

Designing a multiple stakeholder dialogue - initial lessons learnt in navigating through conflicts in the Ghana forestry sector

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1. Introduction - the issue, the context, the project objectives, the choice of a multiple stakeholder dialogue (MSD) as part of the project strategy, and the rationale for this paper

The 5 year project (2007 – 2012) to “Develop alternatives for illegal chainsaw lumbering through multi-stakeholder dialogue in Ghana and Guyana” is implemented by a consortium of partners⁶ to address the degradation of natural forests in both countries. Both Guyana and Ghana show a high incidence of chainsaw lumbering. While in Guyana the practice is legal and controlled, in Ghana it is banned since 1998⁷. However, in many forest fringe communities, chainsaw lumbering is an important source of livelihood despite the high level of conflict associated with the practice. Chainsaw lumbering, which refers to on-site conversion of logs into lumber using chainsaws for commercial purposes, offers livelihood opportunities to large rural groups, who are often living in places that offer few alternatives. Latest estimates for Ghana (Marfo, 2009) mention 86.000 jobs directly and indirectly. Hansen and Treue (2008) estimate that 70% or 2.3 -2.7 million m³ of the total timber harvest is illegally cut annually. It is further estimated that almost the entire demand for timber on the local market in Ghana is supplied with illegal chainsaw lumber (two-thirds of the abovementioned 70%).

The strength of chainsaw lumbering is that it pairs low capital requirements with high labour input. Therefore it represents in countries like Ghana with cheap labour an attractive alternative to the typical high capital, low labour intensive conventional logging and milling. As a result and because no levies and taxes are paid, the price of chainsaw lumber is low and therefore within reach of the local population as well as the traders who are in for a quick but illegal profit. While chainsaw lumbering is banned, several factors have promoted the widespread abuse and illegal application of the technique:

- Local communities have no or insufficient legal access to timber sources;
- The high portability of chainsaws makes chainsaw lumbering elusive to control by forest authorities;
- High unemployment rates in rural communities encourage people to break the law which they tend to perceive as unjust (“the trees are ours”);
- The scope for large profits in chainsaw lumbering is considerable. The traditional sawmill industry is incapable or unwilling to supply domestic markets with timber (the export markets are more attractive⁸). Unscrupulous investors have jumped into the booming local market while evading all forestry charges and taxes;

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⁶ The EU-funded project is an initiative of Tropenbos International (TBI) with partners in Ghana (Forestry Commission (FC) and the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG) and in Guyana (Forestry Training Centre Incorporated and Iwokrama).

⁷ This paper will focus on Ghana only.

⁸ Timber exports from natural forests amounted to €184 million in 2005 (TIDD 2005 quoted in Hansen and Treue (2008)).

- Unclear and/or contested tree tenure systems with the FC, the traditional authority, community members, the District Assembly and local politicians questioning control, encouraging violation of the law;
- Outdated legislation, weak institutions and corrupt practices in the government regulation and control systems exacerbate the problem⁹.
- Lack of political will and political interference particularly by chiefs and local politicians has made enforcement at the operational level difficult.

The existence of illegal practices stimulates the development of exploitative business relations, leading to low benefits for actors early in the production chain and large benefits for others, usually financiers of operations who are located outside the communities. Illegal activities by the chainsaw lumbering community inevitably lead to complaints and conflict with several other stakeholder groups such as the Government (loss of revenue), traditional sawmill owners (unfair competition), conservationists (logging in conservation areas/unsustainable logging) and other owners and users of trees and forest resources (competition over benefits). These deep and sometimes violent conflicts characterise the interactions amongst forestry actors in Ghana. The impact of illegal logging is not only socio-economic: natural forests are dwindling rapidly in Ghana with current logging intensity at four times the sustainable rate (Forest Watch Ghana, 2006; Marfo 2009); it is expected that in “a few years” the natural forests outside national parks in Ghana will have disappeared.

Chainsaw lumbering and in a broader sense illegal logging has also drawn international attention. Apart from the traditional conservation lobby and the international debate on and support for sustainable forest management (SFM) the EU FLEGT initiative has led to a “Voluntary Partnership Agreement” (VPA) with Ghana to ensure the legality of timber production. It is obvious that trade in illegal timber will only be reduced if alternative markets, including the domestic one, are closed or controlled. The Ghana VPA-related *legality assurance system* (in short: checks of forest operations and supply chain from harvesting to export to ensure the legality of the entire production process) will therefore also be applicable to the domestic market. In case the system is implemented successfully and can withstand prevailing corrupt practices in the sector inevitably pressure will mount on chainsaw lumbering practices. There is a risk that well-intended measures to regulate the forest industry will lead to a crackdown on small-scale loggers with potentially serious negative livelihood consequences for poor people. Rather than reducing forest conflict, the consequence may be hardening of the conflict and increased incidence of poverty and violence. There would be a considerable benefit in designing policy measures that address the negative aspects of chainsaw lumbering while maintaining its positive socio-economic effects, including developing alternatives for *illegal* chainsaw lumbering.

Objectives, strategy and intended results

The “Developing alternatives for illegal chainsaw lumbering through multi-stakeholder dialogue in Ghana and Guyana” project – in short the “chainsaw project” - has selected a multi-stakeholder dialogue as a mechanism to reduce conflict, adjust perceptions of the nature of the problems and create shared views of solutions. The dialogue is based on the participatory analysis of information that will help identify and accept the issues surrounding chainsaw lumbering and reduce the controversies. A broadly supported agenda of actions will be agreed upon and implemented. The project overall objectives are 1) to reduce poverty and promote viable livelihoods in forest-dependent communities; 2) to reduce the occurrence of

⁹ Marfo 2009.

illegal logging; and 3) to promote conservation and sustainable management of tropical forests in developing countries.

