



**VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE OF ANDO
KPOMEY**
Togo

Equator Initiative Case Studies
Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative.

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Editors

Editor-in-Chief: Joseph Corcoran
Managing Editor: Oliver Hughes
Contributing Editors: Dearbhla Keegan, Matthew Konsa, Erin Lewis, Whitney Wilding

Contributing Writers

Edayatu Abieodun Lamptey, Erin Atwell, Jonathan Clay, Joseph Corcoran, Sean Cox, Larissa Currado, David Godfrey, Sarah Gordon, Oliver Hughes, Wen-Juan Jiang, Sonal Kanabar, Dearbhla Keegan, Matthew Konsa, Rachael Lader, Erin Lewis, Jona Liebl, Mengning Ma, Mary McGraw, Brandon Payne, Juliana Quaresma, Peter Schecter, Martin Sommerschuh, Whitney Wilding

Design

Sean Cox, Oliver Hughes, Dearbhla Keegan, Matthew Konsa, Amy Korngiebel, Kimberly Koserowski, Erin Lewis, Brandon Payne

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PROJECT SUMMARY

After a devastating bush fire in 1973, the village of Ando Kpomey created a “green belt” buffer around its community that has grown into a 100-hectare forest. A participatory management committee has been established to monitor the forest and its resources and to regulate its use. The community authorizes limited resource extraction to meet livelihood needs and manages revenues generated from the sale of forest-based products. Local women are authorized entry to the community forest to access firewood, significantly reducing the average time needed to forage for cooking fuel. Various crops are grown in the forest, including a range of medicinal plants which have served to meet local healthcare needs.

Neighbouring communities have been enlisted to protect the forest, and have benefited from knowledge sharing on natural resource management, participatory planning and forest conservation. The village hosts peer-to-peer learning exchanges to share lessons learned, and has done so with communities and organization across Togo and Burkina Faso.

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KEY FACTS

EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2012

FOUNDED: 1973

LOCATION: Maritime Region, south-western Togo

BENEFICIARIES: 1,000 residents of Ando Kpomey

BIODIVERSITY: Community forest



Background and Context



Persistent threats to forest cover and biodiversity

The total forested area in Togo is around 287,000 hectares. That number, however, is rapidly shrinking. The annual deforestation rate is 5.75 per cent and rising. Decades of socio-political crises and poor resource governance have resulted in severe degradation of protected areas. Between 2005 and 2010 alone, Togo lost an average of 20,000 ha of forest cover each year. The combination of deforestation, bush fires, and hunting has resulted in the widespread loss of forests and the biodiversity they support. Deforestation has led to land degradation, which has in turn left towns and villages vulnerable to flooding, bush fires and other extreme weather events.

A ‘green belt’ to buffer against bush fires

Ando Kpomey is a small town in the Maritime Region of south-western Togo, located 70 kilometers northwest of the capital, Lomé. The community – which has a modest population of 1,000 residents – was formerly surrounded by dry shrub savannah; bush fires would often break out, devastating housing, local infrastructure, crops and food stores. On two occasions, the entire town was burned to the ground.

When one particularly devastating fire occurred in 1973, a group of town elders proposed a solution: establish a ‘green belt’ of forested area around the perimeter of the community that would effectively buffer against bush fires. It was proposed that, in addition to protecting the town from bush fires – and, by extension, mitigating all of the social, economic and environmental costs associated with recovery – a green belt would allow the community to diversify the crops under cultivation and would harbour biodiversity. The proposal was accepted and since 1973 Ando Kpomey has maintained and expanded a community forest that surrounds the village and now covers an area of more than 100 hectares.

