



**Reducing poverty by linking small forest enterprises with market and service providers**

**REPORT ON TROPENBOS-IIED WORKSHOP ON SMALL AND MEDIUM FOREST ENTERPRISES (SMFEs) IN GHANA**

**THEME: Defining mechanisms for positioning SMFEs to contribute meaningfully to poverty reduction in Ghana**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs) support the livelihood of a large number of people worldwide. In many developing countries, they constitute 80-90% of forestry enterprises and over 50% of forest sector employment. In Ghana, they account for as high as 95% of the income of some rural households<sup>1</sup>. For many other rural households, they serve as additional or alternative sources of income, providing a safety net when the main livelihood activity (mostly farming) fails. In terms of their contribution to livelihoods, SMFEs even outweigh the formal forestry sector. As noted by Macqueen (2004)<sup>2</sup>, SMFEs have a huge potential to contribute to local poverty reduction and sound resource management by virtue of their disposition to accrue wealth locally, empower local entrepreneurship, submit to local and environmental licence to operate and preserve cultural identity.

However Ghana and many other countries, the SMFE sub-sector is bedevilled with numerous challenges as a result of which the full potential of the sub-sector is not realised. Though they have high start-up rates, the majority survive for only a short period. There is little connectivity between SMFE proprietors and relevant bodies and processes. The sub-sector receives very little attention in national forest policies, legislation and programmes. People engaged in these enterprises are therefore faced with problems like unfavourable policies and legislation, excessive bureaucracy, insecure tenure, poor market information, inaccessibility to credit, poor infrastructure, inadequate technology, weak bargaining power and insufficient business know-how.

To be able to shape the business environment and policies in their favour, and to adapt to new market opportunities, SMFEs need to be connected to each other and to markets, national forest programmes, service providers and support networks. An innovative 'Forest Connect' project has been initiated by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) to help establish this connectedness. The project seeks to help connect SMFEs to:

- each other by facilitating associations;
- national forest programmes by giving greater voices to SMFEs to be heard by national forestry programmes and facilitating engagement with policy makers;
- traditional and emerging markets by facilitating market analysis and access to market information
- support networks/information services through strengthening capacity to offer appropriate training and finance.

The project has identified institutional hubs in 11 countries to provide information and networking support services to SMFE associations in the respective countries. The countries are Burkina Faso, China, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, India, Laos, Mali, Mozambique and Nepal. There is also a broader network of supporters in 48 countries linked by an international social networking site (<http://forestconnect.ning.com>). Membership is free and open to anybody with

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Owusu-Ansah, M. (2008), Alternative Tenure and Enterprise Models: Ghana Case Study. Draft Report. Rights and Resources Institute

<sup>2</sup> Macqueen, D.J. (2004) Small scale enterprise and sustainable development – key issues and policy opportunities to improve impact, IIED, London, UK

interest in SMFEs. Such people are encouraged to visit the website and sign up to become members.

In Ghana, Tropenbos International-Ghana is the institutional hub, which under the coordination of the IIED, will provide information and network support services to help establish the necessary connections among SMFEs and between SMFEs and relevant bodies and processes. This connectedness is expected to help increase the number of successful and sustainable SMFEs in the country.

As part of initial activities, TBI-Ghana with support from IIED has carried out a diagnostic study of SMFEs in Ghana.

The two-day expert panel workshop on small and medium forest enterprises had the objective of bringing together relevant actors to discuss the study findings and other issues relating to SMFEs in Ghana, to help define the way forward for the SMFE sub-sector. The outcomes of the workshop would be used to update the draft SMFE study report. This report summarises the proceedings and key outcomes of the workshop.

## 2. THE WORKSHOP

The workshop had the theme 'Defining mechanisms for positioning SMFEs to contribute meaningfully to poverty reduction in Ghana'. The expected outputs were:

- validation of the SMFE diagnostic study findings
- a catalogue of opportunities and constraints to SFME development in Ghana
- a 'Forest Connect' Working Group with defined terms of reference.
- recommendations for enabling the transition (of SMFEs) from insecure and unsustainable practices to equitable, secure and sustainable (enterprise) models

It was attended by fifty eight (58) participants and eighteen (18) media personnel. The participants consisted of SMFE proprietors, promoting organisations, relevant state agencies, NGOs and subject experts (Annex 1).



**Group picture of workshop participants**

The first day activities consisted of:

- workshop opening by way of a prayer, introduction of participants and brief explanation of what the workshop sought to achieve. This was done by Mercy Owusu-Ansah of Tropenbos International-Ghana, the workshop facilitator
- a presentation on the 'Forest Connect' project by James Mayers of the IIED.
- a presentation of the findings of the diagnostic study of SMFEs in Ghana by K. S. Nketiah, the Tropenbos Ghana Programme Team Leader.
- a presentation on 'SMFE Organization and Market Restructuring' by Gene Birikorang of the Hamilton Resources and Consulting, an expert in the subject.
- a presentation on 'Business Support Platforms for SMFEs in Ghana' by Gustav Adu, an expert in the subject.
- each presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session.
- group discussions.

