

# *Indigenous Nature Conservation Practices in Ghana* *- The Case of the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary* *in the Brong-Ahafo Region*

- 1900's – Introduction of IPAS by Colonial Administrators due to so-called concern over rapid deforestation and dwindling wild animal populations in African countries including Ghana

## Problems

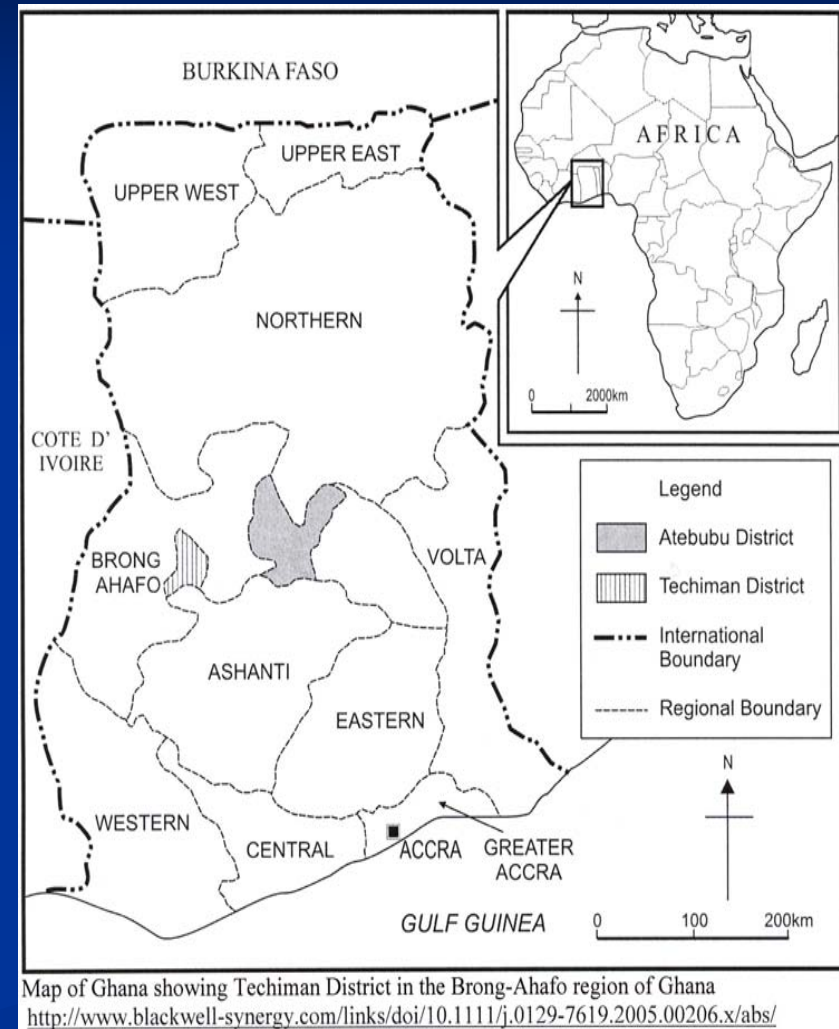
- African Government's dependence on external forces (IMF/WB) promotes increased investment in extractive sector leading to over exploitation of forest resources.
- Rapid population growth in many African countries unmatched by development of appropriate technologies and management of natural resources.

## Result:

- Extensive habitat destruction, degradation and severe depletion of wildlife with serious consequences for biodiversity conservation on the continent.
- African communities have always had traditional strategies for biodiversity conservation like sacred grooves, royal burial grounds, tabooed species and so on, but these are gradually eroding.
- Introduced biodiversity conservation strategies mentioned earlier implement a policy of externally enforced exclusion with no serious attempts to include local communities in the management of protected areas. All these have led to many problems with landscape management with respect to nature/biodiversity conservation.
- *Biodiversity is defined here as the variety of life forms, measured in terms of biomes, ecosystems, species and genetic varieties and the interactions between them (Ntiamoah- Boadu, 1995).*

# Background to Ghana

- Population of about 20.9 million (UN 2003), about 66% of which are rural.
- Pop. Growth rate of about 2.6 ( UNDP Ghana-Country profile)
- It can easily be said that Ghana's greatest strength lies in her natural resources. About 50% of the economically active work in agricultural/forestry sector.



# Nature Conservation in Ghana

- Two Main categories of nature Conservation strategies in Ghana – Indigenous and Introduced.
- **Introduced** – reflects Western-oriented management strategies and are thus based on western knowledge and values. Includes:
  - Forest Reserves are areas legally constituted for permanent forestry production
  - Wildlife conservation areas (national parks, game production reserves, wildlife sanctuaries and strict nature reserves) aims at reserving representative assemblages of Ghana's fauna and flora
- **Indigenous** - pre-colonial resource conservation closely married with cultural practices and traditional life ways.

# Indigenous Nature Conservation in Ghana

- Rural people have emotional and spiritual relationship with nature and sometimes tend to see mountains, rivers and forests as having spiritual essence (Owusu-Koranteng 2003).
- Indigenous Biodiversity Conservation Areas (IBCAs) as old as traditional Ghanaian society itself (as far back as 8th century)
- Sacred and Community Forests have contributed immensely to biodiversity conservation
- Infact, Ghana is said to hold ancient keys for a meaningful model of forest conservation.

