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Coastal Sustainable Landscapes Project

QUARTERLY REPORT: JANUARY – MARCH 2014

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COASTAL SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES PROJECT

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Project Profile

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US Forest Service Coastal Sustainable Landscapes Project

Quarterly Report to the USAID/Ghana Mission January – March 2014

A. CSLP Project Summary

Ghana's Western Region faces myriad land use pressures in its six coastal districts. Demand for conversion of forests to agriculture, cash crop development, harvesting of mangroves and other forest species for charcoal and timber production, and artisanal mining all pose significant threats to forests in this region. High unemployment rates compound these pressures, exacerbating unsustainable natural resource management practices and reducing ecosystem services provided by the Region's forests.

Most land in the Western Region outside forest reserves and other protected areas has been deforested and converted to agriculture. The current situation is one of urgency—to find ways of taking pressure off the remaining reserves and to improve livelihoods and land management outside the reserves. Coupled with the human pressures on the landscape, a warming climate caused by increased atmospheric carbon dioxide poses significant risk to the landscape. In addition to increased temperatures, climate change is associated with jet stream fluctuations causing irregular, more extreme, and unusual weather patterns and events. Changing rainfall patterns and amounts can mean droughts in some areas and floods in others. Changing phenology, distributions of plant species, and rising sea levels are some of the potential adverse impacts on the region from climate change.

To address these growing threats, USAID/Ghana's Economic Growth office has developed natural resource interventions in Ghana's Western Region. USAID's main initiative, the Fisheries and Coastal Management Project (FCM), has four components: (i) Strengthened enabling environment for decentralized fisheries and coastal governance, (ii): Increased use of applied science to inform decision-making, law enforcement and the implementation of management plans, (iii) Heightened public awareness of trends, challenges and successes in ecosystem management and stronger public demand for sustainable use and conservation, and (iv) Improved management of marine and coastal natural resources for multiple benefits.

The US Forest Service, under an inter-agency partnership agreement with USAID, manages one component of the FCM project. The Coastal Sustainable Landscapes Project (CSLP) will contribute in some form to all four components with special emphasis on component (iv). Operating in the six coastal districts of Ghana's resource-rich Western Region (see Figure 1), CSLP activities target landscape level engagement with communities, non-governmental organizations, Government of Ghana agencies, the private sector, and international partners. The geographic area includes districts from the Cote d'Ivoire border to east of the Takoradi-Sekondi metropolitan area including the Greater Amanzule wetlands complex and Cape Three Points.



The CSLP responds to the USAID Sustainable Landscapes (SL) Results Framework by focusing on Strategic Objective 1: *Accelerate the transition to low emission development through investments in clean energy and sustainable landscapes*. The SL interventions will support the second development objective of ensuring sustainable and broadly shared economic growth in Ghana under the USAID/Ghana Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). The goal of the strategy is to support the Government of Ghana in realizing its goal of becoming an established middle-income country by 2022.

To confront these growing threats mentioned above, the CSLP intends to improve carbon sequestration, forest management, and livelihoods in the six coastal districts of the Western Region. The overall long-term impact of the project will be to *promote low emissions development in Ghana's Western Region by strengthening community-based natural resource management and monitoring*. The project will focus on the coastal landscape, including mangroves, other wetlands, and forests and agricultural areas (within and outside protected areas) all of which are managed under a diversity of land tenure regimes.

Ghana has seen numerous interventions related to forest conservation in the past, many with limited success. CSLP's primary activities will focus on applying a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) model, a social entrepreneurial concept that has already enjoyed much success in Ghana, as a novel vehicle to maintain and increase forest cover with native tree species. The CSLP will work with existing Community Resource Management Area (CREMAs) bodies or similar entities to develop their capacity to launch their own VSLA and oversee the loans to community members. The CSLP will apply the VSLA concept to provide incentives for farmers and landowners to incorporate tree crops on their land while helping provide seed funding for a revolving funding mechanism to work towards improved livelihoods. Wherever possible, CSLP aims to support women to manage the VSLAs and therefore more directly improve their livelihoods and those of their households. Additionally, the CSLP will help to demonstrate and transfer effective agroforestry and reforestation methods (technology and practices) to restore native ecosystems. The integration of the VSLA process will ensure that these activities reduce pressure on existing forest resources and restore degraded forests while improving livelihoods.

