groups to facilitate the development of bridging ties through which they can articulate broader group interests. A third objective would be to provide them with information which would facilitate their ability to develop strategic linkages with other groups and place their demands to policy-makers. A fourth objective would be to examine the potential of local level participation in research processes, to generate their own research, to process their own data and information, and to be able to update information systems and utilise them for placing their demands in the policy process.

This entry point creates a different role for the researcher than that of the PRA process. The researcher no longer plays the role of the facilitator of a rational process of negotiation which seeks to bind the whole community to a community plan of action. The role of the researcher is rather to provide information and facilitate information generating processes to facilitate policy processes, feedback and accountability. The outputs of research become information systems that facilitate communications between policy processes and natural resource users.

At present information systems within the districts are weak. There are no institutionalised processes for generating a knowledge base on the needs of localities and the different interest groups that reside in them. As a result of these constraints it becomes difficult for district administrations to develop district profiles, and for Assembly



Members and Unit Committees to present their needs beyond the parochial concerns of their individual village. Without the ability to draw up a district profile, the districts are unable to place their needs and demands before higher-up administrative organs. They become subservient to top-down national prescriptions imposed by Regional Coordinating Councils, which are frequently based on minimal and fragmentary national-level data substantiating a framework that is essentially built on received wisdom of external origin.

To develop policy processes that are more inclusive and respond to the needs of rural dwellers, district level information systems need to be created. The information so derived needs to be able to be processed and updated in ways which enable the concerns of various localities to be reflected in planning procedures. This requires the two-way communication of information between localities and their Unit Committees and the district administration.

Unit Committees and Area Councils should be able to collate basic information on their settlements, the characteristics of the population in the settlement, the different livelihood groups within their settlements, the policy interests of different groups, the natural resource base and natural resource conflicts, the incidences of bush fires, etc. They should be able to feed this information to district assemblies and also request information on trends within the districts. This information should also be available to the District Assembly members and the sub-committees and should inform their deliberations. It should go into the formulation of a district profile which informs the planning process and is also conveyed to regional coordinating councils. These information systems need to be built from the community level upwards to achieve responsiveness to changing conditions and the interests of people. This would be in marked contrast to the technocratic information systems which are built by sector organisations which tend to identify optimal land planning production systems based on the inherent physical characteristics of regions rather than the economic activities of their inhabitants.

#### **4.4 The Proposed Programme**

The major task of the programme will be to identify the interest groups at different points in the hierarchy of the system of decentralisation, from the localities with their Unit Committees through the District administration to the Regional level. Research would identify their information needs, and the major constraints which limit their ability to collect, process and communicate information. It would also strengthen and facilitate their information-generating and communicating processes, and utilise the research capacities of the research team to generate information which these levels can also utilise. This would include access to findings of research services, national databases, remote sensing information, geographical information systems, etc.

Natural resource issues, however, are not constrained by the settlements in which people live. The economic activities of different producers are integrated into a regional economy, in which the activities of a wide range of producers define the niche which one particular set of producers can occupy. Many of the problems in natural resources management in particular areas also occur over a wider area, with variations in the processes of adaptation, conflicts, negotiation of conflicts, and institutional innovations.

Thus, one means of giving natural resource users greater access to information would be to develop regional networks which would bring farmers together to examine particular problems in natural resource management, different perspectives on the problem and different approaches to the resolution of the programme. This could include situations involving conflicts between different natural resource users that are replicated in a number of localities, such as between charcoal burners and (yam) farmers, where reflections on the different histories of conflict and negotiation, could promote social learning. It could also involve situations in which different natural resource users have worked out a set of different adaptive responses to similar problems, or where the adaptive response in one area has consequences for other natural resource users in other areas.

This programme could involve a series of farmer and other resource users exchange visits; workshops which seek to draw lessons from various experiences; and visits to research organisations and government services to exchange experiences. The objective of this network would be to bridge experiences between natural resource users, to enable them to address problems requiring collective actions and to enable them to draw up a framework of reference that enables them to engage in dialogue with policy makers. One output of this programme would be to facilitate workshops between policy makers and rural producers in which the networks of natural resource users could place their demands and projects to the policy makers. The types of themes to be addressed (which would need to be identified by participating networks of farmers) could include issues such as the following:

- Yam, charcoal and tree regeneration: Is there a problem? What are the solutions to good relations between charcoal burners and farmers?
- Maize production with inputs and with bush fallowing, and management of the soil.
- Changes in yam producing technologies.
- Bush fire management: The farmers' perspectives in different areas.
- Vegetable production technologies and stream conservation
- Implications of intensification for women's access to land and farming strategies

This could culminate in a 'week of action' in a District which would attempt to raise the profile of natural resource users in the rural areas.

In terms of resource foci, the Project should cover:

- The management of natural resources control of which has been largely or entirely devolved to the district level (e.g. agricultural products, of the types discussed above, and farm-based products such as charcoal)
- The management of resources which have not been decentralised to the local level, but which impinge directly upon it, and have major implications for the ability of local resource users to sustain and develop their livelihoods.

To cover the second of these topics, it is proposed to include tree plantation development in the substantive phase of the Project.

The Brong Ahafo is likely to be the focus of a major externally funded plantations programme in the coming years. This is not uncontroversial. On the evidence to date, the programme may well favour exactly the sorts of entrepreneurial approaches to resource capture and land development which have already blighted post-independence agricultural modernization in the region, largely to the detriment of the small producer. Information and institutions are again the key. If the small farmer community is to derive benefit from the scheme, it is essential that its members – and their elected representatives – are well informed about it, and are able to influence its implementation. Developing an effective interface between local producers, elected representatives (Unit Committees and District Assemblies), and officials of the devolved and non-devolved public services (agriculture and forestry) is essential to both these tasks.

#### **4.4.1 Project Outputs**

In summary, the project outputs will focus on improvements in three areas of intervention:

1. *The quality of information* available at district level
2. *Networking* between farmers
3. *Articulation of the needs and problems* of rural producers with the democratic organs of local and regional government.

The project outputs are as indicated in the draft Phase Two Logframe, which is presented in the following section (Annex 5).

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