

No. 1

**Forest
Participation
Series**

**The Leaf
Gatherers of
Kwapanin,
Ghana**

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AGYEMANG**

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Celebrating 25 Years

**International
Institute for
Environment and
Development**

Preface

Old alliances and new collaborations for local forest management

Today more than ever, government foresters need to pursue policies and create institutions which can control predatory loggers and secure the intergenerational public interest in some form of national forest estate. But they also need to abandon the pretence that they can do everything else besides. Relationships between people who live with trees and foresters who have formal responsibility to look after those trees have always been uneasy. Foresters in many places are now having to re-think their roles in the face of public hostility and disappearing forests. Increasingly they are looking to become supporters of forest management by local people.

The first five papers in this Forest Participation Series¹ illustrate the range of relationships emerging between government foresters and initiatives for community-based forest management. Some of these are entirely local initiatives which have been responded to by foresters. Others are efforts led by forest departments to initiate change and meet local needs. The case studies describe the origins and effectiveness of these initiatives. In all cases a parallel story is told of how the forestry institutions have themselves adapted to changing circumstances and needs.

Mary Owusu Agyemang (paper no. 1) describes how the Ghana Forestry Department has acknowledged and overcome the distrust of villagers in the

management of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). As in many places, NTFPs are extremely important for people living near forests in Ghana. Yet travel to distant forestry offices to pay for the required permit for collecting wrapping leaves was an unacceptable burden for the women around one forest reserve. Fears that a free permit experiment, introduced by some innovative Forestry Department staff, would lead to all kinds of unlawful activities proved unfounded. The leaf gathering women organised efficiently and protected gathering sites from fires and weeds. The author also describes the way in which the Forestry Department has adapted its ways of working through experiments like this, spearheaded by a Collaborative Forest Management Unit.

Jeanette Clarke, Saiti Makuku, Philip Mukwenhu and Josephine Ncube (paper no. 2) describe woodland management initiatives that have developed in a communal area in Zimbabwe. It is argued that government woodlot programmes have been largely unsuccessful and fail to address the real resource needs of communities. It is in this context that local communities have evolved their own changing woodland management strategies. These practices are entirely local in their origin, usually developed first by individuals who then lead by example and demonstration to others. Participatory research methods were used in the study and the authors discuss how an emphasis on both methodology and

¹ Paper nos. 1 to 4 stem from presentations made to the forestry session of 'In Local Hands': an international conference on community based sustainable development, held at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, from 4-8 July 1994. The forestry session was facilitated by Dr Gill Shepherd of ODI, and the conference was hosted by IIED.

findings allows a greater understanding of how to document, promote and build on existing resource management practices at local level. The early stages of cooperation with these locally-derived practices by government forest extension staff is also described.

Minkesh Paul Sood's paper (no. 3) is written from the viewpoint of an "enlightened" forest officer in Himachal Pradesh state in India. He describes change initiated by certain sections at "the top" of the state Forest Department in response to lessons learned from the past 50 years of attempts to resolve its conflicting roles of extension and policing. Sood describes the careful state level preparation for adoption of the Joint Forest Management approach first outlined by the federal government in 1990. An intriguing picture is painted of a Forest Department grappling with the challenges of institutional reorientation towards collaboration with communities. Slow and sporadic progress is being made in training foresters in relevant skills, and there has clearly been an attempt to institutionalise a system for communication, feedback and information sharing in an otherwise strongly regimented forest service. Forest Departments are far from being monolithic entities. Sood's paper highlights the existence of a range of perspectives and enthusiasms at various levels of the Forest Department and the very real structural impediments - low pay, heavy workloads etc - to adopting new ways.

Madhu Sarin and her colleagues in SARTHI (paper no. 4), an NGO, describe locally-derived initiatives in Gujarat state, India, in response to forest resource scarcities. Across a wide area, a diverse range of organisational forms

and access controls have emerged, with group membership consisting of actual resource users irrespective of formal administrative village boundaries. The strength and effectiveness of the groups lies in consensus based, open decision-making with equitable sharing of costs and benefits among all members. Their major weakness lies in the exclusion of women from their functioning resulting in women's needs for forest produce, particularly woodfuel, being overlooked in forest management priorities. This results in highly inequitable distribution of the opportunity costs of protection between women and men, and puts in doubt the long term sustainability of their forest regeneration.