The specific objective is to reduce the level of conflict and illegality related to chainsaw lumbering by local communities. The project consists of five substantive results, at different levels:

- a) Causes and consequences of chainsaw lumbering and its links with illegality understood (National level);
- b) International best practice determined to address chainsaw lumbering (International level);
- c) Multi-stakeholder learning platforms established to discuss chainsaw lumbering issues (National level);
- d) National consensus achieved in Ghana and Guyana about issues regarding chainsaw lumbering using an institutionalised mechanism for permanent dialogue between stakeholders (National level); and
- e) Communities dependent on chainsaw lumbering producing timber in a regulated and sustainable way (Local level).

The multi-stakeholder learning platforms (c) are considered here as the platforms where the dialogue takes place. The establishment is obviously not an end in itself but perceived as the means towards achieving national consensus on how to deal with chainsaw lumbering (d) and how to identify alternatives for dependent communities (e) while being fed with information on the national context (a) and feeding into best practices and policy advice at the international context (b).

Rationale for this paper

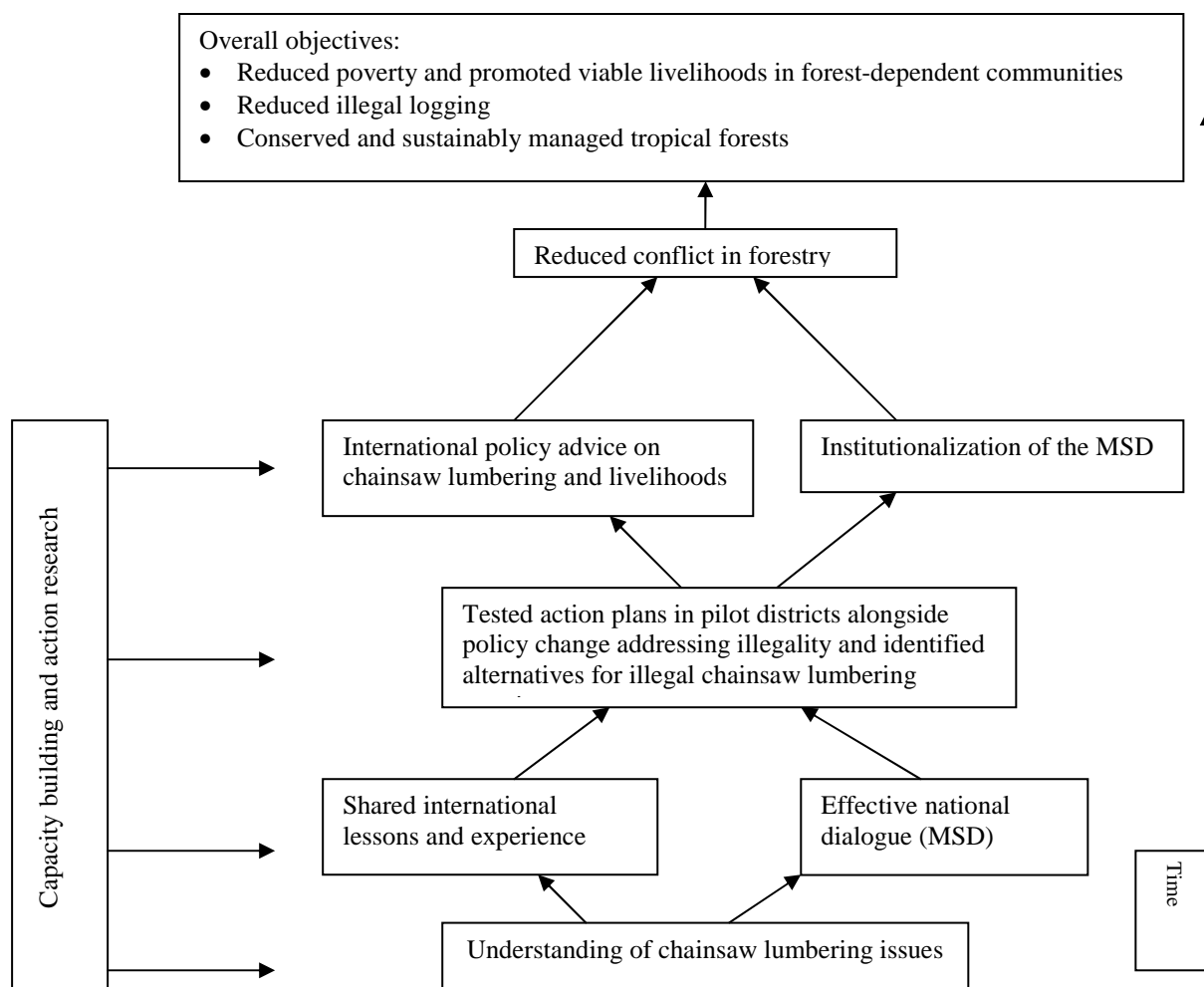
It is too early to assess whether the project's choice of the MSD as a strategy to achieve results d) and e) is effective in reducing the level of conflict and illegality related to chainsaw lumbering by local communities. It is far too early to assess its impact on the above overall project objectives. The actual MSD has not yet started; though preparations for its kick-off are far-advanced. However, it is good at this point in time to critically reflect on the choice for this "governance mechanism" and the aspired related change processes as successful implementation largely hinges on assumptions (see next section). Assumptions made during project inception years ago may have changed and this may warrant adjustments in perceptions, project strategy, resource allocation and process facilitation.

This paper is the result of an internal reflection exercise involving project management and district staff (the Community Forestry Workers) that was triggered by the April 2009 project M&E workshop facilitated by Wageningen International in the Royal Basin Hotel in Kumasi. The intention of this paper is to tell the story of the design of the MSD process so far; the context in which the process evolved; the positive changes perceived to date; the problems encountered; the conditions in place; and the lessons learnt. By writing down the story on paper the project staff and collaborators hope to translate lessons learnt so far into a reinforced and more effective dialogue amongst multiple stakeholders to navigate through conflict in the Ghana forest sector.