The genesis of a community forest

The initial creation of the green belt was based solely on local initiative and voluntary efforts. Family heads and community elders agreed on the proposal and devised a plan for how to move forward. As the rainy season drew to a close, community members came together to clear a ‘fire break’, a 14-meter strip of bush around the town. Beyond the fire break, they planted a 10-meter strip of trees. Every year since, the community has planted an additional 10-meter strip to expand the green belt. Little by little, the green belt has grown to become a community forest, which now surrounds the town to a depth of between 350 and 850 meters and is a great source of pride for Ando Kpomey’s residents. For 18 years after the project began, the community maintained and expanded the forest with no out-



side help. In 1991, the community initiative came to the attention of the Togolese NGO *Association Togolaise pour la Promotion Humaine* (ATPH), which, in 1992, began providing support. Several years later in 2000, the community forest came to the attention of another NGO, *Inades-Formation Togo*, which also began providing support and technical guidance shortly thereafter. With the support of both partners, Ando Kpomey developed formal regulations for management of the community forest in 2003.

Management, participation and financing

While management of the forest is entirely community-based, *Association Togolaise pour la Promotion Humaine* provides occasional technical support and helped to establish management and watchdog committees in the hopes of ensuring accountability, transpar-

ency and good governance. The management approach taken is largely participatory in nature, and the regulations that have been put in place concerning the use of and access to the forest are widely respected by local residents. The community forest in Ando Kpomey is nothing short of a regional anomaly. The majority of surrounding towns have entirely cleared their forests. As such, Ando Kpomey has reached out to neighbouring villages in an effort to engage a larger population in the protection of its forest and local biodiversity. The community forest has become an attraction for visitors to the region and from adjacent municipalities. A visitor tax is collected for entry to the forest, which has provided a valuable source of revenue to finance local infrastructure needs and ongoing conservation and tree-planting efforts. The management committee provides the wider community with regular updates and reports on how this revenue is being spent.



Key Activities and Innovations



The primary activity of the Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey has been the establishment and ongoing maintenance of its community forest. Thanks to the efforts of volunteers every year, the forest now covers an area of more than 100 ha. Rather than focusing on continued expansion, however, the organization is now concentrating its efforts on forest maintenance and monitoring to ensure that existing tree cover stays intact and is not deforested or degraded.

To feed community tree-planting and reforestation efforts, village nurseries were established in which tree saplings were cultivated and nurtured to maturity before being planted in the annual forest expansion. With the support of its partner organizations, the Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey has developed a simple management plan. The plan was drawn up in open consultations with community members. Both the Department of Environment and Forest Resources and the UNDP-implemented GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) have provided the village with resources and support to help establish formal rules for community forest management. Support with this resource governance framework has been complemented by training in sustainable forest management techniques.

The management committee is composed entirely of elected community members. It holds responsibility for ensuring that community forest regulations are complied with, and for regulating and authorizing the felling of trees and other forms of resource extraction within the forest. When a member of the community needs timber for a construction project, they must submit a request to the management committee which authorizes the type and quality of wood that should be used as well as the location in the forest where the tree(s) can be harvested. Through this process, the forest is able to meet the needs of the community without risking overharvesting. Women are also permitted entry to the forest to collect fallen branches for firewood. The rules governing the forest are strictly enforced. Because pressures on forest resources are not limited to inside the

community, the Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey has also made efforts to involve neighbouring communities in the protection of the forest. Residents of adjacent communities are invited to participate in traditional hunts and sustainable resource extraction events, with the intention of demonstrating the value of the forest, the ecosystem goods and services it provides, and to discourage people from degrading or setting fire to the forest.

In recent years, the Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey has expanded into alternative livelihood activities that aim to both raise local incomes and reduce pressure on forest resources. The project – again funded by the UNDP-implemented GEF Small Grants Programme – has trained 25 women in snail farming and 17 men in apiculture and the marketing of honey. Project beneficiaries were provided with hives, brood snails, construction material for snaileries, and honey harvesting and storage equipment.



Impacts



BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS

Bush fires and deforestation have resulted in the clearance of tree cover from the vast majority of neighbouring towns. The community of Ando Kpomey, however, has created a community forest that is locally managed and conserved in a participatory manner. Resource extraction from the 100-hectare forest is regulated by a local management committee, thereby regulating and limiting the extent of forest degradation. A forest surveillance committee has also been established and operates year-round, though it is activated more regularly during the dry season. These efforts have had positive spill-over effects for the environmental health and biodiversity of the area.