This case study is more one of collaborative management *despite* the state, rather than *with* the state. The authors argue that whilst Forestry Department field staff look with pleasure at the "wave in favour of forest protection (sweeping) across villages in the area", villagers do not recognise the Forestry Department. Villagers "do not want to fell their regenerated forests ever again", since the memory of previous large-scale felling during periods of resource scarcity is too strong. And whilst the Joint Forest Management (JFM) approach demands the sharing of benefits - the villagers do not want to share with the Forestry Department at all. The village forestry groups want the right to organise themselves as they see fit, and authority to honour their responsibilities. The challenge for the Forestry Department is clear: to become responsive to locally-initiated forest management by developing powers of facilitation rather than direction.

Calvin Nhira and Frank Matose (paper no. 5) develop an analysis of the JFM

approach in India in relation to current and potential "resource-sharing" initiatives in forest reserves in Zimbabwe. Whilst noting major differences in forestry context between the two countries, they point to a number of lessons for Zimbabwe which have been learned the hard way in India. They discuss the influence of policy, the roles of local institutions and mediating NGOs, and the incentives for local involvement. Whilst compared to some places in India the economic interest of local people in reserved woodlands in Zimbabwe may not be high, the subsistence benefits derived may be crucial for poor households. Thus far the Zimbabwe resource sharing scheme has been premised on the state's need to improve forest protection. The authors conclude that a re-orientation is required towards greater community control through negotiation of rights and responsibilities of communities, the state and local institutions. An adaptive management approach is the key - with ways to monitor and learn from experience.

Each of the papers in this series will be of interest to field practitioners of local forest management because they contain details of the steps taken, their successes and failures. Diversity is celebrated here; it is not the intention to derive generalisable lessons. However, certain themes stand out:

- indigenous managers exist, with rules and practices well attuned to local conditions, but they have suffered from a history of state denial of their abilities
- forest departments are changing; some seeing local management as merely a cheap option in hard-pressed times, others seeking a genuine alternative to ineffective forest protection and resource theft
- both costs and benefits need to be internalised; often the costs of management are internalised within a community, but the benefits are enjoyed elsewhere, ie. if communities are protecting, they should receive genuine incentives (products, guaranteed access to resources or compensation)
- evolutionary not blueprint approaches are needed; recognizing the diversity and complexity of local context, and the importance of exploration and learning
- belief and recognition of ownership of the resource for those expected to manage it is fundamental; local management requires local involvement in decision making; and local institutions providing its authority
- specific consideration of equity amongst participants is needed
- given the above, collaborative management is difficult to bring about, and will clearly not work everywhere; care should be taken not to over-sell its potential where there is little motivation or capacity for its delivery.

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The Leaf Gatherers of Kwapanin, Ghana

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The organisation responsible for this study is the Forestry Department's Planning Branch in Kumasi.

Note on author

At the time of the study the author was working as a Technical Officer with the Participatory Forest Management Unit of the Forestry Department's Planning Branch in Kumasi. She acted as a negotiator and monitored this study. The work of the Planning Branch includes centralized planning, research and monitoring.

Other titles in this series are:

No. 2

Supporting Local Initiatives in Woodland Regeneration: a case study from Ntabazinduna communal land, Zimbabwe

J.M. Clarke, S.J. Makuku, P. Mukwenhu and J. Ncube

No. 3

New Forestry Initiatives in Himachal Pradesh

Minkesh Paul Sood

No. 4

The View from the Ground: Community Perspectives on Joint Forest Management in Gujarat, India

Madhu Sarin and SARTHI

No. 5

Joint Forest Management and Resource Sharing: Lessons from India for Zimbabwe
Calvin Nhira and Frank Matose

Introduction

Ghana has maintained a large forest estate in legally constituted forest reserves which were first established during the colonial period, in the 1920s. There are more than 200 forest reserves in southern Ghana which serve important environmental functions, provide locally valued forest products and are the backbone of the nation's timber industry.