2. Theory of change - the "story" of how to move from current situation to the aspired future, the critical assumptions and uncertainties

The above section describes the current situation in the Ghana forestry sector as dramatic: rapidly decreasing natural forest cover, non-sustainable logging rates and governance

structures and processes that are conducive for widespread illegal use of forest resources. The chainsaw project aims to address the underlying problems that threaten the future of the forests in Ghana. During the April 2009 M&E workshop in Kumasi an attempt was made to build a theory of change to arrive at a brighter future of forestry in the country. This theory is presented in a pictorial form below:



The diagram shows the main elements of the project's logical framework but adds sequencing in time. The boxes can be earmarked as necessary steps (milestones) in a long process to arrive at the aspired future of reduced poverty, reduced illegal logging and SFM. The arrows are obviously not causal relations; they are assumptions that need rigorous monitoring for the project to stay on course. Out of the picture the contours of a strategy emerges to guide project implementation.

Projects like the Chainsaw Project are predominantly based on assumptions due to the many uncertainties and ambiguities that surround it:

- The context is international with multiple scale actors having vested interests in Ghana forests, from globally operating timber merchants, national investors and government agencies to the local farmer in a forest-dependent community just to name a few. The chainsaw project identified 17 stakeholder groupings each including a wide variety of sub-grouping clinging on to their own interests and power bases (Project document, November 2008a).

- The context is multiple sector and changes in forestry are an effect of a wide variety of sector interests: rural development, timber industry development, foreign exchange and tax revenues, biodiversity conservation, tourism, agriculture, climate control, protection of water sources, etc.
- Furthermore the context is value laden: interpretations of an effective dialogue, equitable and transparent policies, good governance, biodiversity conservation, sustainable management, and viable livelihoods will differ by stakeholder group.

The consequence of all these uncertainties and ambiguities is that project and process design is more based on assumptions (“we think it works that way but we are not sure”), uncertainties (“we think the context is conducive but we cannot control it”) and risks (“no clue”) rather than on knowledge. Many of the critical assumptions, uncertainties and risks are process-related. Telling the story of how the chainsaw project intends to influence the aspired future makes that very clear (see box).

..... *Once upon a time* a farmer near Gyaraso in Nkawie Forest District looked at the big tree on his farm land and wondered what to do with it. He knew he did not own it. It was government-owned who in turn had sold it as part of a forest concession to a logging company. The farmer knew what would happen when the company would turn up and cut the tree: a lot of damage to his crops and no compensation. By law he was entitled to compensation but no government officer would force the company to oblige. One day the chainsaw man came along and offered 100 new Cedis for the tree. He employed the farmer and his wife as carriers and the lumber was transported to the roadside, and on to the Kumasi lumber market. The farmer had a long and bitter argument with the local chief on sharing the proceeds and decided he would not entertain such a situation again. From then on he destroyed all seedlings on his farm..... Until the day he was invited to attend a community meeting that was part of a nation-wide dialogue to deal with illegal chainsaw lumbering. The farmer *hoped but was not sure* that participating in a chainsaw lumbering debate would lead to changes in access and control to the trees growing on his farm. The farmer was expected to elect a representative to speak on his behalf at district and national level with other stakeholders. He *hoped but was not sure* that the elected head teacher would represent his interests, tap into his ideas and inform him on the outcome of the dialogue. The dialogue process itself took years and included hundreds of representatives at different levels representing different interests. The debate was meant to be infused with national and international experience and information on the problem at hand, possible solutions and alternative options. The head teacher hoped he would be informed enough to participate meaningfully in the debate but was not sure. The stakeholders in the dialogue were meant to reach consensus decisions on how to deal with illegal chainsaw logging, necessary policy amendments and finding alternatives for those loosing out in the deal. The dialogue was facilitated by government officials who had played dubious roles in fighting illegality in the forestry sector in previous years. The head teacher hoped but was not sure that *this* government would listen to him and allow his constituency to take a share of the forest benefits. How to arrive at consensus decisions in such a contested sector? How can you know that the ruling politicians adopt the advice from the MSD platform? The day came however that the ban on chain sawing milling was lifted and associations of chainsaw operators, small-scale millers, carriers, woodworkers and their financiers were offered small timber concessions on a competitive bidding basis. Small scale competitive bidding following a regulated process of management planning and control in order to sustain operations was presented as the alternative for uncontrolled (illegal) chainsaw lumbering. The chain saw man hoped but was not sure that there would be enough concessions for all newly formed chainsaw miller’s associations; he hoped but was not sure that his association would get the necessary training and support to meet all management requirements, and that the process of awarding concessions was fair and transparent. In fact the chainsaw man proved right to be sceptical. There was just not enough forest left either off-reserve or on-reserve to cater for all chainsaw operators. Their numbers were swelling due to increased demand for lumber by the growing national market as a result of the oil boom in Ghana. The danger of renewed illegal logging (non-sustainable practice in or outside concessions) was looming. Fortunately the Chainsaw Project had foreseen this possibility and had explored alternative livelihood options for those people in forest dependent communities negatively affected by the policy changes. The Chainsaw Project manager hoped but was not sure that enough time, skills and resources were left to venture into domains of enterprise development, product development and marketing that took him way beyond forestry. The unemployed ex-chainsaw operator hoped but was not sure that the training he had received on alternative livelihoods such as grass-cutter and snails rearing, poultry and piggery, petty trade and dress making could be used to set up a small business; he hoped there would be a market for his products; he hoped there were not too