Increased forest cover has improved biological diversity around the village. Many of the trees and vegetation that now thrive in the community forest are endangered or threatened in the larger region. The forest is also home to various species of vines, medicinal plants, edible mushrooms, and wildlife, including many species of birds, rodents and deer. The livelihoods projects that are now being advanced by the Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey provide the local population with income-generating alternatives to unsustainable extraction of forest resources and illegal logging.

Importantly, and in addition to its biodiversity benefits, the community forest contributes to healthy ecosystem functioning and, by extension, the provision of ecosystem goods and services. Among the more important services that have been restored through the planting and expansion of the community forest has been the regulation of water cycles. Other towns that have cleared their forests suffer from irregular rainfall and constant flooding, as the lack of tree roots compromises soil integrity and subsequent land degradation. Anecdotal reports from villagers claim that the community forest has also improved air quality in and around the village, and that the trees planted around Ando Kpomey have created a microclimate that produces regular rainfall, which has benefits for local freshwater access and agriculture.

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

The primary socioeconomic impact from the Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey initiative has been fulfilment of the original motivating objective: protecting the village from bush fires. By creating a 'fire break' and green belt around the perimeter of the village, the community has effectively made bush fires a thing of the past. No bush fires have occurred in the town since 1973, the year the initiative began. Previously, these incidences would cause a great deal of damage to local homes and village infrastructure, which had detrimental effects on the local economy and required large investments of time and resources to rebuild.

Regulating and provisioning services

The role of the community forest in creating a local micro-climate, and therefore potentially increased rainfall, has benefited local agricultural production and, by extension, local food security. Water for irrigation is a precious commodity in the region, which is characterized by arid land and water shortages. These climatic and geographic realities have been exacerbated by deforestation, land degradation and climate change. In the early 1970s, when the decision was made to establish the green belt, there was sufficient tree cover in the surrounding region to maintain regular rainy seasons and sufficient rainfall. Since then, however, due to almost complete deforestation, rainfall is now rare in the surrounding area. Ando Kpomey has been somewhat protected from this, owing in large part to the community forest. Although harvesting wood from the forest is restricted and tightly regulated, community members no longer have a difficult time obtaining wood for construction projects and infrastructure needs. Another socioeconomic benefit of the community forest has been improvements in both the diversity and abundance of the natural resources that are available for community use. The forest contains edible mushrooms, animals that are sustainably hunted (during organised and regulated traditional hunts), and medicinal plants that help to meet some basic community healthcare needs.

Associated benefits of the community forest

One perhaps unanticipated benefit of the community forest has been in respect to land tenure securitization. The forest which now encircles the village is actively monitored and maintained in a way that the surrounding bush and scrubland never was previously. The tree line created by the forest boundaries provides a clear marker and delineation of Ando Kpomey land. This has been beneficial in strengthening community identity as it relates to the stewardship and ownership of communal land, as a way of grounding the village's collective spatial sense of territory, and protecting the village from "land grabs", which are not uncommon in the region.

The Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey collects entrance fees from visitors to the community forest. This revenue stream has been effectively directed towards village development projects. The majority of the funds have been used to construct and then operate a local school. The school has been recognized by the Togolese government and was allocated teachers, beginning in the 2010-2011 school year.

Notably, the community forest has given the women of Ando Kpomey a stronger voice in community life through representation in all decision-making processes and in the management of the forest. The participatory management approach employed by Ando Kpomey gives men and women equal roles and equal representation in forest governance. Community members have reported that

women are increasingly inclined to voice their opinions at town meetings, especially during exchange visits when other communities come to visit the forest. Women also benefit from being given access to the forest to gather firewood, reducing the distance they would otherwise have been forced to travel to collect fuel for household consumption.

