

AsaseFest – Nature Based Solutions: Workshop report



Sankofa bird
'learn from the
past, to make
a better future'

Cora van Oosten, Amanda Krijgsman. Accra, Ghana, 29&30 October 2019

On the 29th and 30th of October, inspired natural resource management practitioners from West -Africa, but mainly from Ghana, came together at the AsaseFest; hosted by the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) and Wageningen University and Research, in Accra, Ghana. The event was co-sponsored by the Wageningen research program on Nature Based Solutions, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Safety. The programme of the Asase Fest was, like the GLF, organised around the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, whilst Ecosystem Restoration was framed as a Nature Based Solution.

As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change expressed their alarming concerns about the adverse effects of climate change on global food security in their Fifth Assessment Report, the UN Decade is on a mission to provide a solution, to be found in nature itself. The changing climate is causing prolonged droughts, rising temperatures, shifts in precipitation patterns, floods, and sea-level rise. Challenges that are already apparent and expected to increase in the future. At the same time, the global population is growing. Still, the impacts of climate change threaten the capacity of ecosystems to support the food production needed to feed the world. The UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration aims to *"massively scale up the restoration of degraded and destroyed ecosystems as a proven measure to fight the climate crisis and enhance food security, water supply and biodiversity"* (UN Environment Programme, 2019).

To push the agenda, the Asase Fest (which means 'Learning from Earth Festival') presented a series of case studies of Nature-based Solutions (NBS) contributing to ecosystem or landscape restoration. Emphasis was put on forests, because Ghana suffers high deforestation rates, mainly due to illegal mining and forest fires. The Forest Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG) explained that forest restoration efforts are challenged by the complex land rights system of Ghana. In their work on Ghana's Forest Investments Programme, they are dealing with this by mobilizing the local communities, allow them to farm under the trees, since they also have ownership over the land. Building on that, the Satoyama Initiative, together with the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL), presented the landscape approach to NBS in socio-ecological production landscapes. This approach supports multi-faceted, multi-level and multi-stakeholder discussions on shared interests, goals and interventions. PBL demonstrated landscape scenario planning as a tool that facilitates this process and compares the outcomes of various 'what if' scenarios. The challenges of competition for land and competing land uses that PBL touched upon, was further addressed by A Rocha and Tropenbos Ghana, who face the negative impacts of mining activities in Ghana. The International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) presented case studies of restoring degraded land after out-mining by planting bamboo and rattan, while simultaneously creating opportunities for development. Another business perspective on NBS in forest restoration efforts was given by FORM International, who employ and educate the local communities surrounding their teak plantations. For example by allowing the farmers to do intercropping and involving them in fire management.

The second day of the Asase Fest addressed a number of pre-conditions needed for the success of NBS and restoration efforts. Land restoration cannot be done without the radical inclusion of traditional leaders, political leaders, and youth engagement. To achieve the goals, people need to commit and hold each other accountable. That can be done on the basis of rights. In the case of Ghana, the landscape restoration agenda needs to become a policy first, before it can be a community action agenda. Within the process of the formulation and implementation of action plans, understanding of land rights is fundamental. Land rights cannot be taken for granted, they are fundamental to accomplish the agenda of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

Take home messages:

- Access to land, tenure rights and competing land uses, remain challenging barriers, therefore policy and regulatory frameworks are key in restoration efforts.
- Enforcement of benefit sharing schemes is needed.
- Building multi-stakeholder and multi-level partnerships, close collaboration and frequent communication are the ingredients for success.
- Empower the local communities, create jobs, involve and assist them in restoration efforts.
- Connect restoration efforts by using a landscape approach.

References:

UN Environment Programme. (2019). UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/new-un-decade-ecosystem-restoration-offers-unparalleled-opportunity> .



Acknowledgement:

This workshop report is a knowledge product of the project 'Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Resilient and Circular Food Systems'. This project is part of the KB programs: Circular and Climate Neutral (KB-34-007-010) and Food Security and Valuing Water Program (KB-35-007-002)

The project 'Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Resilient and Circular Food Systems' is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality.