

**PROTECTING ATEWA ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH BIODIVERSITY
MONITORING AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACH –**

KEY BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT VALIDATION REPORT

IMPLEMENTOR:



DONOR:



PARTNERS:



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Background:

The Atewa Range Forest Reserve is challenged with threats to its key biodiversity and ecosystem services. This can be attributed to weak governance and management systems, notably inadequate law enforcement and inadequate assessment and monitoring of the threats facing the Atewa Range Forest Reserve. Current efforts by regulatory bodies such as the Forestry Commission to monitor and manage protected areas such as Atewa Forest Reserve have largely been unsuccessful due to, among others, limitations of staff and logistics. This lack of capacity of mandated institutions can partly be overcome by engaging a wider scope of stakeholders in monitoring protected areas. This project therefore proposes to address this gap through the development of an innovative participatory technology-based monitoring system. With respect to Atewa Range Forest Reserve, since its designation as an Important Bird Area in 2001 and subsequently as a Key Biodiversity Area, there has been substantial degradation of Atewa through illegal logging and mining both within the forest and the surrounding landscape. There is therefore an urgent need to set up a community-based monitoring and information system that will serve as a watchdog for developments in this critical ecosystem. Thus, a community-based monitoring system will increase transparency and accountability in government decisions regarding the utilization of natural resources for national development as in the case of the bauxite development at Atewa. The monitoring system will also support the forest authorities in their work to protect the forest from illegal activities by giving them information on exactly when and where these activities are taking place.

1. Introduction:

A one-day validation meeting was held on the 10th of November, 2021 at the Abuakwa South Municipal Assembly hall. This was to ascertain the findings of expert scientist consultants who assessed the population status of various species such as Birds, Primates and Amphibians against the Key Biodiversity Area Criteria after they have been trained in a two-day workshop that was held from 14th to 15th April, 2021 at Nana Poku Palace Hotel – Kibi which was followed by field research within the Atewa Range Forest Reserve.

The information generated by the KBA studies and the globally threatened species will be used to strengthen the Atewa campaign advocating against incompatible bauxite mining activities and for the forest's protected area designation to be upgraded to National Park. The results of this approach will also feed into the Ghana National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) review following the first five-year implementation of its 25-year plan.

The one-day validation meeting brought together 35 participants comprising of 3 experts from KNUST (Dr. Ofori Boateng, Caleb - Herpetologist, Mr. Nutsuakor Mac Elikem Kwabla – Ornithologist, Dr. Bright Kankam - Primatologist). Also presents were staff from governmental institutions (Forestry Commission, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Abuakwa South Assembly, Bird Life International and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund). Also presents at the meeting were Chiefs, Queen Mothers and hunters from Potroase, Obuoho, Apampatia, Pameng, Akyeansah and Sagyimaase/Adukrom communities. The meeting was facilitated by Mrs. Jaqueline Kumadoh (A Rocha Ghana), Dr. Ofori Boateng Caleb (Herpetologist), Mr. Nutsuakor Mac Elikem Kwabla (Ornithologist) and Dr. Bright Kankam (Primatologist).

Present to chair the meeting was Mr. Mohammed Habib (Coordinating Director- Abuakwa South Municipal Assembly). During his chairmanship acceptance speech, he lamented that the impact of the forestry commission is very low in manning the forest reserve. In addition, the impact of galamsey operators and chainsaw activities has been very detrimental to the socio economics of municipality. In his remarks he threw his undiluted support behind the project by calling for a sustainable use of the Forest Reserve and urged Forestry Commission to strengthen the protection of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve. He therefore called for a collaborative effort from all stakeholders especially chiefs in preserving the Atewa Range Forest Reserve for the benefit for all.

Mrs. Jaqueline Kumadoh (A Rocha Ghana) later put the meeting into context. She welcomed all participants to the meeting and indicated that Atewa Range Forest Reserve is endowed with valuable natural resources with new species being discovered with time (Conraua sagyimase, Prhynobatrachus afiabirago) but yet, faces many challenges in its management. Therefore, the purpose of the meeting was to critically assess the findings from the consultants and send it to the Key Biodiversity Area secretariat. This information will then be used in upgrading the status of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve. The assessment if accepted will increase the visibility of the forest reserve to the international community which in turn rake in some revenue into the Ghanaian Economy. She added.