POLICY IMPACTS

The success of the community forest stems in large part from the choice to prioritize community leadership in resource governance planning and forest management. This success has not gone unnoticed. The Togolese Government has been influenced by the community-based stewardship and management model and, importantly, revised legislation text on forest management to be less top-heavy and more amenable to participatory, community-based action. As one example, the Ministry of the Environment and Forest Resources adopted a more participatory approach to forest management that directly involves and integrates local town associations in the management of protected areas. The Ando Kpomey community forest provided proof of what local communities can achieve when empowered, and can be credited with influencing this change in policy. The Ando Kpomey community has opened up the community forest to workshops and events that engage local and national policymakers, giving them a first-hand experience of the community approach.



Sustainability and Replication



SUSTAINABILITY

While the project benefits from partner support – and receives some international funding – it is worth noting that establishment of the community forest was initiated by the community of Ando Kpomey itself. The community maintained and expended the forest without any external support or funding for 18 years, from 1973 to 1991. The longevity of the project is testament to the determination and will of the community to confront the social, environmental and economic challenges associated with bush fires, land degradation and water shortages.

The Ando Kpomey community forest remains very much a locally driven project. All segments of the local populations – men, women and youth – are represented in each of the committees that oversee the forest. The forest is managed in such a way that all community members feel involved and have a stake in its stewardship. The forest remains communally owned and management rules are well respected. The community members recognize the benefits the forest brings and are happy to continue to invest their time and energy in maintaining it. Every year, towards the end of the rainy season, residents clear the fire break and carry out any necessary planting to maintain the quality of the forest. Throughout the year, but especially during the dry season, community members monitor the forest to prevent forest fires and deforestation. All of this work is carried out voluntarily – the involvement of the entire village has helped to strengthen the solidarity and cohesion of the community.

The community collects a tax from all visitors to the forest, which constitutes a source of revenue for local development projects. The majority of the money collected to date has been directed towards the construction of a local school. A grant from the UNDP-implemented Small Grants Programme (SGP) funds alternative livelihoods projects, which have subsequently reduced pressure on the forest. Additional funding for reforestation efforts is collected

from local businesses: any business which extracts resources from the forest must pay a contribution to the Village Development Committee, which then goes towards maintenance of the forest and other village development activities.

REPLICATION

The community forest has served as a best practice model in the region and has a high level of potential for replication. The overwhelming majority of villages in the region have cleared their forests, and now suffer water shortages, irregular rainfall and land degradation as a result. The Ando Kpomey forest has to a large degree helped the village address these issues, although certain problems are endemic to the region and persist. Ando Kpomey has taken steps to ensure that other villages respect the rules and regulations of the community forest and undertaken outreach to demonstrate the benefits that come from reforestation and environmental stewardship. Residents of neighbouring communities have been invited to tradition hunts in the Ando Kpomey forest as a way of sharing benefits across villages, for instance.

The Ando Kpomey forest management model has been promoted through educational visits, peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchanges, and awareness-raising workshops. Visitors have included a range of farming organizations from the area, neighbouring prefectures, and researchers from the University of Lomé, government agencies, and NGOs. These exchanges have paid dividends, as the community forest project model has been replicated in the communities of Nyaméssiva, Kpenyuie, Zikpé, Setekpé Klégbékopé and Akpuive to date.

The community has also employed awareness-raising workshops and mass media to disseminate information about the forest. In 2011, representatives from Ando Kpomey held a workshop on

forest management in the neighbouring village of Akpuive. Over 500 people attended, including members of seven neighbouring villages, while the event was promoted on local radio stations. Inades-Formation Togo, an important partner to the village committee's work, published a booklet in 2006 titled "Creating and managing a community forest: the Ando Kpomey project".

PARTNERS

Association Togolaise pour la Promotion Humaine (ATPH) was the first NGO to become involved in the project. Since 1991, ATPH has provided technical assistance to help the community establish a watchdog committee and a management committee: the introduction of these bodies has helped to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of local funds.

Inades (Institut Africain pour le Développement Economique et Social) - Formation Togo has worked with the Ando Kpomey community since 2000, advising on the development of forest management methods, and promoting the community forest as a model that could be replicated elsewhere. This NGO also published a booklet highlighting the Ando Kpomey model for use in replication.

