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# ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY ASSISTANTS IN CSLP INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES

**COASTAL SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES PROJECT  
(CSLP)**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

The Ghana Coastal Sustainable Landscapes Project (CSLP) is a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Feed the Future initiative and a U.S. Forest Service-managed intervention being implemented in the six coastal districts<sup>1</sup> of Ghana's Western Region. The project, originally a three-year project (2013-2016) funded with USAID Climate Change monies, was extended initially for another three years through September 2019<sup>2</sup> with Feed the Future funding, based on successes achieved within the initial phase. It worked to promote low emissions development in Ghana's Western Region by strengthening community-based natural resource management and monitoring, and improving livelihoods in farming and fishing communities.

The project's second phase, under the U.S. government's Feed the Future Initiative, had a specific objective to reduce poverty and increase resiliency in the target communities through improved natural resource management, livelihood diversification, value chain development, and ecosystem conservation and restoration. The project interventions covered 43 core coastal communities with smallholder farmers and fisher folks as the main beneficiaries. In total, project actions of one sort or another had reached more than 82 communities as of early June 2018.

The interventions of the CSLP were guided by two main outcomes: (i) increased incomes from livelihood diversification and, (ii) improved environment and natural resource management. Specific activities included agroforestry and forestry best practices, short- and medium-term livelihood improvement activities (e.g. beekeeping, climate smart agricultural, CSA, vegetable production), on-farm tree planting of commercial and agroforestry species and management of greening areas / urban greeneries. Others included wetland/mangrove conservation, spatial planning, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and youth engagement (via formation of environmental clubs in public schools).

The CSLP used in-field consultations, targeted trainings, strategic capacity building, detailed technical assistance, and participation in institutional/policy level discussions and workshops based on field-level experience to achieve project objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Shama, STMA, Ahanta West, Nzema East, Ellembelle and Jomoro Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies (MMDAs)

<sup>2</sup> This was subsequently reduced to only two years, to September 2018, due to lack of financial resources in USAID/Ghana's budget

## 1.1 Introduction

In 2014 when CSLP selected beneficiary communities for its intervention activities, a needs assessment was conducted to assess technical gaps in livelihood opportunities that exist in the landscape. Upon assessing the technical gaps in livelihood opportunities (of CSLP intervention communities in 2014,) it became necessary to engage community members to support and assist in regularly monitoring CSLP activities.

Community Assistants (CAs) are members of enlisted CSLP farmers who are resident in the various communities and have been trained by the CSLP to provide technical assistance to CSLP intervention activities. Recruited CAs carried out several tasks in all CSLP intervention activities in order to undertake the following activities:

1. To assist in mapping farm areas where tree seedlings received from CSLP were planted, fallow land including primary/secondary forests farmers have decided to leave uncultivated and vegetable farms by farmers who have agreed to practice climate smart vegetable production.
2. Support Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration activities by monitoring planted tree seedlings as well as counting and reporting on surviving seedlings or trees. Assist farmers to identify different trees/shrubs on farms for Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR).
3. Assist field specialists to conduct agro-ecological and socio-economic surveys in the respective community.
4. Advise/ remind enlisted CSLP farmers to practice what they learn from trainings conducted by CSLP including planting of tree seedlings, tending operations, cultural practices and livelihood activities.
5. Disseminate events schedules to all farmers when such information is received from CSLP staff.
6. Undergo technical training to be able to use the GPS to map out farms as indicated in 1, 2 and 3 above.

## 1.2 Core Values of Community Assistants

Selection of CAs was based on five core values jointly defined by the CSLP staff and community members. Other requirements used was literacy and numeracy skills that met data quality standards of the CSLP.

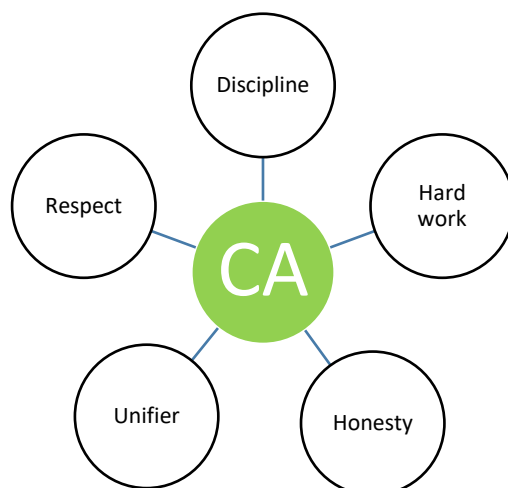


Figure 1: Core values used to select CAs

### 1.3 Technical Roles of Community Assistants

<b>Community Assistants must have the ability and capacity to do the following :</b>					
<b>Beekeeping</b>	<b>CSA</b>	<b>VSLA</b>	<b>Tree Monitoring</b>	<b>Wetland Restoration</b>	<b>Mobilization</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills to monitor beehives and advise the farmer what to do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills to identify problems in vegetable production and advise the farmer.</li> <li>• Ability to prepare all organic recipes</li> <li>• Swift in reporting problems to authority e.g. MoFA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to organize and motivate group members to pay for loans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and ability to identify all planted tree species and FMNR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to raise mangrove seedlings and manage nurseries</li> <li>• Mobilize community members to replant degraded areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills to interact with community members</li> <li>• Effective communication with project beneficiaries</li> <li>• Building relationship with the Traditional Authorities, Government agencies, sister NGOs and private organizations.</li> </ul>

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Various methods and strategies were used to ensure effective selection and engagement of CAs. Pre-defined selection criteria for CAs was used and their capacities were built through trainings and workshops in order to ensure CAs had achieved required competencies and orientation to carry out tasks assigned to them by the CSLP.

### 2.1 Criteria for Selection of CAs

Individual community members recommended for selection as CAs were assessed based on the following criteria:

1. Member of CSLP enlisted farmers
2. Resident in the community of engagement
3. Willingness to participate in all CSLP field activities and trainings.
4. Acceptable literacy and numeracy skills
5. Demonstrate the five core values in Figure 1.

### 2.2 Capacity Building – Orientation and Workshops

One basic criteria for selecting a community assistant was his/her ability to read and write. This was necessary to enable them fill reporting format (performance data sheets) on monthly basis and other issues related to their task. To build on this capacity, trainings and other forms of capacity building efforts were undertaken to improve the technical abilities of community assistants through the following;

- Regular orientation
- Update on CSLP intervention activities and rationale for carrying out the intervention activities.
- Equip community assistants to improve on their relationship building between CAs and CSLP, CAs and enlisted farmers.

Community assistants' workshops were organized when CAs contracts were renewed every six months to discuss challenges, the way forward and provide some more technical advice to CAs to enable them carry out their tasks efficiently. During these workshops, CAs were taken through how to properly complete performance sheets aimed at enhancing their report writing skills. These workshops also served as refresher trainings for technical areas they may be facing challenges in.

## 2.2 Trainings in CSLP Technical Areas

CAs were taken through trainings, hands-on exercises or coaching to enhance their abilities to undertake tasks listed in section 1.3 above. Table 1 is a list of trainings community assistants participated in and their respective objectives.

*Table 1: Technical Trainings Given to CAs*

<b>Technical Area</b>	<b>Trainings received</b>
Farm Mapping	Use of GPS <sup>3</sup> units in efficiently mapping and reporting data on mapped farms
Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration	Trained to identify planted tree species and FMNR. CAs were taken through tree monitoring and counting and how to properly record data on surviving trees. CAs were trained to develop skills in managing tree nurseries.
Beekeeping	How to monitor beehives and provide technical advice
VSLA	Organize group members. Community Assistants who doubled up as village assistants were trained in starting up new VSLA groups, facilitate meetings, conflict resolution and financial numeracy
Climate Smart Agriculture	How to monitor CSA farms, provide technical advice, prepare organic recipes, identify pests, diseases and other problems in vegetable production. CAs were also trained to hold and report on Enterprise group meetings
Wetland Restoration	How to raise mangrove seedlings and maintain mangrove nurseries

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<sup>3</sup> Geographic Positioning System



Certificates were issued to CAs who participated in trainings and performed well regarding their assigned tasks.