## Various Categories of IBCAs

- Three categories of indigenous protected area systems within rural communities. These are strategies that:
  1. *Protect particular ecosystems or habitats (such as sacred groves, royal burial grounds, sacred rivers)*
  2. *Protect particular animal or plant species (such as totem and tabooed species)*
  3. *Regulate exploitation of natural resources (such as close seasons for harvesting or hunting).*
- These strategies are often enshrined in religious or cultural beliefs and superstitions and enforced by taboos.
- Lot of correspondence between local practices and conservation /sustainable use though different conceptualisations (See table).

Indigenous

IPAS correspondence

**Sacred or fetish groves, local or community forests:** small patches of forest set aside as sacred lands normally close to settlements that cannot be touched. Royal burial grounds protected because of respect for the dead and the belief that the ancestral spirits live there.

***Biodiversity Conservation:*** as they are intended to protect watersheds, fragile ecosystems, plants and animals of conservation importance to local communities

**Sacred Watercourses:** Many rivers and streams that provide the main source of drinking water for a village also considered sacred. The surrounding forestlands protected on the basis that the spirit of the river resides in the forest.

***River corridor management*** as prohibition of cultivation of forestlands on the river banks, prohibition of use of fisheries resources within the river and restrictions on access to the river on certain days

**Totem and tabooed species:** Patches of forests protected because they support sacred, totem or tabooed species believed to have special spiritual or cultural values and associations. Many clans in Ghana have a wild animal or plant species as their symbol.

***Fauna/Animal (also Flora) Conservation:*** Traditionally, such species are strictly protected. In some cases, even touching the species is forbidden

## Methodological Challenges

- Explicitly none as managed by revered gods via traditional heads/fetish priests with uncontested authority
- Sustained by strong traditional beliefs upheld by the local people who have spiritual, religious and cultural attachments to the groves
- Implicitly, sacred grove management threatened, though not always as tangible as with IPAS.
- Yet, rather corrosive manager claiming its share as survival greatly threatened by the *erosion of traditional beliefs* that have sustained the system
- Theoretical Problems (value conflicts)
- Groves contain resources upon which the poor rural folk are so dependent
- subsistent/market and economic values respectively vs. purely aesthetic (religious, cultural) values for which they exist
- Result: A number gradually shrunken by surrounding farms and others already lost to development projects

## Conclusion of IBC in Ghana

- There are many intangible benefits of forests to rural communities that may be important to them but that may not be seen as having economic value. These may thus not be aggregated as cost to the communities when they are lost. Sacred groves however, are of immense value not only to the rural folk, but also to humanity as a whole as our case study will demonstrate shortly.

# Case Study: The Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary

- Been described as the most famous example of Traditional African Wildlife Conservation in Ghana.
- It is situated in the Nkoranza District of the Brong-Ahafo Region with an area of about 4.5 km<sup>2</sup>. This region forms part of the “transitional zone” between the country’s coastal rainforests and dry grassland interior.
- Flora of the sanctuary is a forest of dry semi-deciduous type (fire zone subtype). Thus Sparse under storey making for exceptional viewing of monkeys and birds in the tree canopy



# Specie variety in this traditional conservation patch



- Fauna: The sanctuary harbours several species of primates.
- The most prominent among these being the Pied Colobus and Campbell's Mona monkey.
- There are also occasional sooty mangabey monkeys in the sanctuary. Pasta monkeys and Savannah duikers are common in the surrounding countryside.
- There is also a broad variety of birdlife in and around the sanctuary including the spectacular paradise flycatcher
- (Narration)

## Theoretical and Methodological issues in its Management

- Explicitly, there seems to be a problem in its management as traditional authorities, farmers, conservationists, tourists, loggers and even fires struggle for their share of resources (Value Conflicts)
- Encroachment on the core forest by surrounding farmlands and bushfires. Forest being cleared by farmers who plant their own trees to grow fruit, timber and medicines
- Timber logging also a potential conflict arising out of the economic value attached to this forest.
- Methodologically however, the sanctuary seems to present a successful case of community cooperation with government conservation efforts

## Theoretical and Methodological problems in its Management (Cont.)

- Remarkable Management feat: an unusual merging of traditional and state law in which villages play a crucial part.
- Presently, most villagers support the protection of the grove because:
  - Of its spiritual value, but also because
  - They realise its ability to attract tourists and provide an alternative means of sustenance for them.
- Other villages trying to Replicate this example

# Global significance

- The Boabeng- Fiema Sanctuary provides an interesting example of how ancient traditions can provide not only modern means of income generation, but also an effective management of biodiversity through the combined efforts of state and local communities.

## Lessons

- Conservation needs not be the sole preserve of government initiative as villagers can take the lead with other villages copying their example.
- The suggestion then is to coordinate efforts and integrate traditional knowledge and practices in modern conservation strategies as is the case with the Boabeng-Fiema sanctuary and others like it.
- Finally, factors identified as militating against protected area management such as lack of education, public awareness and understanding of conservation issues must be addressed as a matter of urgency.