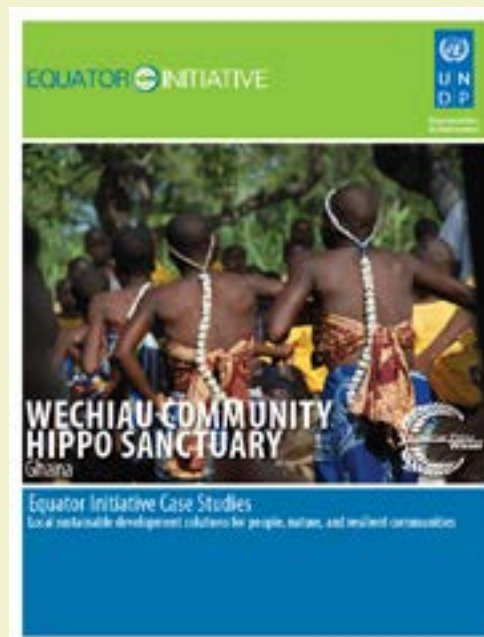
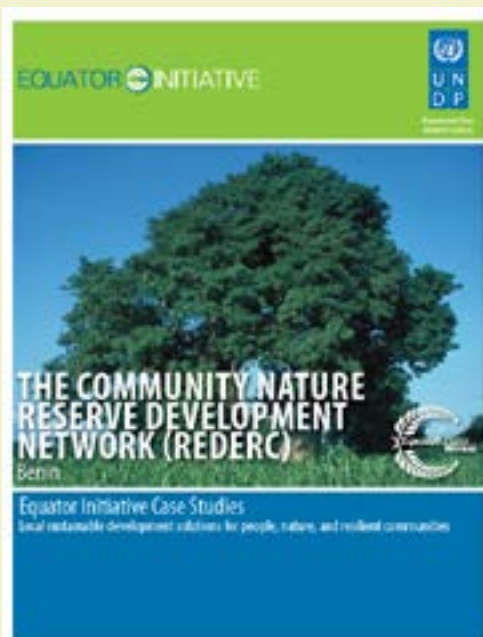
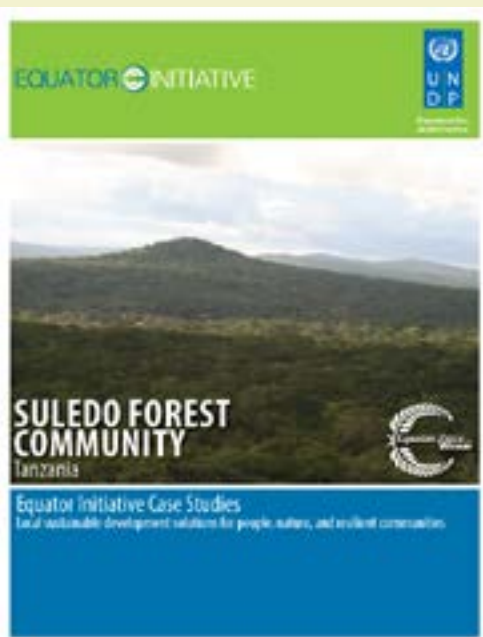
In 2009, Ando Kpomey successfully submitted a project to the UNDP-implemented GEF Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP) for funding. This project involved the development of alternative livelihood activities in the village and capacity development for the Village Development Committee to improve management of the forest. To date, community members have been trained in snail farming and bee keeping, and a simple management plan for the community forest has been drafted with GEF-SGP support.



FURTHER REFERENCE

- Presentation on the work of the Village Development Committee of Ando Kpomey (PowerPoint) http://www.equatorinitiative.org/images/stories/Community_Aldeia/Day_4/Togo_PRESENTATION_MODZI_A_RIO_togo.pdf

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Equator Initiative
Environment and Energy Group
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
304 East 45th Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10017
Tel: +1 646 781-4023
www.equatorinitiative.org

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