### 2.3 Certifications

A hands-on GPS device training for land parcel mapping was organized from the year 2014 -2015 for all community assistants to provide them with technical skills in mapping farms. CAs were trained to map farm areas where tree seedlings received from CSLP were planted and where naturally regenerated trees have been nurtured as well as CSA vegetable fields as detailed in their contracts Terms of Reference.

*Certificates were provided for community assistants who participated in trainings and worked with the worked with the CSLP. In*

Table 2 is a list of CAs who received certificates.

*Table 2: CAs who have received certificates from the CSLP*

<b>Community</b>	<b>Community Assistants name</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Shama	Thomas Cobbinah	Male
	Obed Cobbinah	Male
Cape Three points	Paul Ansah	Male
	Stephen Quaicoe	Male
Bokro	Daniel Quaidoo	Male
Adubrim	Augustine Adamtey	Male
	Augustine Nwaye Yeboah	Male
Ayawora	Daniel Tetteh	Male
	Emmanuel A.A. Aberro	Male
Navrongo	Walter Cudjoe	Male
	James Fepkey	Male
Tweako 1	Mathew Atewine	Male
	Joseph Ayertey	Male
Tweako 2	Francis Mochia Amoaka	Male
		Male
Aduzuaso	Nicholas Baidoo	Male
Fawoman	Stephen Sakitey	Male

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### 3. RESULTS

This section outlines benefits and challenges involved in engaging Community Assistants to support CSLP interventions.

#### 3.1 Benefits

The CSLP cannot overemphasize the immense support community assistants provided throughout the length of the project. Collective efforts of these individuals were key in ensuring the successful organization of trainings, dissemination of information and monitoring CSLP interventions. Some of the benefits of engaging community assistants for both CAs and the CSLP include;

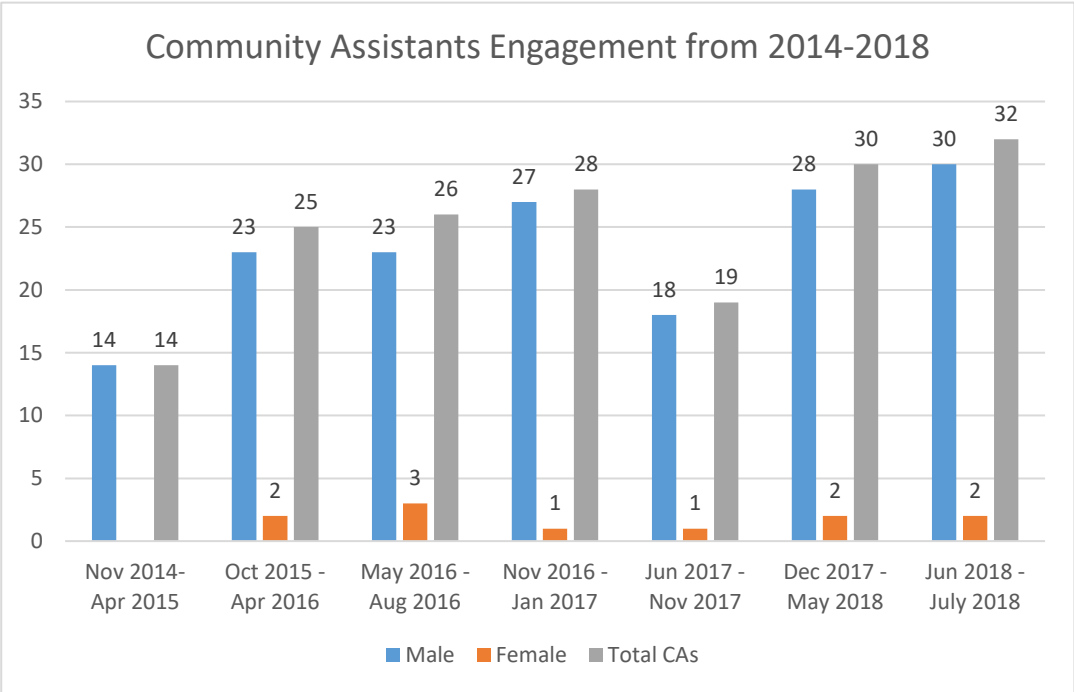
Successful organization of trainings: Community assistants ensured information about trainings, events and field visits were delivered on time at all times. They also handled preparation of venues and mobilization of participants which in all contributed to the successful trainings and events of the CSLP.