Responsibility for managing these reserves is vested in the State. The Government holds the land in trust for the corporate customary law groups such as 'stools' and clans who retain ownership of the land and forest. These forests are managed by the Forestry Department using familiar means: forest guards, demarcation lines, management plans and more recently yield regulation and control. Reserve boundaries are generally respected, but the condition of the forest is worsening. Illegal logging, illegal mining, bushfires and illegal farming are all problems which plague the Forestry Department. But the Forestry Department's regulatory system alone will not secure the resource. The challenge for foresters now is to combine their silvicultural systems and logging control with community based activities which enhance forest management.

Timber is the most valued product for the government and the industrial sector. However, for village communities situated close to forest reserves the non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are more important. These include all the products from the forest

which are not processed by large industries, for example, fruit, mushrooms and other food, building poles, roofing material and medicines. Many NTFPs are traded as well as being used to sustain households. These include the leaves used to wrap food, which are the focus of this case study.

In 1990 the Forestry Department initiated a study to examine the importance of NTFPs for people living near forest reserves. The study examined the uses of NTFPs, their role in rural economies and the impact of the decline of forests on the uses and value of NTFPs for rural people. Trade in five common NTFPs was also studied, including that of *Marantaceae* leaves. The study was carried out in eight villages, one of which was Kwapanin (this study is referred to in this paper as the 'NTFP Pilot Study').

The NTFP Pilot Study concluded that hundreds of thousands of people in southern Ghana are involved in the trade of NTFPs, working full-time or part-time selling a vast array of products from baskets to snails. For many people the trade and processing of NTFPs provide a source of supplemental or seasonal income. Often NTFPs provide an economic buffer during hard times - people collect NTFPs to pay for hospital bills, school fees, or to buy food during the hungry season. In some villages, the majority of people rely on NTFP processing and trade as there are few alternative ways of earning cash. The NTFP Pilot Study also showed the importance of NTFPs in

the regional economy. For example, the *Marantaceae* leaf trade in Kumasi alone was estimated to contribute 24 million cedis a month (roughly £43,600) to the regional economy in 1990.

Of equal importance to the trade of NTFPs are their subsistence uses. NTFPs are particularly important for poorer households, especially when they fall on bad times. Forests provide food, medicines, materials for household equipment like sleeping mats and pounding pestles, materials to build houses, material for making agricultural equipment such as hoe handles, and fishing equipment like fish traps as well as many more intangible benefits such as cultural artifacts (eg stools and drums). [For more information on this study see Falconer (1992) and Falconer (1993)].

For most people living near forests, NTFPs are extremely important. Thus, NTFP management provides one avenue for collaboration between forestry professionals and local people.

This case study discusses foresters' experiences in starting to work on NTFP management with a few communities in one area. On an experimental basis, we modified the current management regime from one of permits to registration. This gave NTFP gatherers free access to the NTFP resource and more responsibility for monitoring forest exploitation and forest protection. The experiment was very successful and indicated that, given the right kind of incentive, advice and encouragement, rural communities who depend on forest products would cooperate with the Forestry Department in the management and protection of the forests.

Background

This paper describes a case study in a community called Kwapanin, located at the edge of the Afram Headwaters Forest Reserve in Ashanti Region, southern Ghana (see map 1). It is on the northern edge of the high forest, to the north are much drier savannah woodlands. The forest reserve falls in the dry semi-deciduous forest type (Hall and Swaine, 1981). Parts of the forest are severely degraded and suffer from regular bushfires. Here there are mainly grass and weeds. Other portions of the reserve have been converted to teak plantation. The natural forest areas where the food wrapping leaves are found are far from the village.