For the group discussion, the workshop participants were divided into three groups; Wood Forest Products (WFP) group, Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFP) group and Forest Services group. Participants joined one of the groups based on their engagement or knowledge in the three enterprise categories. The three groups engaged in similar discussions on SMFEs using prepared checklists. Generally, each group discussed the status of SMFEs in the enterprise category and issues affecting their growth and development. The

discussion covered issues on policy/governance, market and finance, enterprise links/association, labour as well as threats and opportunities for developing enterprises within the category.

The second day activities consisted of:

- a brief recap of the previous day's activities and an overview of the second day's activities by Mercy Owusu-Ansah, the workshop facilitator
- a presentation on policy issues relating to SMFEs by Kyeretwie Opoku of Civic Response, a civil rights lawyer. His presentation was followed by a discussion session.
- formation of a 'Forest Connect' Working Group. Participants discussed the nature and terms of reference for the Working Group and the institutional composition it should have.
- evaluation of the workshop

### **3. KEY WORKSHOP OUTCOMES**

From the presentations and the ensuing discussions, the following key workshop outcomes have been deduced.

#### **Ghana and the Forest Connect Project**

Ghana's forest resources have dwindled at an alarming rate over the years, calling for changes in the manner in which forests are managed and utilised. Meanwhile, people are demanding greater local benefits and control over forests. The forest sector therefore has to reorganise and position itself for this new challenge bearing in mind what can be done differently to satisfy stakeholders whilst putting the country back on track for sustainable forest management. This suggests a shift in focus from large scale timber exploitation to creation of the right environment for sustainable entrepreneurship in the SMFE sub-sector. In this regard, the workshop participants considered that Ghana is privileged to benefit from the 'Forest Connect' project as it seeks to provide an avenue for achieving this desired shift of focus in the forestry sector. The project's international profile and networking will provide the right framework for learning through experience and information sharing

#### **Findings of the diagnostic study on SMFEs in Ghana**

The diagnostic study reviewed the status of SMFEs in Ghana to provide indicative figures on SMFEs, and identified issues confronting the sub-sector and mechanisms for harnessing the poverty reduction potential of SMFEs. The study covered five of the ten political regions of the country; the Upper West, Northern, Western, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions. Three categories of SMFEs were identified: Wood Forest Products (WFP) enterprises, Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFP) enterprises and Forest Service enterprises. Most of these enterprises are individually owned and majority of the proprietors engage in the enterprises as supplementary sources of incomes to their main livelihoods especially farming. Factors influencing engagement in the various activities include raw material availability, ease of starting, influence from family members/friends and lack of alternative source of income. The enterprises rely on both reserved forests and off-reserve areas for their raw materials. Due to unsustainable harvesting practices, the wild sources of raw materials for many enterprises have dwindled over the years, as a result of which some of the products are being domesticated. Key among challenges facing SMFEs in Ghana are lack of markets for products, limited access to market information, difficulty in accessing credit to finance SMFEs, and unfavourable policy and business environment.

The workshop agreed that the study findings are a clear demonstration of the importance of small forest enterprises in Ghana which span across the entire forestry spectrum from resource creation to utilization and conservation. However despite the potential and the level of dependency, small forest enterprises do not have the needed support to thrive as businesses in a competitive economy and unless that support is provided they are likely to fizzle out rather than grow.

#### **SMFE Organization and Market Restructuring**

It was agreed that SMFEs need to be pro-active and adopt strategies to take advantage of opportunities offered by the current economic regime. This could be achieved by overcoming the value chain gap through networking for technical, legal and financial support. The challenges to achieving such market orientation include unfair competition and risks associated with market developments. Favourable interventions from the government could help overcome these challenges. Such interventions could be in the form of establishing specialised institutions to support

SMFE markets, and review of the current forest policies/legislation to support growth of SMFE businesses.

### **Business Support Platforms for SMFEs in Ghana**

Support platforms for SMFEs could be in the form of micro credit, capacity building and support services like market information, packaging, labeling, advertising and logistics/transport.

On finance, it was made known that start up capital for SMFEs normally come from proprietor's own savings, relations, money lenders and sometimes from government or donor-funded projects. The problem with the informal financial sources is that their low capital base does not allow them to give sufficient funds to SMFEs. In the case of money lenders, their interest rates are far above what would be appropriate for SMFEs. There is difficulty in accessing funds from the formal financial sector such as the banks due to the perceived unsustainable nature of SMFEs, the lack of data (track record) on SMFEs as result of which banks cannot assess their loan-worthiness, and absence of acceptable collaterals. A point was strongly made that it is always better and safer for an SMFE proprietor to start the enterprise from his/her own savings or financial resources and build up his expertise and experience before resorting to loans or micro-credits of any kind.

Training and capacity building for SMFEs is offered by formal technical institutions, other government initiatives and some donor-funded projects. To cut down cost, people are normally grouped at one place and given training. However, to ensure effectiveness, training needs to be field-based and not a one-off activity.