many other people stepping into the same market; he hoped but was not sure that he could export the snails to Europe; he hoped he would earn more with his small enterprise than when resorting to illegal lumbering practices. At the same time the high ranking government official was reporting to the EU that illegal chainsaw activities were on the decrease, and that management of the forests that were left in Ghana was gradually becoming more sustainable while communities were busy exploring alternative livelihood options. However, he realized that improved forest management would require more forest policy reforms, a stronger government agency, better resourced to do reforestation and better able to pay good salaries to staff to counter corrupt practices. He hoped but was not sure that the EU would pay higher prices for legally produced timber and open its markets for snails, grasscutters, pigs and chickens produced by those forest residents not able anymore to engage in lumber production.....and that is how the MSD positively affected our farmer in Gyaraso in Nkawie Forest District; he nurtured the tree seedlings again to maturity because he knew that his children one day would fetch a reasonable share of the high world market price for tropical timber and he lived happily ever after.

3. The MSD design process – steps taken so far

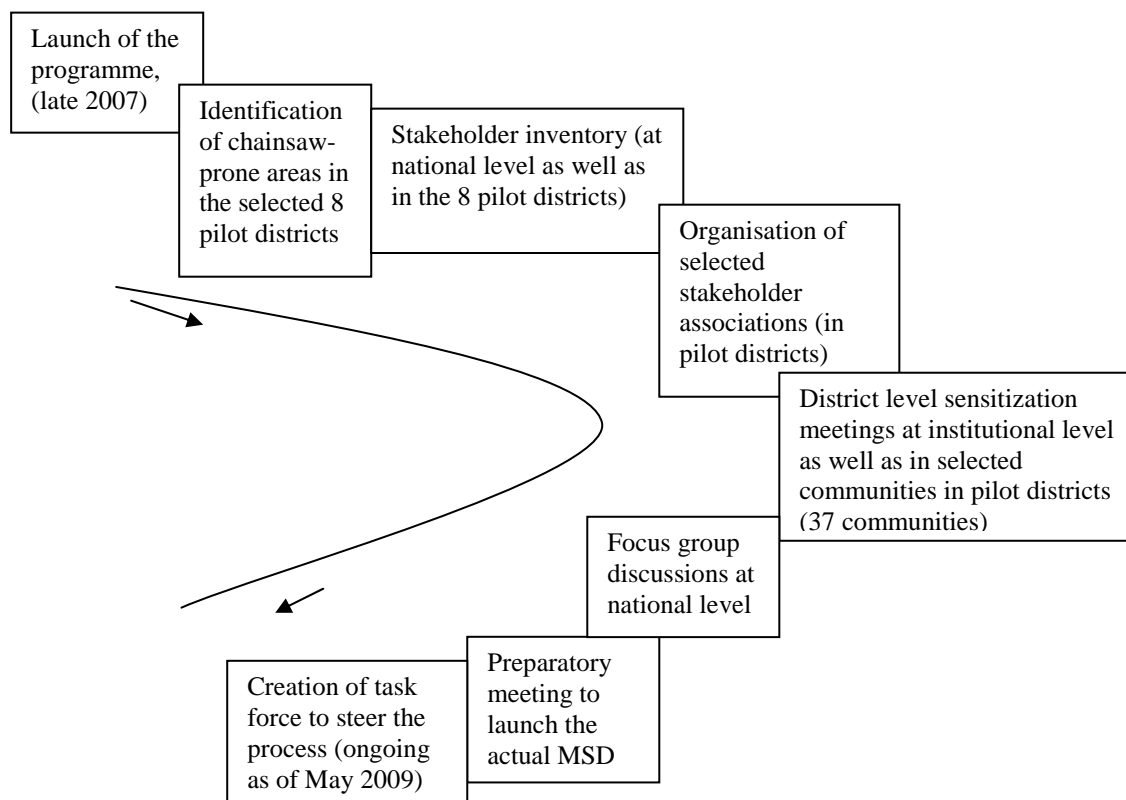
As mentioned before the actual MSD has not yet started although preparations for its kick-off are far-advanced. The design process has taken considerable time and resources of the project as the dialogue is perceived to be the prime mechanism to reach project objectives. The dialogue in combination with adequate knowledge on chainsaw lumbering issues and livelihood alternatives is expected to reduce mistrust and hostility between stakeholder groups. The MSD has to ensure mutual trust, discuss sensitive issues and produce credible information and “its success in reducing conflict will depend on the extent to which stakeholders believe in the role of such mechanism to produce result and the willingness to accept the outcomes of the process even if they represent a change away from fixed ideas and established positions” (Project document, November 2008a, p. 5).

After the launch of the programme in late 2007, an inventory was made of the stakeholders at national level as well as at pilot district level in more detail, focused on the chainsaw-prone areas. An immediate start was made in the districts to try and bring individuals together into representative groups to facilitate communication: e.g. chainsaw operator associations, carriers, carpenters and woodworkers associations; and guide these groups in selecting their representatives. While doing so the project facilitators noticed that government agencies (amongst them senior staff of the Forestry Commission itself) were not always appreciative of the strategy of the Project (“how can you talk with someone who is actually breaking the law”) and ad-hoc sensitization meetings were organized in July/August 2008 in all 8 pilot districts¹⁰. Subsequently “focus group” discussions were organized during 4 days (1 day for each focus group: traditional authorities, District Assemblies, NGOs and communities; government institutions; the formal timber industry and research institutes; and the (illegal) chainsaw loggers) to synthesize the currently available information on the critical issues, and “to provide insight in the views of important stakeholder groups and their attitude and expectations with regard to the multi-stakeholder dialogue to address these critical issues” (Project document “Chainsaw project”, November 2008c). All selected stakeholders came together in March 2009 to agree upon the project strategy and division of roles and responsibilities and to elect a task force to guide the MSD process for the years to come.

