

## Green Scenery

# Assessment of Gbongokama Community Forest, Community Awareness raising and Public Education on Role of Forests - A Quick Impact Project

## REPORT ON

### Participatory Rural Livelihood Assessment (PRLA)

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#### Introduction

This project was supported by the IUCN NL and it seeks to assess the Gbongokama Community Forest, educate and raise awareness of the communities on role of forest. To achieve this, the project is to be implemented in three interlocking components and one of these components positioned in it a participatory rural appraisal on the issues of livelihood. This assessment report is therefore the outcome of the PRA. It has been titled “Participatory Rural Livelihood Assessment because it primarily looked at the livelihoods of Gbongokama community.

The overall goal of this project is to promote the conservation of Gbongokama community forest and to educate communities on the rationale to protect their forest.

The specific objectives of this project are:

To undertake an in depth assessment of the Gbongokama Community Forest (GCF) and its associated ecosystems to determine its suitability for conservation

To raise the awareness and educational levels of the communities on the importance of forests and to enhance capacities of the communities to better understand the benefits of conservation

To design options for alternative sources of income and livelihoods as a means to conservation

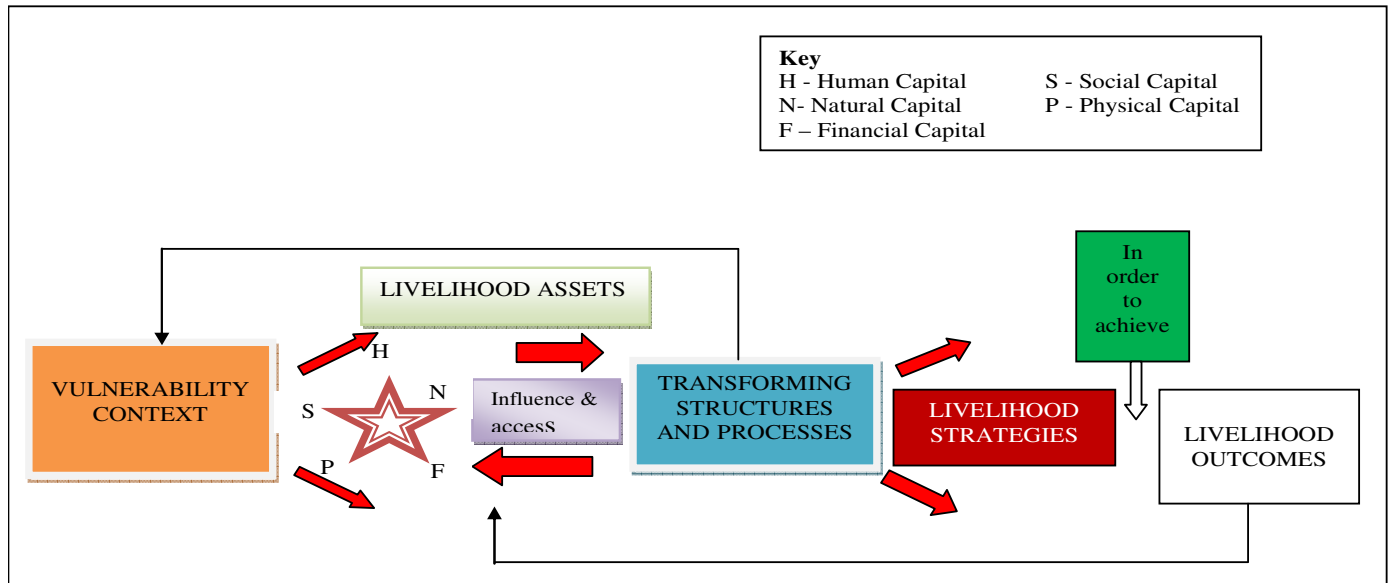
To influence decisions at community and national levels through the extensive use of the media.