#### **Support for Technical activities:**

Enhanced Capacity of Community Assistants: Through trainings and capacity building activities, most CAs have acquired and improved skills in public speaking, use of GPS units in farm mapping and effective monitoring of beekeeping, CSA farms, and wetlands. These skills also add up to their ability to mobilize and ensure things are done, making them champions of development interventions and good points of contact for future projects.

**Gender involvement:** An initial total of twenty-eight community assistants were employed; this group was made up of 26 males and 2 females representing only 7% of the total number. This was mostly due to culture of these intervention communities where most jobs were seen as men's jobs and also mainly owing to the fact that most women were unable to read and write. As at July 2018, the number of females had

increased by three, representing 15% of the total 32 community assistants recruited over the length of project. These female community assistants have over the period developed confidence in making contributions at meetings and in applying the technical knowledge gained from training and workshops. They are capable of giving technical advice to both female and male farmers whose farms or beehives they monitor. Hopefully, this will encourage many more females to contribute or participate in future development interventions.



### 3.2 Challenges

**Handling Technical Roles:** Although regular support was provided to community assistants by CSLP staff, some tasks were very technical in nature and proved to be a challenge. Areas of major concern were conflict resolution in VSLAs and pest management in climate Smart Agriculture among others. The technical team dealt with this by being available to answer complaints and providing technical back-stopping when community assistants reached out.

**Late payment of monthly allowances:** This was caused by late submission of reports, and incomplete reports. The CSLP tackled this by scheduling two dates in a month by which all reports should reach the office for the payment process to be facilitated. All CAs were encouraged to open bank accounts and sign up for SMS alerts so they could be notified of payments. Also, workshops were held at regular intervals during which CAs were taught how to properly complete performance sheets required for monthly reporting and wage payment.

**Non-cooperation of farmers:** Some farmers refused to co-operate with CAs by not allowing them to enter their farms or simply refusing to go with them to their farms or beehives for monitoring at agreed times. Farmers were educated by the CSLP team on the importance of regular monitoring of these interventions and encouraged to cooperate with CAs during visits to their farms.

**Proper Report Writing:** Due to the very basic levels of education of most community assistants, performance sheets that needed to be completed for monthly reports proved to be a little challenging. This was overcome by regular trainings, one-on-one sessions and workshops to aid CAs submit accurate documentation for payment.

*Table 3: Contract periods and number of community assistants engaged from 2014-2018*

<b>CA Contract Period</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Nov 2014- Apr 2015	14	0	14
Oct 2015 - Apr 2016	23	2	25
May 2016 - Aug 2016	23	3	26
Nov 2016 - Jan 2017	27	1	28
Jun 2017 - Nov 2017	18	1	19
Dec 2017 - May 2018	28	2	30
Jun 2018 - July 2018	30	2	32

## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Conclusions

The CSLP cannot overemphasize the immense support community assistants provided throughout the length of the project. Collective efforts of these individuals were key in ensuring the successful organization of trainings, dissemination of information and monitoring CSLP interventions. These CAs served as points of contact for the CSLP and championed all interventions.

### 4.2 Recommendations

Future landscape projects that may have to use the Community Assistant strategy should include a thorough assessment of the literacy and numeracy skills of prospective individuals. This will go a long way to improve data quality for accurate reporting on project indicators.