Facilitation of the design process takes place at two levels: at national level by the national facilitator (Forestry Commission staff attached to the programme) and at district level in 8 selected pilot (forest) districts by Forest Services Division (FSD) staff such as Customer Relation Officers and Assistant District Managers attached to the programme as Community

¹⁰ The 8 pilot forest districts are: Assin Fosu, Akim Oda, Begoro, Goaso, Juaso, Kade, Nkawie, and Sunyani.

Forestry Workers (CFWs). Staff were selected by the Project Management Team consisting of representatives of the consortium partners TBI Ghana, FC and FORIG.



The rationale for the selection of 8 pilot districts is perceived to be pragmatic: the project cannot cover the entire country; the selection is expected to be representative of local interests in the forestry sector and offers sufficient opportunities to develop and test alternatives (on a piloting basis) for illegal chainsaw activities (either in legal logging or beyond in what is generally called “alternative livelihoods”).

Capacity building and action research are important ingredients of the design process. An effective dialogue requires skilled facilitators (building trust and motivation and create a level playing field) and a steady flow of relevant carefully packaged information but also stakeholders being sufficiently organized to represent their constituency; these representatives being capable to draw input from their constituency before a meeting and providing feedback thereafter. It is the responsibility of the national facilitator and especially the 8 CFWs at district level to build capacity of local stakeholders to take meaningfully part in the process. With so many stakeholders in such conflicting context this is a formidable task.

It is claimed by the project staff that stakeholder participation in the design process so far is active: for example more than 500 stakeholders participated in the 37 community sensitization meetings in 8 districts; 135 government staff participated in the 8 district institutional sensitization meetings. The following factors are perceived to have triggered stakeholder participation:

- Recognition – important stakeholder groups such as the chainsaw operators feel they have finally been recognised as key players in the forestry sector. The project seems a good vehicle to “legalise” their claims.

- Direct financial interests – chainsaw milling is a lucrative income generating activity for an entire production chain and stakeholders participate to “protect” their income.
- Indirect financial interests – landowners such as government (de facto the Forestry Commission) and chiefs feel they are losing out in the current situation because chainsaw operators do not pay royalties. The project seems a good platform to make their voices heard.
- Prospective economic interests – the perceived provision of alternative livelihoods by the project draws in “the community”.
- Deadlock – the ban on chainsaw lumbering is not effective and this realisation draws in policy makers and implementers.
- Crisis – the forestry resources are dwindling rapidly; even chainsaw operators realise this. Not coming to the table and address deeply rooted conflicts is therefore no option anymore as in that case everybody suffers.
- Opportunities – the forests of Ghana hold valuable assets and the benefits thereof draw a wide variety of actors such as NGOs, District Assemblies, private sector, politicians, etc.

Two important stakeholder groupings seem to have manoeuvred themselves in a particular position. The large timber companies/saw mills are not so interested in the debate because they perceive “illegal loggers” as trespassers who must be arrested and prosecuted. It is not in their interest to have chainsaw milling legalised as this will result in more competition over scarce resources. In the meantime they have their steady supply of timber from the forest reserves, are politically well-connected and have no major reason to worry in the short term. The second “odd” stakeholder is the Forestry Commission:

- The Commission is “Chainsaw project” consortium partner and therefore jointly responsible for delivering the outcome of the project. To that effect it receives considerable payment from the project (part of the salaries of its staff in coordination and CFW positions, operational funds and investments such as computers). However, the FC may not be eager to implement the outcome of the MSD as this outcome *may* be politically sensitive and against the vested interests of the Commission and/or its staff members.
- Many stakeholders perceive the Forestry Commission and its inability to deal with illegal chainsaw lumbering over the past decade at the heart of the current problem of mismanagement of forests in Ghana. Analysing cause and effect as necessary part of the upcoming MSD puts the FC in an awkward “judging your own case” position.
- This awkward position is illustrated by the current role of the Community Forest Workers that are employed by the FC/FSD to implement the law and apprehend chainsaw operators the one day and discuss alternative options for their illegal practices with the same people on the next.

It is too easy to denounce both stakeholders as purely opportunistic. In addition it is debatable to what extent both of them represent a singular set of interests. On the other hand, they are key stakeholders and it is important to analyse the underlying institutional interests driving their (un)willingness to change.

4. Positive changes - what positive change can be witnessed in the MSD design process so far (examples from districts as well as national level)?

The Chainsaw Project seems to have come at an opportune time. The situation of forestry depletion and forestry benefits seeping away uncontrolled has become untenable and most stakeholders agree that something has to be done to stem the tide. The project has played a

catalytic role in this process. Even though the actual multiple stakeholder dialogue has not yet started the outcome of which cannot be predicted due to the numerous assumption underlying the strategy, some positive changes can already be witnessed:

1. There seems to be better understanding amongst stakeholders of the chainsaw associated problems, and especially appreciation of each others' interests and perceptions resulting in more compassion to come out with the best alternative that will be in the interest of all stakeholders rather than blindly focussing on mandates and positions;
2. Better understanding of each others' interests has improved interactions and relationships between stakeholders; most notably the friction between the chainsaw operators and forestry officials in the pilot areas has reduced;
3. The preparations for the dialogue has supported democratisation processes in rural Ghana; the less vocal forestry stakeholders such as farmers and community groups are supported to air their views in the debate, and prompted to hold agencies accountable for policy and practice failures that affect them;
4. So far the process has positively contributed to coordination in the forestry sector notwithstanding the prevailing conflicting interests. Both the stakeholder inventory, the sensitization meetings and focus group meetings seem to have instilled a sense of urgency to manage the problems together rather than hiding behind mandates;
5. The enabling environment created by the Project has enriched policy formulation processes even beyond the project itself, e.g. in linking with the Ghana-EU FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade initiative) Voluntary Partnership Agreement signed in September 2008 which is supported in design and implementation by a consortium of donors (e.g. EU, World Bank, the Netherlands, France) via the Natural Resources and Environmental Governance (NREG) Programme. Furthermore the Project linked with FAO/ DFID supported establishment of national, regional and district Forestry Forums – also multiple stakeholder platforms to debate forestry-related issues, as well as with the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) discussion.