The PRLA process entailed assessing the capitals in the communities that facilitates or setback options for livelihood strategy. The approach used is simple community meetings with representatives of various groups (men, women, and youths) within the communities and visual observations. A prior discussion was held in which the assignment was given to each of the three communities to determine what they would desire as a community option for livelihood that would guarantee the protection and conservation of the forest. The need for capital assessment is necessary to determine how much resources are available in the communities that can be built upon to facilitate and sustain the choice of livelihood options of the communities.

Understanding the level of poverty and available community capital is bound to inform Green Scenery about the kinds of intervention strategies that can be put in place to facilitate sustainable livelihood strategy where we understand sustainable livelihood to mean, *“The maintenance or enhancement of resource productivity on a long-term basis that guarantees adequate stock and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs.”*

Once sustainable livelihood is established it therefore becomes paramount that this livelihood is secured in all its aspects. From this perspective Green Scenery further views sustainable livelihood security as *“the secure ownership or access on a long term to enhanced resource productivity that guarantees adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs.”*

### Sustainable livelihoods framework



Source: Department for International Development Natural Resources Policy and Advisory Department, May 1999

The sustainable livelihood framework seen above is adopted by this report to guide the investigation assess the vulnerability of the communities, determine their livelihood assets, and understand present livelihood strategies that lead to the current livelihood outcomes. Once these are established a close look at structures and processes negatively influencing the current livelihood outcomes will be examined with the intention of assisting the communities transform them for the better.

To avoid biases the community capital and livelihood assessment was done on the spot without prior notice.

The following are the types of capital that were assessed in the Gbongokama enclave:

- A. **Personal Capital:** Peoples’ internal motivations, their will to act to promote change, their drive to assert their rights and the spiritual side of their lives.
  - i. **Human Capital:** The skills, knowledge, ability to work and good health that together enable people to pursue their livelihood goals.
- B. **Social Capital:** This represents the informal networks, formal groups, relationships of trust and exchange – upon which people draw in pursuits of their livelihood strategies.

- C. **Physical Capital:** Comprises infrastructure and producer goods needed to support livelihoods. E.g. tools, equipment, affordable transport, secure shelter and buildings, adequate water supply and sanitation, clean and affordable energy and access to information.
- D. **Financial Capital:** These are financial resources used to achieve their livelihood goals. Key sources include: available stock such as cash, bank deposits, livestock, and jewelry. Others are access to credit, and regular inflows of money such as earned income, wages, pensions and remittances.
- E. **Natural capital:** This is the natural resource stock from which resources and services useful for livelihood are derived. These can be nutrients, rainfall, erosion protection, land, swamps, and natural vegetation such as forests.

The three communities of Gbongokama portend similar capital attributes, which have been to a very large extent captured by this report. If individual community deviations exist, these will be stated as such.

### **Geographic location of Gbongokama Community Forest**

GCF is located within a triangulation of three villages; Teetema, Gangama, and Mesima. They are approximately one mile from each other. In terms of geographic co-ordinates, Gangama is North: 07° 25.412' West: 12°18.442', Teetema is North: 07° 24.935' West: 12° 17.999", and Mesima is North: 07° 24.8' West: 12° 18.7"

The total population of the three villages as at February, 2009 is 458 compared to 362 in March 2008 indicating an increase by 96 persons. Should this trend continue given that all factors remain the same, in ten years the population would more than double its present state.

### **Human Capital**

All the communities have a very energetic and highly motivated population. The motivation stems from the desire to have their communities exposed to development that has for ages been lacking. They exemplify high level cooperation with each other. For instance one community can call upon the other for assistance in a communal venture and that assistance can be granted. One typical example to portray this was when Gangama requested assistance from Teetema and Mesima to construct a 3.5 mile long road between Moseba and Gangama. This project requiring heavy labour was accomplished. In similar vein, Mesima recently requested both Gangama and Teetema to assist in the construction of a local bridge across a swamp leading to Mesima. The bridge project has been completed. The one difference that exists between them is the number of able bodied men and women to undertake tasks that will ensure livelihoods. While Gangama is the largest of the three villages it commands more able bodied people than Teetema (second largest) and Mesima (least in size and population). The inhabitants of these communities are all Muslim and demonstrate high level spirituality. They all show strong desire for rule of law and do pursue their rights at the community level.