If successfully implemented, these efforts will lead to increased employment, improved livelihoods, better land management of existing resources, increased soil fertility, and increased carbon stocks. Moreover, improved land management and livelihoods will reduce pressure on intact areas of forest reserve, protecting their biodiversity and allowing for ecotourism.



B. Quarterly Report Highlights

This quarterly report provides an update on the implementation progress and critical issues related to the CSLP for the start-up period of January to March 2014.

During the current reporting period, progress with CSLP start up and project work planning included the following key achievements:

- Hiring and orientation of core project team including the Administrative and Finance Specialist, Communications Specialist, two Community Benefits Specialists, and the Environmental Services and Spatial Planning Specialist;
- Acquisition of CSLP office space in Anaji neighborhood of Takoradi and initial set up of the space;
- Signature of Letter of Intent with the Ghana Forestry Commission and US Forest Service International Programs;
- Participation in USAID Economic Growth Office Partners Meeting in Accra to further integrate Feed the Future concepts into the project;
- Development of the CSLP Performance Management Plan;
- Development of the CSLP Environmental Monitoring and Mitigation Plan;
- Development of project operations & administrative manual and small grants manual
- Recruitment of a new project Director;
- Participation of two US Forest Service Regional Ecologists to assist with establishing project baselines for indicator reporting and supporting the project in work planning;
- First annual work plan session facilitated by Training Resources Group with the presence of CSLP staff, US Forest Service colleagues and USAID/Ghana; and,
- Participation of Community Benefits/NRM Specialist in US Forest Service International Seminar on Watershed Management.



C. Project Implementation – Successes to Date

Forest Service established the project office, recruited and oriented new project staff, established baseline monitoring parameters for field activities, engaged partners, signed letters of intent (LOI), developed monitoring and environmental mitigation strategies and enhanced the overall project scope and vision for CSLP during quarter two, year one of the Coastal Sustainable Landscapes Project.

CSLP Recruitment and Staffing

The CSLP team advertised, screened and recruited personnel for the following positions: Administrative and Finance Specialist, the Communication and Outreach Specialist, the Community Benefits Specialist, the Environmental and Spatial Planning Specialist and the Governance and Policy Specialist.

CSLP offered positions to five qualified personnel and negotiated salaries in February. CSLP and USFS leadership decided, in consultation with USAID, not to fill the Governance and Policy Specialist position and instead hire an additional Community Benefits Specialist. Additionally, CSLP recruited and hired a project driver.

USFS conducted a wide recruit for a project director, screened candidates and interviewed finalists. A USAID official participated in the finalist's interview in Washington. The Forest Service selected Steve Dennison, a senior natural resource and development expert with extensive experience living and working in Africa for the position in April 2014.

CSLP will recruit a Village Savings and Loan Specialist in April 2014.

Office Accommodation and Receipt of Equipment

CSLP signed a two-year Tenancy Agreement for a house in the Anaji neighborhood of Takoradi for use as office for the CSLP on March 1, 2014. The ICFG and ADVANCE USAID projects donated office equipment and furniture to CSLP. Some items required refurbishment, which is underway. All items are recorded in the CSLP equipment inventory list.

Collaboration with Partners: Letter of Intent with the Forestry Commission of Ghana

CSLP pursued three LOIs during this quarter with the Forestry Commission of Ghana, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The LOI between the Forestry Commission and the CSLP was signed by the Director of the USFS' International Programs and the Chief Executive Officer of the Forestry Commission of Ghana. The Forestry Commission will be the main CSLP counterpart within the Government of Ghana. The LOI will enable CSLP work in the Western Region and engagement on the national level relating to natural resources management and governance.

The LOIs with the EPA and MOFA are still being finalized. These will provide support for partnerships with the regional offices of these agencies in key areas of



intervention. Ideally, the LOI will enable key EPA and MOFA staff to engage with CSLP staff throughout the project.

Participation in USAID Economic Growth Office Partners Meeting

CSLP participated in a two-day Implementing Partners meeting of USAID/Ghana Economic Growth Office's Feed the Future (FtF) initiative. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- a. Expand stakeholder awareness and understanding of the objectives of the United States Government (USG) Feed the Future Program.
- b. Increase awareness and understanding of the Government of Ghana Agriculture Sector Strategy and its role in the African Union re-launched Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).
- c. Build a clearer understanding of how the USG efforts support CAADP and Government of Ghana Agriculture Sector priorities, with detail on technical and geographic priorities.
- d. Expand Implementing Partner and other stakeholder awareness and understanding of the objectives of the United States Government (USG) Feed the Future Program.
- e. Advance USAID agenda to achieve and scale food security results over the next two years.
- f. Identify opportunities to increase coordination among partners.