5.and the problems encountered so far

A project operating in a contested area is bound to run into problems. The list below is based on an internal brainstorming session and predominantly process related. Added to the list are summarised responses to these problems as initiated by the project:

- Misconception amongst stakeholders that the project was pre-empting the debate and pushing for legalisation of chainsaw lumbering. *(In response the project launched sensitization meetings at both local as well as district level to re-emphasise its facilitating rather than its “problem-solving” role);*
- Profound mistrust between the “illegal” chainsaw operators and the Forestry Commission. In the forests both parties sometimes fight armed battles while during the MSD the latter invites the former to sit at the table and have an open and non-biased debate. The fact that the key facilitators of the MSD at different levels are FC staff may complicate matters. *(The project responded by having the Community Forestry Workers - the facilitators at district level - to organise numerous informal meetings with chainsaw lumbering-related interest groups to build trust);*
- Antagonism between some stakeholder groups (most notably between the timber industries versus chainsaw operators). *(More meetings);*
- Entrenched positions of some stakeholders participating in the process. Despite the stepped-up efforts of the project to inform stakeholders on project objectives and strategy, to bring everybody on board, to build trust and create a level playing field for

all stakeholders it would be naïve to assume that an open and effective dialogue will follow automatically, that participation is equitable, that consensus will be reached and outcomes will be accepted by all (*see box*).

- It proved difficult to organise various stakeholder groupings such as chainsaw operators, machine owners, carriers, transporters into “associations”. Even more difficult was to bring on board the financiers of the (illegal) chainsaw activities. The rationale of doing so was to facilitate representation and easy communication. However, the fact that the prevailing activity is illegal did not help; people proved to be cautious being drawn into formal structures that required their names written down on paper, or had too much to lose when coming in the open. On the other hand, in some cases groups of operators were eager to register as association as they misconstrued the initiative as one that would give them priority in registering for a concession to log with chainsaws legally. *The project has acknowledged that organising groups of people in effective associations requires skilful facilitation and is time consuming. More efforts of the CFWs are directed to this activity.*
- In addition it proved that dividing the parties with a stake in chainsaw lumbering in Ghana in (17) stakeholder groupings did not do away with the conflicts and differences in interests amongst “members” of these larger groupings.
- The organisation of village and district meetings in Ghana are surrounded by protocol and this may hamper open debate and equitable participation. Chiefs for example – an important stakeholder group – have a tendency to control meetings as demanded by their traditional status. Not only traditional authorities but also government officials and politicians tend to adhere to their privileged position in terms of hierarchy and power of access to resources. *While it is difficult to shy away from protocol and powerful actors dominating discussions the project facilitators apply various techniques to create open debates: group discussions, use of local language, informal meetings, meetings at different venues, etc.*

In July/August community sensitization meetings took place in the 8 pilot districts to generate ownership of the project objective and strategy - mainly the dialogue - amongst community stakeholders such as farmers, chainsaw operators, carriers, loaders, carpenters, and landowners. The report on these meetings (Project document “Chainsaw project”, draft November 2008b, Stakeholder Sensitization Report Ghana) offers some interesting quotes from participants that highlight the entrenched positions of some of them:

✚ “Are you sure you are not luring us to be arrested by the FC?”

✚ “Can’t the laws be changed now since the consequences of the existing laws on chainsaw operations are too costly now? Some people lost their lives because of the laws”.

✚ “Unavailable employment alternatives to the local citizens”.

✚ “There are a lot of chainsaw operators. So, how can all of them have access to these new types of machine?”

✚ “Don’t you think the four year for the project is too long a time as by that time there would not be any forest for timber?”

6. Are we on the right track?

The project is ongoing for over a year, the building blocks have been put in place (stakeholder identified and sensitized, facilitators trained, management set-up agreed, the MSD process designed and about to be launched). It is envisaged that the process will lead to an effective dialogue that will address chainsaw-related conflicts in the forestry sector in Ghana but how can we be sure that we are navigating through conflict in the right direction? This section aims to analyse this assumption through the following performance questions:

- a) Is the process unfolding as planned and leading towards a successful start of the MSD?
- b) Do we expect that this process will help us in achieving the project objectives?
- c) Can we sustain the outcome of the process?
- d) What impact do we expect to achieve with the MSD – based on the information we currently have?

a. Is the process unfolding as planned and leading towards a successful start of the MSD?

The process is gradually unfolding unplanned! The dynamics of the process in the complex domain of illegal logging has necessitated the modification of some initially planned activities and introduction of new ones to navigate through the conflicts in a more acceptable direction. After reflecting on the process at the initial stages it was observed that the capacity to facilitate activities at meetings had to be strengthened and in addition stakeholder sensitization at district level had to be stepped up. The output of the modified project strategy is believed to improve the process and more likely to produce desired results, as well as, and this is considered even more important, the willingness of stakeholders to accept outcomes of the MSD. Currently all building blocks seem to be in place for the dialogue to start.

b. Do we expect that this process will help us in achieving the project objectives?