Following are skilled persons found in the three communities:

One carpenter

One mason

One tin smith

One black smith

Two local cane-chair makers

Five basket weavers

Five mat weavers

Four local soap makers

In addition to these skills, all able bodied community members are subsistent farmers who grow cassava as major crop and rice as second major. Other garden crops like pineapples, bananas, beans are grown to a lesser extent. The crops are mainly grown for home consumption and small quantities of surplus make it to the market for cash that can be used to buy other manufactured goods or pay for medication.

There is a prevalence of malaria. Hernia also was reported by more than 5% of the population. Diarrhea was reported to be common in the rainy season. Due to their exclusion, the likelihood of HIV occurrence is slim but needs verification from mobile clinic attendance who visits the region very seldom.

### **Social Capital**

In all the three villages, only one group exists. This group is a youth entertainment group. No community based organization is in existence. However, informal networks are present to some extent both in and out of the communities. There are family relations, inter-marriages, network of friends, and network of Quran teachers. Strong relationship of trust was observed and reported by the communities from which small loans can be acquired. No major conflict that would divide the communities has emerged and is not envisaged because of the level of inter-marriages that has occurred among the community people.

### **Physical capital**

The communities all lack schools, clinics, water wells, stores, drying floors and latrines. Water and Sanitation (WAS) is particularly critical since these lead to serious impact on community health throughout the year. Water borne diseases like dysentery and Cholera are prevalent and these emanate from poor fecal matter disposal in all three communities (the communities practice open defecation system – ODS); children are worse affected during outbreaks. Only one poorly constructed road exist between them and Mogigba the closest point to board a public transport some 7.5km. Roads in the region are terribly bad and at certain times of the year (peak rainy season) are impassible by vehicles. This situation has encouraged a high cost in transportation (over \$10) to travel for only 122 km to Bo the largest city in the South of the country. Basic housing exists and is largely wattle or clay blocks and grass which are susceptible to fire accidents or disaster.

Very crude tools such as cutlasses, hoes, axes are used for farming. No farm equipment (either on hire or loan) were reported or observed. The major source of energy is firewood. Kerosene is very precious and

expensive and is used only for lighting purposes. In the region there exists a mechanical cassava processor for garie (minced cassava dehydrated and roasted in open containers into gritty little grains) production. This equipment uses petrol for its operation and petrol can only be purchased in Mattru, some 60 Km away and at a cost of \$6 per 4 litre. There are a number of radio stations whose signals are received in the three communities. The most common listened-to radio is the Mattru Jong community radio station. Also the community radio of Bonthe Island is also a source of information. Other radio stations whose signals are received in the communities are Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service and Radio Maria. Information is also got from meetings in the Chiefdom headquarter of Gbap. Other source of information has been from Green Scenery working in the communities. No commercial bank exists within the chiefdom from which credit can be obtained.

### **Financial Capital**

There is no banking system in the communities not even in the entire chiefdom. The closest bank is a Community Bank in Mattru, 60Km away, which bank itself is beset with its own challenges. No informal source of cooperatives or group of persons jointly contributing to a pot of money for later distribution (combi or osusu). No one could boast of cash stashed away for some investment. Only three people are reportedly earning some monthly stipend (in the Green Scenery project) in the communities, which engagement itself ends in October. There are non that are earning money as pension. The cash inflows into the communities are highly irregular and largely based on the production and sale of garie in the weekly markets within the region. Garie production is not regular and even when produced is done in small quantities, just enough to carry on the head to the market, hence attracting significantly low cash.