On support services, agencies and programmes like the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare, Ghana Export Promotion Council, the Wood Sector Development Project the GRATIS Foundation and the National Youth Employment Programme offer opportunities and support to SMFEs in Ghana. The Rural Enterprises Project model was identified as a useful one to learn from in our bid to establish 'connectedness' for SMFEs.

Because SMFEs cannot meet the demands of the international market currently, it is important that they take advantage of opportunities offered by the local market. The new super markets springing up in Ghana offer opportunities for marketing SMFE products domestically. SMFE proprietors need to develop proper business ethics and do proper packaging and labelling to be able to take advantage of this new marketing opportunity.

### **Policy issues relating to SMFEs**

It was emphasized that any enterprise needs a favourable environment to flourish. Among others, businesses need secured long term resource rights and investment incentives. These are available in the formal forestry sector. For instance, there are clear policies on resource allocation and provisions for resolving disputes arising thereof. There is even a state liaison provision by which the state (Forestry Commission) can intervene legally on behalf of timber companies. These provisions are however, non-existent for the SMFE sub-sector. Legal access to both timber and NTFPs is difficult and severely restrictive. For whilst access to timber has been made the preserve of timber companies, access to NTFPs, for commercial purposes is not covered by any clear and transparent statutory arrangement.

The ongoing review of the current (1994) Forest and Wildlife policy and its supporting legislation, under the Natural Resources and Environmental Governance (NREG) programme was identified as an opportunity to rectify these anomalies. The review is in its early stages. The capacity of the SMFE sub-sector needs to be built to effectively participate in the policy/legislative review. Effort needs to be made to achieve the desired shift of forestry sector emphasis from 'timberisation' to the creation of the right environment for entrepreneurship within the SMFE sub-sector. From experiences in countries like Brazil, Guyana and India, it is known that when the SMFE sub-sector is properly developed, it would contribute significantly to livelihoods and forestry revenues.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The workshop was generally evaluated as successful and important by the workshop participants. It was seen as a good step towards the long awaited opportunity for a forum devoted to the broadening of forest utilization for wider stakeholder participation and benefit. Participants expressed the wish that the workshop will not be like many others they have attended where nothing happened after all the nice discussions.

Participants advised Tropenbos International-Ghana on how best to push the 'Forest Connect' agenda forward. Among others, they advised on careful selection of the 'Forest Connect' Working Group members, capacity building of SMFE actors so that they can actively participate in policy dialogues, and design of a series of focus group discussions to generate credible policy recommendations. The workshop ended on this note.

As a next step, a first meeting of the 'Forest Connect' Working Group will be organised to discuss details of the group's mandate and the way forward for the 'Forest Connect' Project in Ghana.

Based on the discussions at the workshop and later discussions at TBI-Ghana, the proposed interim 'Forest Connect' Working Group shall have a membership of thirteen (13) people, from the outfits listed below:

1. Tropenbos International-Ghana: to be represented by two people: the Programme Team Leader and the Scientific Coordinator
2. Forestry Commission: The Wildlife Division, a possible nominee is Mr. Oti Awere
3. The Sector Ministry: Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, to be represented by one nominee
4. Supporting NGOs/CBOs: to be represented by one nominee from ASNAPP (Agribusiness for Sustainable Natural Plant Products)
5. Research/Academia: to be represented by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, a possible nominee is Dr. Emmanuel Acheampong of the Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources
6. National Board for Small Scale Industries: to be represented by one nominee
7. SMFE Practitioners: to be represented by two people: Mr. Wellington Baiden of the Portal sustainably managed forest estate and one nominee from the Brong Ahafo Regional Grasscutter Farmers Association (BARGFA)
8. The Rural Enterprises Project: to be represented by one nominee
9. Association of Ghana Industries: to be represented by one nominee
10. The Kumasi Wood Cluster: to be represented by Mr. Gustav Adu
11. The Energy Commission: a possible nominee is Mr Wisdom Ahiataku

The general objective (mandate) of the Working Group is to help SMFEs in Ghana reach their potential for local sustainable development by learning from experience, developing plans and steering action for policy/legislative reform, support networks, enterprise organisation and market restructuring. Among others, the Working Group will:

- ensure that SMFE concerns are adequately captured in the new forest and wildlife policy under preparation
- develop networking and communication strategies for SMFEs
- Identify training and capacity building needs and institutions that can offer training

- develop framework to ensure SMFEs contribute to sustainable forest management through payment of taxes, levies, etc.
- link SMFEs to existing natural resource management platforms in Ghana

Over a 12 week-period, the Working Group will develop an action plan for achieving its mandate. The Group will have an initial meeting to discuss details of the group's mandate and divide tasks toward developing the action plan. A second meeting will be held to finalise the action plan which will then be developed into a draft proposal. A third meeting will be held to finalise the proposal. The proposal will then be sent to the IIED for inputs, after which it will be submitted to identified, donor agencies. A work plan and proposed budget for this interim working period of the Working Group has been prepared and will be sent to the IIED as a separate document.

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