The immediate objective of the project is to reduce the level of conflict and illegality related to chainsaw milling. The MSD approach aims at bringing together all stakeholders affected by chainsaw lumbering and to enable direct communication to arrive at a consensus outcome. It is foreseen that issues will be examined using a structured dialogue meaning that agendas will be set in a transparent manner, the venue will be carefully selected, reporting and feedback mechanisms agreed by all, and that meetings will be well-facilitated aiming to avoid a situation where one single stakeholder high-jacks the process. The MSD will build upon a commonly agreed interpretation of the problem and a commonly shared vision of where solutions may be found. Common understanding is based upon the previous focus group workshops. As such the process is expected to provide a more effective pathway than “traditional” research for information to contribute to solutions. Moreover the process provides a forum for stakeholders that rarely meet to influence national policy and argue for policy reforms that address their concerns. It seems safe to assume that stakeholders will grab this opportunity with both hands.

The effectiveness of the MSD process will depend on the extent to which the stakeholders believe in the role of such process to produce results. This will largely depend on many assumptions such as: all key stakeholders will participate effectively in the dialogue; accurate information necessary for effective participation is available; stakeholders are willing to negotiate and make concessions/agreements; stakeholder constituencies accepts the results of their delegates at the MSD; government will recognise the MSD and consider outcomes in policy reforms.

While keeping these assumptions in mind it is expected that this process will help in reducing conflict and illegality related to the chainsaw issue; the extent to which a consensus outcome can be generated in this highly contested domain is obviously strived for but less certain.

c. Can we sustain the outcome of the process?

The success of sustaining the MSD will obviously depend on the willingness of all stakeholders to accept its functioning and outcome but will also largely depend on its added value in the organisational landscape of the forestry sector in Ghana. The MSD will have to

transform from project activity to an institution. Based on the preparatory activities so far implemented and the structure, modalities and format agreed upon, there are ample opportunities to integrate the MSD successfully into the already existing National (and district) Forest Forum as well as the VPA implementation. Funds are adequate to facilitate this process and negotiations are ongoing. By doing so the outcome of the MSD can be sustained and the mechanism will be institutionalised as a permanent feature in the forest sector to address future forestry challenges and opportunities in general and issues and conflicts related to chainsaw milling in particular.

d. What impact do we expect to achieve with the MSD – based on the information we currently have?

Reducing conflict in the forestry sector by means of a multi-stakeholder dialogue is not an end in itself. As per project intervention logic it is a means towards achieving a positive impact in the forestry sector: to reduce poverty and promote viable livelihoods in forest-dependent communities; to reduce the occurrence of illegal logging; and to promote conservation and sustainable management of tropical forests in developing countries. While at this stage of project implementation it will be difficult to assess impact it may be possible to analyse the project context and results so far and describe the expected impact. Knowing the contested and vibrant environment we are working in, this analysis will be based, again, on numerous assumptions and uncertainties. By making these visible, and testing them as part and parcel of the dialogue, there is an increased chance that the process that will unfold leads to validation (and result) or refuting (and adaptation of the strategy). Some of the critical assumptions and uncertainties underpinning the overall project objectives are woven into the story of the Gyaraso farmer in earlier sections of this paper. The most important ones are repeated here:

- *Poverty reduction.* In the current forestry context of Ghana it is likely that forest reforms that abolish illegal logging will have a (initial) negative impact on incomes of forest-dependent communities. This is foreseen in the project strategy (and project title). Alternative livelihood options need to be found for those disenfranchised by the necessary reform as a result of the MSD. The major assumption is that sufficient and viable economic alternatives can be explored to provide a more lucrative livelihood than illegal forest use. In the booming free market economy of entrepreneurial Ghana one may wonder what lucrative alternatives are still left for exploration. The dismal record of donor-driven “micro enterprise projects” makes the assumption turn into an uncertainty.
- *Reduction of illegal logging.* The anticipated effect of a successful MSD is a policy change that positively influences more equitable access to forest resources and puts in place sufficient mechanisms to combat illegality. Parallel policy change processes are ongoing in the sector (e.g the FLEGT/VPA between Ghana and the EU). The major assumption underlying this project objective is the willingness of the legislator to reform the forestry sector in such a way that changes in laws and policy are considered legitimate and are duly respected.
- *Forest conservation.* The positive impact of a successful dialogue and hence reduced conflict between stakeholders is the anticipated conservation of tropical forests in Ghana. Achieving this impact will largely depend on achieving the aforementioned two overall objectives highlighting the critical uncertainty of having sufficient time left to conserve the last patch of tropical forest in Ghana.

7. Analysing the conditions for a successful start of the MSD process?

An initial analysis of the enabling environment of the Chainsaw Project has highlighted a number of factors that critically influence the operation and outcome of the MSD process:

- *Intensity of the problem.* Chainsaw milling is a national dilemma. Although the ban has been in place for the past 11 years the activity is still prevailing and expanding, as one stakeholder explains it “a chainsaw operator is born everyday”. Most stakeholders are concerned about the survival chances of the remaining forest reserves and resources. Meanwhile, stakeholders are also asking how to continue to meet their needs for lumber if it was not for the activities of the chainsaw operators. With Ghana signing the VPA and her commitment to ensure that the domestic market is providing legal lumber, the multi-stakeholder platforms which seek to develop alternatives for illegal chainsaw milling seem to be one of the best strategies for addressing the chainsaw issues in Ghana.
- *All-inclusive participation.* For a successful dialogue process the project is seeking the participation and support of all stakeholders. The stakeholder analysis revealed that although different interest, fears and expectations are at stake, the issue about sustainable use and continuous supply of lumber to the domestic market cannot be compromised. They realise that participation will ensure that their voice is heard and their interests are considered.
- *Sufficient capacity of staff to facilitate and capacity of stakeholders to effectively participate in the dialogue.* At the moment facilitators at the district and national levels have been equipped with skills, knowledge and techniques for facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms. The capacities of stakeholders need to be built to motivate them to participate. In addition it is necessary to empower marginalised groups to participate effectively in the process. This requires an ongoing effort as communication channels between representatives and constituencies are often changing and the skills required to participate in representative and accountable decision-making are many.
- *Sufficient information on the “alternatives”.* It was expected from the onset that the outcome of the MSD leads to a change of current chainsaw lumbering policy and subsequent practice, most importantly the reduction of the number of active saws. This will have serious livelihood consequences and therefore requires development of sustainable alternatives livelihoods (possibly beyond the sector). The information on these “alternatives” - especially those beyond the sector - is currently not available in the project. This information gap may jeopardise progress in the dialogue (from problem to solution) as well as projected impact (especially on poverty reduction objectives).
- *Sufficient scope for institutional embedding.* The Project management has begun discussing a process for integrating the MSD platform in the “forestry forum” network at all levels (from the Community Resources Management Committees to District forest forums and the national forest forum). The forest forum network is facilitated by the Forestry Commission and as such a recognized body in Ghana aimed at strengthening the voices of civil society in forest management, enhancing interaction and dialogue between the Forestry Commission and civil society and supporting pro-poor changes in the forestry and land sectors. The forestry forum expects to achieve these objectives by sharing and exchanging ideas for inclusion in the formulation and review of policy; policy implementation; as well as monitoring and evaluation. In effect both the forestry forums and the MSD have a common goal of providing a platform for policy dialogue on forestry related issues. With its integration completed chainsaw issues will be consolidated on the national agenda beyond the project areas, and beyond the project period.

8. What lessons can be drawn from the design process so far for input into further project implementation?

The first year of project implementation has provided several opportunities to reflect on progress, opportunities and challenges: management meetings, training workshops, stakeholder meetings and related forest management workshops and conferences. The reflection amongst management and staff so far has resulted in the following lessons learnt that are considered of value for further project implementation.

- *The project strategy has to provide room for adaptive management* – the chainsaw project aims to address multiple stakeholder interests in a very contentious area. The outcome of the promoted dialogue is uncertain and may be open to various interpretations and surrounded by unknowns. The project set-up as paraphrased in the above “theory of change” to arrive at the intended results (in the short term) and overall project objectives (in the longer term) is largely based on assumptions. Project management can therefore not expect that “implementation as planned” will automatically lead to the desired results. To the contrary, the project strategy will benefit from giving due attention to adaptive management principles such as: establish a good M&E system to monitor the projected critical assumptions and uncertainties; create a learning environment for staff and stakeholders to reflect on process and impact, success and failures; create space right from the onset to be able to adapt logical frameworks and budgets when necessary; document lessons learnt and share with stakeholders to justify adaptations.
- *A successful dialogue depends on trust* – a long and well-facilitated preparation process engaging with all stakeholders is necessary to generate sufficient levels of trust amongst stakeholders to talk frankly about sensitive issues such as financial and institutional interests. It is currently believed that the investments in preparation pay off in more effective implementation.
- *Equitable participation demands time, resources and facilitation skills* – the design of the MSD process has taken 18 months; the actual dialogue has not started yet. Ensuring fair representation of the numerous stakeholder groups in meetings; sufficient feedback mechanisms to keep the debate alive between representative and constituents; access to information for all stakeholders; opportunities for the “voiceless” to contribute to the discussion; etc. has proved to be time-consuming and demanding considerable facilitation skills. One may wonder if the scope of the project (international experiences/national debate/district debates/local debates) is not overstretching its resources.
- *Common understanding of the problem does not necessarily lead to consensus solutions* – the project set-up and initial process design largely hinges on an “effective” MSD assuming that all stakeholders “create shared views of solutions” (Project document 2005, page 5). The experience so far has shown however that interests amongst stakeholders are very different and without pre-empting the outcome of the dialogue one can also formulate an assumption that conflicting views on solutions will remain. In either case it is important to build what-if scenarios to avoid the project blindly steering into a direction that may be impossible to reach.
- *Collaboration with other forest policy development initiatives is necessary for impact.* There are currently more than one initiative with a stakeholder consultation and a policy development component implemented in the Ghana forestry sector: the FLEGT/VPA process; the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) initiative; debate on the UNFF Non-Legally Binding Instrument (NLBI); the NREG-related KASA civil society project; the Global Witness Forest Transparency Reporting; Pro-poor REDD (IUCN/Danida); WWF Forest Certification

support; GIRAF Civil society Project (EU); National (and district) Forest Forum (FAO supported); and the Growing Forests Partnership¹¹. Obviously there are institutional interests (of Ghana-based stakeholders as well as donors) that hamper collaboration but the overdose of consultation in the sector holds a real danger of “consultation-fatigue” and opportunistic behaviour (participation in the best-paying process) that may yield short-term output but not necessarily long-term impact. This potential long-term impact is more likely to be achieved in the multi-faceted forestry sector by means of collaboration, complementarity and cohesion offering opportunities for a range of “change agents” to play their role.

9. Concluding remarks

The “Developing alternatives for illegal chainsaw lumbering through multi-stakeholder dialogue in Ghana ...” project (2007 – 2012) has designed a multi-stakeholder dialogue process to combat illegal chainsaw lumbering in the Ghana forestry sector. With all process building blocks in place it is expected that the unfolding dialogue will result in a shared understanding of the illegal chainsaw lumbering issue and agreement on necessary policy changes to reduce the level of conflict and illegality related to chainsaw lumbering by local communities. What is less certain is that reduced levels of conflict will lead to reduced poverty, reduced illegal logging and the conservation of the remaining forests in Ghana. However, having these overall objectives featuring prominently and permanently on the agenda of the dialogue, will greatly contribute to the forestry reforms that are expected to be launched in Ghana in the near future.

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¹¹ List compiled by Terry Green in June 2009, pers. comm.