Less than 10 people own stock of sheep or goats. Total number of these small ruminants is 39. There are over 100 flocks of native chickens. Almost every household has a chicken or two. At least four people own an oil palm plantation which is not up to one hectare. No national or international remittances were reported to be received. At the community level access to worthy credit is very limited and confined to the trust worthiness of the person in need and the availability of such cash when needed.

### **Natural Capital**

If anything is in relative abundance is the natural capital. Due to the demography, population is posing less threat at the moment to the natural capital. However, population growth rate has been recorded (from Green Scenery's monitoring) to be high and this may bear threat on natural resources in the future. Land is available and the three communities have for farming purpose up to 80 Hectares of upland for cassava and other crops. They also have access to over 30 Hectares of flood plains for rice production. Although the upland soil is predominantly sandy, communities assert that many crops do well on the land. Some crops cited were; coconut, oil palm, cashew, groundnuts, maize, cassava, pineapples, mangoes, and bananas. Vegetables were also mentioned. The region gets adequate rainfall per year and the communities highly depend on rain-fed agriculture even when they are of proximate distances from fresh water swamps. The land is flat and hardly undulating thus erosion is minimal but nutrient leach may be significant due to the sandiness of the soil, hence fertility replacement needs to be undertaken. However, caution must exist on the type of fertilizer to be used. Chemical fertilizers should not be used as it may negatively impact on the pristine fresh water swamps in the region. Organic fertilizer (composting) is highly recommended as

fertilizer for this area. One main community forest “Gbongokama” exists and has been a major source of added livelihood for the communities. Timber and poles for housing construction, non-timber forest products such as raffia for local chairs and mats, seeds of certain trees used for food, lianas used in wattle housing, herbs for medication, honey from bees and wild animals trapped or hunted for meat are some of the added livelihood sources mentioned. The three communities are situated next to fresh water swamps of massive biological diversity. The swamps are fed presumably by both the river Sewa and Jong and they drain into the Atlantic Ocean. Many migratory birds have been sighted in these swamps.

### **Livelihood Options that Exist in the Communities**

The main livelihood option in the three communities is farming. Farming is largely restricted to cassava and rice. Economic trees like oil palm or coconuts are casually undertaken. Fruits like pineapples and bananas are done to pass time and command less emphasis. Almost all those who farm cassava, can produce garie for sale out in the weekly markets, but garie production is limited due to difficulties in transportation. However, potential exists for large scale production of quality garie. Adding value and quality to this product can also boost product demand from the communities

Livestock are raised in small quantities for fear of damage to agricultural crops. The common animals raised are small ruminants (sheep and goats). Sheep are preferred due to their significance in the Islamic religion. Other types of animals raised are chicken but these are purely for social and entertainment purposes.

There are at least more than one source of skill; carpentry, mason, blacksmith, and tinsmith in the three communities. However, those with these skills fall back on farming for sustenance as these trades are viewed as not profitable.

### **Current Livelihood Strategies**

One question Green Scenery set to pursue was “how do the communities manage to survive throughout the year?” the answers were strikingly very similar in all three communities. The description given here is not entirely based on a sequence but follows a level of pattern. The year by and large would start with farming activities with food and some cash stashed away to meet the food and labour demands during this period. By the end of the planting season and most often the first weeding, all stock of food and cash would have exhausted. A minimum of 3 – 4 months is often the transition to the harvest period. This transition, often called the hunger period is when communities are waiting for their farm crops to yield and be ready for harvesting. During this time food and cash from their subsistent activities including farming would have depleted and often severe hunger sets in. Survival during this period becomes crucial and community members engaged in various means to outlive this period. The means of outliving the hunger period is wide ranged and include the following:

- Harvest wild food including palm cabbage from palm trees
- Hunting/setting snares for wild animals and processing for sale; bush meat collection, this collection include primates
- Bee production

- Logging timber for sale to community members
- Removing NTFPs such as rattan, raffia, native mat materials to weave into baskets, chairs, mats etc.
- Extracting medicines for sale
- Extracting lianas for sale to locals constructing their houses
- Fish in the nearby swamps

Much of the items (food and other natural materials) collected can either be eaten or processed and sold for cash that can fetch much needed cash which in turn can be used for food or other needs.