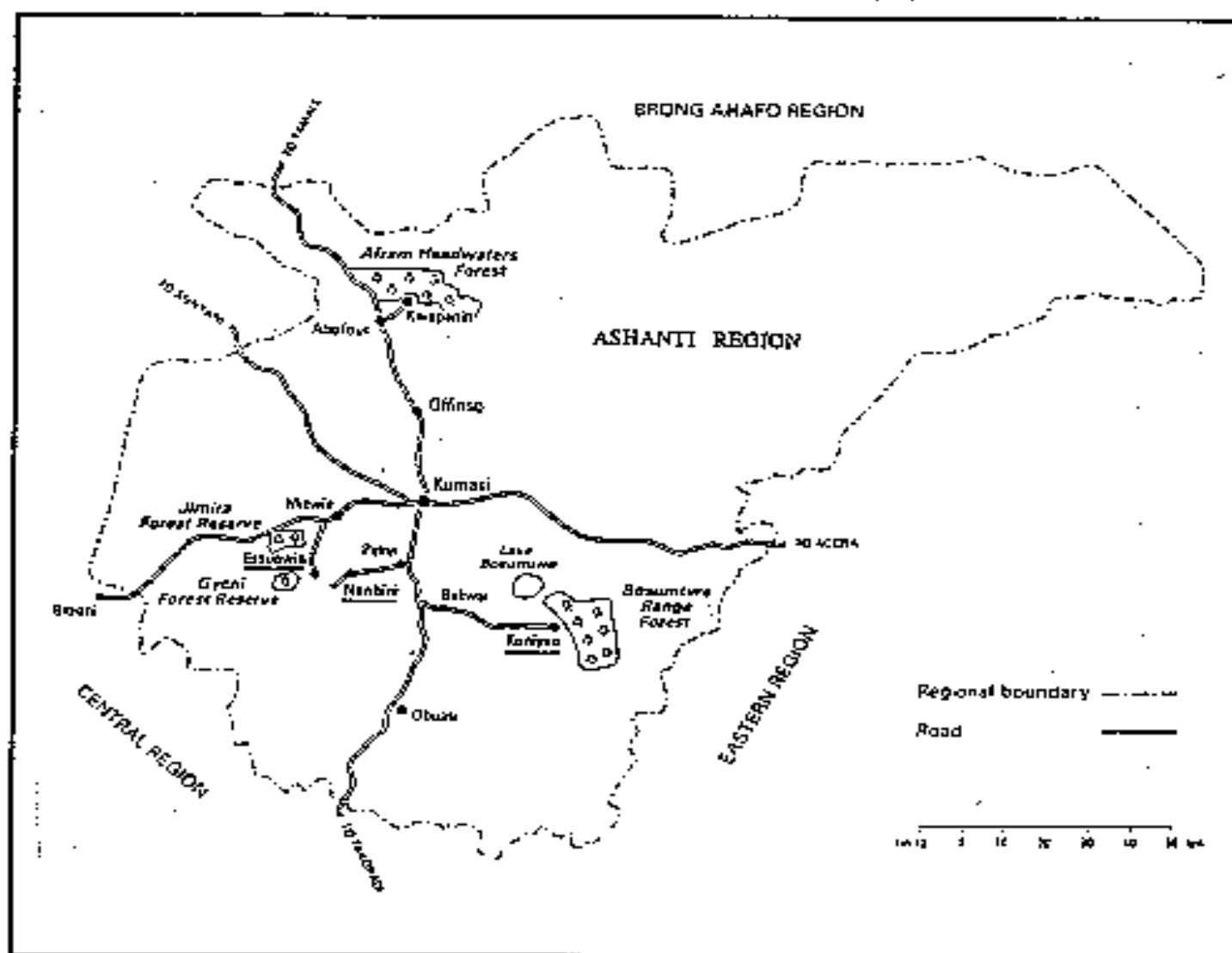
Kwapanin is a medium-sized village of about 1200 people. It is an Asante village (Asante being the main ethnic group in the region), but includes many immigrants, especially from the north. Many of these immigrants settled in the village one or two generations ago, having come to the area to work as labourers on cocoa farms. Most people in the village are farmers. But the local economy and people's livelihoods have suffered greatly over the last ten years from devastating bushfires and environmental degradation. The early 1980s were particularly bad years: in 1983 devastating fires swept through the area, destroying most of the farms.

Large areas of forest, fallow lands, cocoa farms and many locally important non-timber forest products such as canes, sponges and chewing stick were razed to the ground.

Few people have replanted their cocoa or other cash crops such as oil palm. Now people are concentrating on subsistence farming (mainly maize and cassava), as well as on cloth weaving and gathering food wrapping leaves from the forest. Many men have left the village to find work in urban Kumasi or the bigger towns. For many of the

women in Kwapanin, gathering leaves in the forest provides a vital means of livelihood. For some households collecting leaves is their only source of income.

The importance of leaf gathering to this community cannot be exaggerated enough. In the past, it was mainly immigrants and women with no access to land who gathered leaves. The native women of Kwapanin were involved in other cash-earning activities; notably wage labour on cocoa farms, gathering cola nuts, and producing palm oil.



