



Overview of CREMA

Ghana's cocoa landscape is a mosaic of farms, off reserve forests, gazetted forest reserves, fallows and human settlements adjoining one another. Cocoa cultivation and the absence of land use planning in cocoa distribution is driving deforestation and forest degradation as a result of encroachment of cocoa farms into forest reserves and the loss of shade trees and forest patches in the cocoa farming landscape. Landscape level land-use planning and governance has been identified as a critical tool to reduce encroachment of farms into forest reserves and ensure greater overall environmental sustainability.

At least eighty (80%) percent of Ghana's lands are held under customary tenure arrangements, the principal custodians being traditional rulers, earth priests, councils of elders, and family or lineage heads. Customary tenure is the main tenure arrangement within the cocoa growing landscape.

Though the majority of land is held under customary tenure, its custodians are technically and financially limited in their ability to ensure sustainable land use decisions and reforms without external support. In addition, the existing government mechanism for land use planning focuses on physical urban and infrastructure planning, to the neglect of rural areas where agriculture production is the major land use decision. In effect, the planning and management of rural landscapes is left for the individual or customary custodians. As a result, landscape scale governance and land-use planning within rural cocoa areas does not occur under the business as usual scenario.

Customary land management institutions are inadequate to facilitate such planning on their own, as they face multiple challenges of significant magnitude. Customary institutions lack the funding and capacity to implement policies effectively. Ownership information and the location of boundaries are often derived from oral tradition and memory rather than with reference to surveyed maps, and this situation provides a fertile ground for litigation and insecurity of land under the customary system.

Since the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy, the government introduced a number of innovations to encourage local communities' participation in the management and sharing of benefits from the forest. The most successful of these measures has been the Community Resource Management Area (CREMA).

The CREMA approach has resulted in improved natural resources governance, conservation awareness, and increased collective community action in numerous jurisdictions. It has helped to reduced incidences of the anthropogenic activities underlying deforestation and forest degradation activities. CREMA mechanism is particularly well suited to focus on landscape level land-use planning and governance.

The strengths and unique characteristics of the CREMA mechanism include its constitution, the establishment of a management board or executive committee, community-level committees, and agreed rules and regulations that are ultimately backed by district by-laws and endorsed by the local government and traditional authorities. A certificate of devolution of management responsibility and authority, issued by the Minister responsible for Lands and Forestry, is achievable through the CREMA process. In principle, CREMAs encourage and can facilitate a community-based assessment and planning process, democratic decision making by the local leadership, and benefit sharing amongst all stakeholders. These and other tenets of the CREMA mechanism provide useful processes and structures to support participatory landscape level planning at the grassroots to reduce encroachment of cocoa farms into forest reserves.

Landscape-level approaches in Ghana's cocoa forests required improved landscape management and the CREMA mechanism has been adapted to deliver collaborative land use planning for cocoa landscapes through HIA and Sub-HIA structures.