2. Summary of Presentations

2.1 Presentation on Trigger Primate Species of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve.

First to present was Dr. Bright Kankam – (Primatologist). He started the methodology as follows: A total of 24 hunters were interviewed and 20 hunters were selected to work based on their recent knowledge on the presence and location of any of the six study species. The research teams walked simultaneously on the trails in different parts of the reserve (time: 4:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.) at an average speed of approx. 1 km/h with regular stops every 50 m for 1 min (Aquino et al., 2013). The Team members scanned, listened to calls, looked for feeding signs. Therefore, at least 11 communities were visited (i.e., Adadientem, Sagyimase, Asikam, Potroase-Oboase, Owuram, Akyeansa, Larbikrom, Juaso, Obuoho, Pamen, Dompim). A total distance of 130 km was covered in 127.5 hours using a Total Survey effort of 348 man-hours in 8 days. The Data collected include the primate species, number of individuals in the group, time of observation, and GPS location. He later presented on the trigger primate species of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve. His findings indicated that one primate species (Colobus vellerosus) out of six (White-napped Mangabey, Diana Monkey, White-thighed Colobus, Lowe’s Monkey, Olive Colobus, Spot-nosed Monkey) that were assessed met the Potential Trigger Species Criterion under KBA A1 sub criterion. However, five (5) species (Lowe’s monkey, Spot-nosed monkey, White-thighed colobus monkey, Diana monkey Olive Colobus White-napped Mangabey) out of the 6 species qualified for the minimum threshold of attaining a KBA status.

2.2 Presentation on Trigger Amphibian Species of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve.

Dr. Ofori Boateng Caleb (herpetologist) presented on trigger amphibian species of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve. In his introductory remark he said among the different taxonomic groups occurring at Atewa, amphibians are by far the most threatened. He added that 2,396 species occur in Atewa Range Forest Reserve out of which only 25% has been assessed on the IUCN Red List. Out of the 25% evaluated, at least 100 species are threatened or near threatened. A few of these amphibian species are potential KBA trigger species but have not been deliberately assessed for this purpose. His findings indicated that six species were targeted (*Kassina arboricola*, *Astylosternus latecephalus*, *Phrynobatrachus ghanensis*, *Conraua sagyimase*, *Phrynobatrachus afibirago*, *Hyperolius bobirensis*). However, three species (*Conraua sagyimase*, *Phrynobatrachus afibirago*, *Hyperolius bobirensis*) qualified for the KBA criterion.

2.3 Presentation on Trigger Avian Species of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve.

Last to present was Mr. Nutsuakor Mac Elikem Kwabla – Ornithologist). He started with the methodology employed as follows: During the survey, Point count method was used with daily survey starting at 6:00am-10:30am in the morning and 3:00pm-5:00pm in the evening. Also direct sightings, calls and playbacks were employed as well as Mist-netting at 3 sites. GPS were also used to record coordinates on the field. His findings indicated that six out of the 13 proposed trigger species were recorded during the time of the field surveys (Yellow-bearded Greenbul - *Criniger olivaceus*, Brown-cheeked Hornbill - *Bycanistes cylindricus*, Green-tailed Bristlebill - *Bleda eximius*, Sharpe's Apalis - *Apalis sharpie*, Copper-tailed Starling - *Hylopsar cupreocauda*, Blue-moustached Bee-eater - *Merops mentalis*). The 6 species therefore qualified for the B3 criterion under the KBA Status.

3. Feedback and Comments

Barimah Owusu Akyem Boahen II (Chief of Apampatia) commended the Good work being championed by A Rocha Ghana and called on Government to upgrade the Statues of Atewa into a national park. This is to safeguard the water resources of the forest, he concluded.

Speaking on behalf of hunters at the meeting was Mr. Francis Zoe (Saaman community). In his remarks he made it clear that hunters like himself have good intent for the sustainable use of

wildlife resources and only hunt on subsistence basis. He therefore appealed to A Rocha Ghana to aid in the provision of Alternative Livelihood programs such as bee Keeping to himself and other hunters alike. This is to bridge the gap in their income for household keeping, and to also reduce hunting efforts.

To add to the above was a commendation by Mr. Emmanuel Antwi (Atewa Forest District Manager of the Forestry Commission). In his remarks, he commended the effort of some hunters in the fight against forest degradation by chainsaw and galamsey operators and wished some of these hunters could be trained as forest monitors to help in holding the integrity of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve high.

4. Next Steps

The next line of action on the project is to select Five (5) community members each from the five project communities (Sagyimaase/Adukrom, Potroase, Obuoho, Apampatia, Pameng) who will receive training in the use of the SMART application in reporting illegal activities and help monitor changes in water quality parameters within the Atewa Range Forest Reserve in collaboration with the Forestry Commission and Water Resource Commission for prompt action. The traditional leaders were advised to make sure that selected community members are men and women of integrity who will not be corrupted once they start monitoring and reporting illegal activities within the forest reserve.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations:

The outcome of the surveys conducted by the consultants is enough evidence to qualify Atewa Range Forest Reserve as a Key Biodiversity Area and was accepted by all stakeholders present at the meeting. It is recommended that more conservation education should be done at the schools and community level to create awareness.

Appendix: Photo Gallery



Mr. Habib Mohammed (Abuakwa South Municipal Coordinating Director) delivering his welcome Address.



Barimah Owusu Akyem Boahen II (Apampatia Chief) making an input during the Open forum session.



Chief linguist of Pameng making an input during the Open Forum Session



Queen mother of Obuoho community making an input during the open forum