Map 1: Location of Kwapanin village

The *Marantaceae* Leaf Wrapper Business

The large, strong and impermeable leaves of a group of herbaceous plants in the *Marantaceae* family are widely used as wrapping material. Traders in all the rural and urban markets in the south of Ghana use them to wrap food, cola nuts, spices, salt, meat, etc. In addition, *Marantaceae* leaves are used as wrappers for prepared food (such as fried plantain or cooked rice) which is sold by the roadside.

There are different types of leaves and some of them have particular uses and markets. For example there is one type known locally as *ntentrema* which is used for storing, wrapping and curing cola nuts (which are widely used throughout West Africa as a stimulant). There are many alternative materials including plastic and paper but most traders prefer *Marantaceae* leaves. They are especially valued for the flavour they give food, their preserving qualities, their ability to withstand boiling and because they are cheap (Falconer, 1993).

Marantaceae are herbaceous plants which grow on the forest floor and which are most commonly found in disturbed sites (such as tree fall gaps), in swamps and in moderately burnt forests. They are found in most of the forests in the south of Ghana, but are particularly common in the disturbed drier forests. Leaf gathering is a common source of quick cash throughout the south of the country (they are known by many people as 'bush allowance'). However, there are major collection centres in the northern

part of Ashanti Region where Kwapanin is situated.

The leaf gatherers of Kwapanin mainly collect the leaves from the forest reserve, although leaves can also be found on fallow land and on cocoa farms during the rainy season. In the reserve there are about ten collection sites (these are places where several of the marketable species are found in dense patches). Leaf gatherers visit each collection site, periodically moving on to other sites only after the leaves have been exhausted. During the dry season they allow the site to 'rest' (regenerate) for about two months, while in the rainy season they return to each site after three or four weeks. The closest collecting site to Kwapanin is about five miles from the village, and distances between sites range between two and six miles.

The harvesting methods are simple: the stems of mature leaves are broken just beneath the leaf node. The leaves are tied into bundles (of 30 to 60 leaves) which are then gathered together and carried in headloads from the forest. The leaves are harvested with no apparent damage to the forest. The gatherers do not collect immature leaves as there is no market for them and amongst themselves they believe that harvesting the immature leaves would destroy the future crop. This rotational system of leaf collection appears to maintain commercially exploitable levels of supply.

The women usually go in groups, as

they do not like being in the forest on their own. Despite this, there is keen competition between the women who all try to be the first group at a collection site. They often leave the village at 6am, not returning until late in the evening. Those who gather regularly go on collection trips as often as four times a week. Gatherers from the other villages surrounding the forest reserve collect at the same sites in the reserve. There is no system of exclusive rights to patches of leaves. Thus, women from Kwapanin have no advantage over women from neighbouring villages even on their own 'stool' land.

There are marked differences between the seasons. Many more people sell leaves during the early rains when the leaves are more plentiful and when the need for cash is most acute. During the dry season, however, returns are far higher because the prices rise substantially.

Many women have established regular trading relations with buyers in the village. Sometimes they sell the leaves immediately to food sellers in the village; at other times the leaves are taken to the nearby weekly market at Abofour (about 2.5 miles away). Occasionally gatherers take the leaves directly to the large urban markets in Kumasi.

At the time of the NTFP Pilot Study relations were poor between the Forestry Department staff and the Kwapanin villagers such that, whenever they saw a landrover or Forestry Department staff, they would try to avoid them. Only after the NTFP Pilot Study team lived in the village for weeks would the gatherers trust them enough to discuss their problems, to trade with them and to take them to the forest. Many women continued to believe that a trap was being set for them by the Forestry Department.

An Experiment to Modify the Forestry Department's NTFP Permit System

The situation in Kwapanin prior to the experiment

Many villagers had suffered increasing poverty during the 1980s and had little money to sustain the family. For some this meant that their children had to stop attending school because there was no money to pay for school fees or to buy uniforms. Many households relied on leaf gathering to eke out an existence.