This period of foraging can exert considerable pressure on natural resources within communities and in the face of a growing population natural resource depletion will be greatly affected. Such could be the case for Gbongokama forest when in the earlier years population was much lesser and the forest was able to offer the natural resource needs of the surrounding communities. This has changed in recent years as demographic changes take place. The forest was gradually being depleted and its obliteration was near when the search for Cam Wood took agents of business people to the forest enclave. The high youth population and its drive for extra cash was putting to risk the survival of the community forest, a forest that is believed to have served these communities for over a hundred years.

### **The New Stress**

The new stress that is adding to already existing challenges for the communities is the freaky nature of the local weather which is also influenced by global climate variation or change. There is growing uneasiness in the communities over the late occurrence of the rains and prolong dry spell in their region. This phenomenon was not only observed in that region but also throughout the country this year. The farmers basing their farming circle on the normal rainfall pattern planted their crops just ahead of the anticipated rains that never poured. The rains were late for over forty five days and even when it started raining, showers were not much both in intensity and time. The situation lead to loss in planting materials as planting stakes and seedlings were scotched to death due to heat from the sun and want of water/rainfall. After this loss many became hesitant to sow crops even when the rains started for fear that rains would not be enough to sustain the crops in the field. Many however could not manage to sow enough as the means to do so was just not there having lost their seeds or planting materials.

A number of difficulties are now associated with this climatic phenomenon. Firstly, the hunger period may be much longer due to the fact that crops were planted early and more than once. Secondly, the hunger period would be severe for reason that left over food or cash was utilized to support a second crop sowing activity and for acquiring crop stakes or seeds. Thirdly, there is uncertainty over crop yield in this region this year due to the lateness of the rains. It is known that water is crucial in cropping cycle. Too much of it at a particular time or too little of it could affect yield negatively. Should there be a situation where yield drops then food insecurity will prevail in the region, and poverty will further be reinforced. It is now becoming clear that in addition to seeking strategies for the usual livelihood, new adaption mechanisms must be sort to deal with the climate change phenomenon.

## **Governance**

The Chieftom is headed by the Paramount Chief and the Chieftom Council these are elected at village and section levels. They are seen as the custodian of the community land which is apportioned to families, some of the community natural resources e.g. swamp, and certain forests are usually set aside to be utilized as a common resource pull. Governance over common resource pulls are usually loose even though community byelaws are in place as a measure of protection. However, implementation and enforcement of byelaws are usually a problem due to capacity issues.

At the village level there exist a village chief who reports all village activities and development issues to the Section Chief, the Section Chief is accountable to the Paramount chief. The chieftom council is the highest decision making body of the traditional governance structure. This structure has been made to interface with the local councils in the decentralization process of the Local Government Act. The interfacing relationship is however laden with challenges such as control and power over what and when. The challenges are presenting their own setbacks. Nevertheless these structures are responsible for the fundamental development of the wards, chieftom, and the district. Absolutely no development programmes have dawned these villages and as a matter of fact many villages in the chieftom. This can be attributed to a number of reasons some of which are:

- The local governance structure at the chieftom level is weak and cannot aspire to attract development in the communities including Gbonogokama
- Capacity of authorities in the governance structure is lacking and is affecting the ability to design viable community projects that will help alleviate poverty
- Very little support is given to the local government at the chieftom level to engender any meaningful development
- Poor accountability at the local level leading to poor delivery of development initiative and the recompense in even revenue generation.

Whatever are the reasons, the bottom line remains clear Gbonogokama communities live in abject poverty and the future holds nothing for their children and women who are the most vulnerable unless levels of development interventions are deliberately targeted at these communities.