The meeting created the opportunity for a shared understanding of the various projects under the initiative. The projects covered commercial agriculture, nutrition, natural resources management, agricultural technology and policy. USAID placed emphasis on enhancing collaboration between the Initiative's projects. Sessions were devoted to discussing potential opportunities for collaboration.

D. Monitoring, Evaluation and Knowledge Management

Development of the draft CSLP Monitoring Documents

USAID provided feedback to CSLP on the project's Performance Management Plan (PMP). Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Services Support (METSS) worked with CSLP to update the plan. Similarly, CSLP drafted the initial Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP) and submitted to USAID for review.

Development of the CSLP Work Plan and Indicators

During the week of the 17th to 21st March 2014, the CSLP further defined its work plan for the life of the project. With the support of a facilitator from Training Resources Group, as well as two regional ecologists from the US Forest Service, the team developed activity specific outlines for the life of the project. This initial strategy will be further defined in the coming weeks to include detailed budgets and deliverables for each activity.



Photo 1. CSLP Work Planning Session in Takoradi. Photo courtesy of Tom DeMeo.

The work-planning session allowed for the CSLP staff, USAID and USFS detailers to learn about each other's strengths and passions related to natural resources management to help build a strong sense of team spirit. It is hoped that this session, along with a continued emphasis on feedback and adaptive management, will allow for a well-managed project that can quickly respond to changing needs and opportunities to make the best use of funding and limited time.

The CSLP team and the USFS ecologists work conducted during the March visit enabled the development of an indicator tracker tool. This easy-to-use tool will allow staff to record and track progress towards indicators in real time. The tool will be used to track specific training activities by the type of training. In addition, it can be used to track specific management interventions (including area being targeted) and institutions with improved capacity as a result of CSLP interventions. Over the coming weeks, staff will begin to use the tool and adapt it, as needed, to ensure its practicality in the field and office.

Project Operations Manual and Small Grants Manual Drafted

The CSLP team drafted an operations manual to guide project administration and management which will be reviewed by legal counsel over the coming weeks. This document will be reviewed by each staff member as a part of his/her orientation to the project. Changes can be proposed by staff members to the Project Director for review.

In addition, a small grants manual has been drafted for use in the case of small grants being awarded to local partners. The manual sets out guidelines and best practices for management of such a funding mechanism.



Photo 2. Small group work planning in Takoradi. Photo courtesy of Tom DeMeo.

Capacity Building: Community Benefits Specialist attends USFS Watershed Seminar

One of the two Community Benefits/NRM Specialists departed for the United States to attend the US Forest Service International Seminar on Watershed Management after the work planning session. By sharing experiences and learning alongside experts and colleagues from across the world, the specialist will be gaining new perspectives on potential activities for CSLP to mobilize communities in Ghana to protect existing forests and incentive new forest cover. In addition to USAID colleagues, he will meet and learn from US Forest Service experts, other NGO staff, and the private sector. He will present key lessons-learned to CSLP staff upon his return to Takoradi later this month.

E. Project Implementation – Lessons Learned

Maintaining Focus on Achievable Outcomes

During the previous quarter, the project was able to more clearly focus on achievable outcomes for the projected life of the project. Given the relatively short time frame, the team realized that the initial intent of including policy revisions as a major outcome would be too ambitious. Thus, the project has chosen to stay abreast of national level policy work by sharing lessons learned from the field while simultaneously learning of changes to natural resource-related policy, while maintaining the key focus of the project on livelihood and management interventions on the ground. CSLP believes this will enable the project to ultimately be more successful in meeting its targets for areas under improved management while building more sustainable livelihoods.



F. Planned Activities for Next Reporting Period

Critical issues/activities for the next quarter are:

- a) Further orientation of staff (administrative procedures, activity level budgeting)
- b) Orientation of new Project Director
- c) Site selection criteria developed and priority sites identified and quantified
- d) Finalization of first annual work plan
- e) Project indicator targets finalized
- f) Engagement with project partners
- g) Project launch event