There was an atmosphere of mutual mistrust between FD staff and the villagers. The leaf gatherers felt that they were being unfairly harassed by forestry officials in the village, at the market and in the forest. Many argued that the permit system encouraged abuse and that officials could charge them haphazard fines at will. They added that the system created an opportunity for other non-forestry officials to seize their goods. Leaf

gatherers identified the following specific problems:

- The Forestry Department's system of obtaining permits for NTFP collection in the reserve was found to be cumbersome. To legally enter the forest and harvest leaves the gatherers were required to travel from Kwapanin to Kumasi on a poor road, where it was difficult and expensive to find transportation. In Kumasi they would buy a permit from the Forestry Department, paying a set fee for each headload of leaves they planned to collect during the following month. Permits were issued for a maximum period of one month. In addition to the inconvenience of getting to the distant District Forestry Office, many gatherers explained that they could not afford the permit at certain times of the year when market prices were low. As a result many gatherers shared permits with two or three people, and went to collect leaves on different days.
- Many villagers complained that bushfires frequently swept onto their farms from the forest (mainly from the teak plantation near the village). They admitted that many villagers infringed forestry rules, setting traps in the reserves and hunting during the dry season. They argued that they had no power or authority to control activities in the forest reserve.
- They complained that forestry officials never visited the village to reason with them or to explain the Forestry Department's management practices.

The foresters also had difficulties with the current situation, complaining that

farmers were deliberately setting fires near the forest and that they would not assist in protecting the forest from bushfires. They also saw that many villagers were illegally entering the forest to collect leaves and other forest goods. They added that they were not given adequate resources to police the forest.

To address some of the problems identified by the gatherers and to try and improve relations between the Forestry Department and the gatherers in the area, the Department's newly formed Participatory Forest Management Unit (now the Collaborative Forest Management Unit) initiated an experiment with the NTFP management system.

Modifying the permit for a registration system

The changes in the permit system were designed to address problems identified by the gatherers and to allay fears of both the foresters and the gatherers. Thus, the objectives of the experiment were:

- to improve relations between the FD staff and rural people on the periphery of the reserve;
- to see whether gatherers living near the forest reserve would conduct themselves responsibly if given free and unrestricted access to exercise their communal rites for NTFPs;
- to ensure that all people gathering in the forest were doing so legally;
- to study the importance of *Marantaceae*

leaf gathering in the livelihoods of women and children;

- to learn more about the *Marantaceae* leaf resource and its exploitation.

Who was involved in the experiment?

The Forestry Department's Participatory Forest Management Unit (PFMU) was responsible for the initiative. Working with the NTFP Pilot Study team, the PFMU established the programme with the leaf gatherers from Kwapanin and the District Forest Officer. The system was modified through negotiation with these women.

Prior to the experiment, the leaf gatherers had organized themselves into an association with a head spokesperson known as the 'queen mother'. The association holds regular meetings to discuss the state of the collection sites, prices, the types of leaves being marketed, transportation to market sites and relations with the Forestry Department. The PFMU worked through this association as well as with other village level institutions, notably the chief and the government's local representative in the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR).

The gatherers identified some of the most problematic aspects of the NTFP permit system which included:

- distant travel to the District Forest Office in Kumasi;
- the short time limit on the permit;

- the need to specify the quantity to be collected before actually going to the forest;
- the high cost of the permit during the dry season in relation to what they could earn;
- the part-time nature of gathering for most women;
- the harassment they encountered from officials;
- poor proof of whether the resource was exploited legally, whether from the forest, from fallow or from their cocoa farms.

A registration system was devised which gave much of the responsibility for monitoring the activities of the gatherers to village institutions: to the association, the chief and the CDR. No quantities were set as most gatherers argued that estimating quantities which would be gathered in the future was very difficult. An initial duration of six months was agreed. The long period would lessen the administrative burden but still allow for periodic review of the system, of exploitation patterns and market prices.

The Forestry Department was collecting very little revenue from leaf gatherers anywhere in the region although local foresters knew the area to be a major source of leaves. The District forester's greatest fear was that the women would abuse the privilege of being in the forest to collect other goods and even to establish farms. He was also worried about the precedent of changing the system to one of much freer access to the forest.

The leaf gatherers were also concerned, many believing that a trap was being set for them by the forest officers. They did not believe that the Department was interested in their plight and did not think that the Department would readily negotiate over access to the forest. Many gatherers argued amongst themselves that in the long run negotiating with the Department would lead to their ruin.

At the beginning the biggest task was getting the District Forester and the gatherers to negotiate with each other. The NTEP Pilot Study team, who were well known in the village, were instrumental in building ties between the Participatory Forest Management Unit and the leaf gatherers in Kwapanin.