### **Livelihood Options Desired by the Communities**

In the course of the meetings communities were required to identify their desired livelihood options and the following were what the three villages opted for:

#### ***Mesima village wish to grow:***

- a. Cassava
- b. Groundnut



- c. Rice.

***Teetema village wish to grow:***

- a. Maize
- b. Groundnut
- c. Rice

***Gangama wish to grow***

- a. Cassava
- b. Groundnut
- c. Rice

**Other Income Generating Activities discussed.**

- Income generation activities: garie production, adding value to garie
- Other cassava products: Foofoo, cassava fine starch, and dehydrated cassava bits for livestock
- A bakery for bread production
- A small community store that caters for basic necessities
- Cain rats production
- Honey production
- Small ruminants (goats and sheep) production

**Findings**

To implement any sustainable livelihood strategy, it is necessary to understand the range of methodological frameworks applicable to sustainable livelihoods. The combination of livelihood strategies which can be sustained by livelihood resources that in turn is catalytically supported by institutions/organizations in a given context presents a livelihood outcome that can only be sustainable if the livelihood resources are themselves sustainable and not prone to uncertainties or degradation. The Gbongokama context presents a number of challenges which, one of the catalyst organizations, Green Scenery has set itself to understand in order to assist the three communities design their options of sustainable livelihood framework.

The following are the findings of Green Scenery for the three communities referred to as Gbongokama communities:

- The three communities are marginalized; no development orchestrated by government policies has ever dawn these communities

- Except for the present Green Scenery intervention, no development agency has ever been to the communities with development interventions
- The communities ostensibly are geographically hidden and not placed on NGO intervention maps
- Gbongokama communities live in abject poverty
- The economies of the communities are subsistent rather than cash
- The communities are very vulnerable to disease outbreak because access to health facilities is nonexistent
- Water, sanitation, and education are nonexistent. These can be found only in some 10 – 12 kilometer radius
- The communities have been highly motivated by the presence of Green Scenery this is evident by the level of cooperation accorded to it. The construction of a 3.5 mile motor track to Gbongokama, the willingness to learn conservation and farming techniques, support given to forest and biodiversity researchers, and the local moratorium on the forest are vivid indicators
- There is a steady demographic increase in the communities and youths and children command high percentages
- The communities are all farming communities and largely survive on farming activities
- Land and its constituent natural resources is the only large capital at the disposal of the Gbongokama communities
- There is potential for the communities to engage in large crops production if given the appropriate support. The potential lies in the fact that they have ample farm land and the youth population motivated to work
- Due to its geographical location, Gbongokama communities lack immediate access to market, this is further compounded by the existence of bad roads
- There are community structures that can support local initiatives, but these require capacity building on a number of issues among which are advocacy, leadership for transformation, management etc.
- There are also Chiefdom structures that can inhibit or support local initiatives. Supporting structures need to be encouraged and inhibiting ones given the capacity to play supporting roles
- There is willingness on the part the communities to conserve their forest if they can be assisted to fend their livelihoods in alternative ways

## **Recommendations**

1. The three villages have all agreed to conserve Gbongokama Community Forest. Therefore it is wise to effect conservation
2. The management of the community forest must be well structured and empowered to undertake prudent management practices
3. The communities are very poor. A major capital base will be placed under a moratorium, hindering options of livelihood. It is strongly recommended in light of this to assist these communities with alternative and sustainable livelihood strategies that will guarantee the security of the communities and the forest
4. To achieve a sustainable livelihood outcome it is imperative to pitch in the development process of the communities water, sanitation, and education
5. A number of livelihood options have been identified. A careful study is required to determine their combinations and sequencing to achieve the dual goal of sustainable livelihood and the protection of biodiversity
6. Increase in the scale (medium scale) of their farming practice for both upland and the flooded plains
7. This report also strongly recommends that support be accorded to Gbongokama Communities to access markets through the construction of roads or alternatively assisting with power tractors that challenge such difficult terrains as well as undertake multiple farming activities.