Thus after several weeks' discussions it was agreed that all the gatherers in the village would register with the PFMU, and a list would be kept at the District and Regional Forest Offices, and by the local forest guard. The queen mother and the village chief took responsibility for ensuring that only those registered as gatherers entered the forest to gather leaves. The conditions set out in the agreement were that:

- nobody should collect *Marrubium* leaves from the forest reserve without first registering with the queen mother and the Department (PFMU) and obtaining a permit;
- no other forest products should be collected using this permit;
- a breach of any of the conditions by anybody in the village would provide grounds for Forestry Department to

withdraw permits from all permit holders in the village.

To convince the women that the Forestry Department was serious in its desire to modify the NTEP management system it was agreed that for an initial period of six months there would be no charge for registration. Each gatherer who registered was issued a six month permit to collect leaves. Later extended for a further six months.

With the assistance of the leaf gatherers' association in Kwapanin, the author was responsible for identifying and negotiating with leaf gatherers in the other villages surrounding the forest reserve. They, too, are organised into associations led by a queen mother. This made negotiation fairly easy as there was no problem in identifying the forest users.

Upon agreement with the District Officer and the respective queen mothers 535 people registered as gatherers in the seven villages surrounding the Afram Headwaters forest reserve, and were issued with free permits. Out of, 58 people registered in Kwapanin, 72 women and two children registered as full-time gatherers, and five women and 19 children as part-time gatherers.

The PFMU visited these areas periodically to monitor the progress of the experiment and to find out if the local foresters or the gatherers were encountering any problems.

After the initial problems of convincing the gatherers of the Department's sincerity, the PFMU's main problem was logistical, in getting to the area regularly enough to study the outcome of the experiment.

Outcome of the Experimental Shift to a Registration System

The experiment helped to generate the villagers' interest in the protection of the forest reserve. In one instance gatherers from Kwapanin and Agogo came together to fight a bushfire that was threatening the forest reserve. In the previous years they were unwilling to do this for fear of being accused of starting the bushfires. The villagers were anxious to prevent the destruction of the leaf sites by the fire.

The experiment also helped to improve relations between the Forestry Department staff and the rural people. The Forest Guards who maintain the boundary of the forest reserve were pleased with the cooperation of the villagers and the leaf collectors and believed that they were abiding by the conditions of the registration. The villagers were happy that the Forestry Department had, after all, their interest and needs at heart.

The leaf gatherers association was able to successfully control its members in abiding by the conditions set down for exploitation in the forest reserve. They prevented those who did not have permission to be in the forest from entering; they checked the forestry permits of people coming from outside the village. For example, on one occasion a firewood collector from Kumasi was sent to collect a permit from the Forestry Department before being allowed into the reserve by the gatherers.

The gatherers from these seven

communities demonstrated clearly that they were capable of conducting themselves responsibly in the reserve - that given the responsibility for protecting the forest as well as the right to exploit a locally valuable product they could become effective partners in forest management. Fears that the experiment would result in villagers engaging in all kinds of unlawful activities in the forest proved unfounded. They did not infringe on any forest laws during the period of the experiment.

Subsequent visits to the forest with the gatherers revealed that they have tried to protect leaf collection sites from bushfires and invading *akyeamong* weed (*Chromolaena odorata*). In some places they have cleared fire traces near sites to protect them from bushfires. A few of the gatherers from Kwapanin have experimented with planting seeds of *Marantaceae* near one of the collection sites in an attempt to expand the area. This was successful and they were starting to harvest the planted leaves within a year of planting.

The gatherers evaluated the experiment as being very successful, saying that relations between them and the Department were greatly improved. In particular, they reported several results of the experiment:

- it helped to unite the villagers by bringing northerners and Asantes together;
- it brought the gatherers closer to the

chief and elders and to the Unit Committee members (local government representatives). The chief and Unit Committee took an active part in monitoring gathering activities and looked out for the gatherers when they lost their way in the forest late in the night;

- it strengthened the role of the 'queen mother' of the gatherers' association as she became the spokesperson for the gatherers, as well as being the contact point for the chief and the foresters regarding forest issues; she also assumed greater authority in controlling the activities of the gatherers as no one wanted to lose the opportunity of gaining access to the forest;
- it helped financially and most households were able to send their children back to school again;
- the unrestricted access to the forest meant that they could patrol the forest for bushfires and illegal activities. In the dry season they constructed fire traces and extinguished fires;
- the experiment also increased the level of exploitation of leaves in the forest; more women and children came into leaf gathering and as a result the gatherers started to worry about over-exploitation and to think of ways of increasing the resource; this led to their experiments with planting the leaves.

Lessons to be Drawn from this Case Study

The experiment provided an example to the Forestry Department of how, given the right kind of incentive, advice and encouragement, rural communities who depend on forest products can cooperate with them in the management and protection of the forests.

It showed that there is considerable scope for improving forest management systems so that local communities derive greater benefit and are more actively involved in the management of forests without major changes in policy. What is needed is a shift in the perceptions of foresters with regards to the *potential* for involving local people in forest management. Small experiments like the one in Kwapanin go a long way in shifting people's views about what is and what is not possible

in encouraging more local involvement in forest management.

It showed that in some circumstances at least small changes can make a big difference, especially in improving relationships between different parties involved in management.

It showed that you do not need to be the head of the Department to make a difference and to have an impact. District Forest Officers make many decisions which affect the relationship between the Department and local people living near forest reserves. Technical Officers play important roles too, and their actions may also have a significant impact on the relations between communities, forest users and the Department. As a result such Officers may affect the way local

people value the forest, the ways that they benefit from forests and their sense of responsibility towards them.

There are limits, however, to the lessons to be drawn from this case example. *Marantaceae* leaves are herbaceous plants whose exploitation appears to cause little damage to the integrity of the forest. They are widely available and there is a large market demand for them. There are few alternative uses for them. This is rarely the case with other NTFPs or with timber. Many other traded NTFPs appear to be over-exploited and for some there is considerable competition between different end-users. For example, canes are sought after by people who weave furniture and other goods for urban markets. They are also in great demand in villages for house building and other 'subsistence' uses. The issues relating to the exploitation of timber are much more complex: devising ways of ensuring that local people receive more benefits from timber extraction and take more responsibility for protecting and maintaining the timber resource are fraught with difficulties. But the Forestry Department is addressing these problems.

The head of the Forestry Department in Ghana has stated that in the future forestry must address local as well as national needs: 'only when forests have a real value to the local people will we be able to gain their cooperation and energy for forest protection and management... and without that

cooperation the future of the forests cannot be guaranteed... except at the prohibitive cost of a vast army of forest guards.'

The principle of ensuring that forest management systems address local needs and engender local cooperation is now accepted in Ghana. The new approach will be based on collaboration between forest using and owning communities and professional foresters. What is not yet clear is what this means in practice. The Forestry Department has therefore established a unit called the Collaborative Forest Management Unit. The job of this unit is to explore the potential for a more collaborative approach to forest management.

Finally, with regard to replicating this work, we need to create a situation in which responsible access to the reserves is always obtainable, not only on special dispensation. The Forestry Department needs to institute effective alternatives to the permit system. An environment will then have been created in which people using NTFPs across southern Ghana will automatically be able to take more control over the management of this resource. This is a task which is currently being tackled by the Collaborative Forest Management Unit.

This leaves us with a crucial question: How can we create an environment which will enable a shift in forestry practices to encourage greater involvement of local people in forest management and replenishment?

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The Leaf Gatherers of Kwapanin, Ghana

This paper describes how the Ghana Forestry Department has acknowledged and overcome the distrust of villagers in the management of non-timber forest products. The collection of wrapping leaves is an important activity for people (particularly women) living near forests in Ghana - yet travel to distant forestry offices to pay for the required permit became an unacceptable burden for the women around one forest reserve. Despite fears of an increase in unlawful activities, the Forestry Department introduced free permits on an experimental basis. Such fears were unfounded: the leaf gathering women organised themselves efficiently and protected gathering sites. The paper also describes how the Forestry Department has adapted its ways of working through such experiments, spearheaded by a Collaborative Forest Management Unit.

IIED's Forestry and Land Use Programme

The Forestry and Land Use Programme addresses needs for productivity, sustainability and equity in forestry and land use. Its research and capacity-strengthening work focuses at the national level in developing countries.

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