



PROFILE



Overview

In recognising the need to reverse the negative environmental impact with its associated health and economic challenges the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Council, under the leadership of His Majesty Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin has mobilised resources (through existing traditional structures and the Okyeman Environment Foundation with support from stakeholders) to these prevailing challenges and enhance natural resource governance.

The Okyeman (Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area) lies in the western part of the Eastern Region of Ghana and extends from Jejeti and Akyem Sekyere in the North to Adeiso in the South-West. The area covers 5204 square kilometres and has an estimated population of around two million (ca. 10% of Ghana's population). A wide majority of the communities are mainly rural agricultural communities as farming is the primary occupation of the people. Okyeman is predominantly a rainforest region earning the area the historic appellation of "Kwaebibirem", which means the rich dense, dark forest. The governance system is structured into five divisions, namely Adonten (155 towns and villages), Oseawuo (288), Nifa (113), Benkum (208) and Gyase (27). The traditional system of government in Okyeman is one of the most sophisticated in Ghana, with a government structure made up of the King (Okyenene) and three councils of elected chiefs, sub-chiefs, councillors and elders.

The Kingdom boasts of a number of forest reserves and numerous sacred groves (patches of forest set aside as sacred and strictly protected by customary law). The most famous in recent times is the Atewa Forest Reserve, which has been designated a Globally Important Bird Area and a Globally Significant Biodiversity Area. It was designated as a Forest Reserve in 1926 to *protect the headwaters of the Birem, Densu and Ayensu rivers and their tributaries, which together are the main sources of potable water for over 10 million people, *maintain forest cover on the steep slopes of the hills, thereby preventing excessive erosion, and *halting shifting cultivation and extension of the boundaries of existing cocoa farms. Atewa harbours many flora and fauna species not found anywhere in the country and to some extent nowhere in the world due to extinction, even though successive governments of the Republic of Ghana have made failed attempts to mine the bauxite deposits there.

The Traditional Leader, the Okyenene, His Majesty Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin (the 35th King of Akyem Abuakwa) on ascending the throne on 4th October, 1999 pledged to introduce real economic development, commercial growth and the general progress and welfare of his subjects. In his pledge, the Okyenene referred to and prioritised the development of children, health, education and environment noting that "the success of my reign is dependent totally on my ability as your leader to ensure that our future – our children – is really secure." In pursuant of his conviction to execute his promise to his people, the Okyenene recognising the extreme levels of deprivation (ie poor education and health and its related facilities and the lack of basic infrastructure such as potable drinking water and electricity) during his first tour of all the 1000+ communities in the Kingdom to initiate various projects and programmes which included the Okyeman Environment Week (around World Environment Day), Okyeman HIV/AIDS Awareness, Boa Baako Boaman (Help One help a nation) Educational Scholarship and hence the establishment of the Okyeman Environment Foundation in June, 2000.



Objectives of OEF

The objectives of the Foundation are to *promote, cultivate, sponsor, develop, aid and advance the public interest in and appreciation of environmental and natural resource preservation and protection; *sponsor and assist organisations involved in environmental and natural resource preservation, education and planning; *sponsor and assist individuals of a promising talent in the study of the environment and the sustainable use of natural resource through scholarships, grants and bursaries; *sponsor lectures and demonstrations and to publish and otherwise disseminate information about the environment and natural resource; and *do any and all other things necessary, desirable or useful to accomplish the foundation goal's either alone or together with other organisations and individuals having similar purpose.

The King has advocated for the Atewa Forest Reserve to be designated as a National Park in order to enhance conservation efforts there and promote ecotourism and pharmaceutical research as the most viable options. This pronouncement has inspired propelling efforts from other local organisations which have gained international attention.

In 2021, the Okyeman Environment Foundation, in partnership with the SDGs Advisory Unit for the President of the Republic of Ghana, HE Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo (Co-Chair of the Eminent Group of Advocates for the SDGs), organised the Royal Dialogue on Climate Action and Sustainable Development Goals as a pre-COP26 event at the Ofori Panin Fie (Okyenhene's Palace) in Kyebi, the ancient capital of Akyem Abuakwa and under the auspices of the His Majesty Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin (a major champion of Climate Change and environmental issues in Ghana). The two-day event received Policy Makers, Business Leaders, Civil Society Organisations, Community and Traditional Leaders and Heads of Diplomatic Missions to Ghana as a progressive coalition to champion urgent collective climate action needed to meet Ghana's commitment under the Paris Agreement and the accelerated implementation of the SDG's. An important objective of the Royal Dialogue was to create greater visibility for COP26 and emphasise the urgency of climate action at the sub-national level. The discussions at the event led to the framing of the "Kyebi Declaration" on Climate and the SDG's and was presented at the COP26 in Glasgow by the EPA of Ghana.

Projects by OEF

Community-based Integrated Natural Resources Management Project (CINRMP) in Okyeman

A grant amount of \$848,000 was awarded to the Okyeman Environment Foundation by Global Environment Facility through the World Bank for the implementation of the Community-based Integrated Natural Resources Management Project (CINRMP) from 2003 to 2008. The project was implemented in partnership with Ghana Wildlife Society and co-financed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning of the Government of Ghana.

Objectives of CINRMP

The main objective of the project was to **enhance biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of renewable natural resources in the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional Area, using community-based resource management approaches**. This expanded the scope of the Traditional Authorities'

initiatives thereby enhancing sustainable forestry related economic activities and optimising the local and global environmental benefits.

The project supported the objectives through the following components:

- A. Improving the status of forest and wildlife resources through better management.
- B. Inventorying and documenting the forest resources to inform and affect the development plans to ensure sustainability.
- C. Integrating traditional regulatory systems for natural resource management into governmental policies and regulations.
- D. Establishing an environmental awareness programme, focusing on key environmental issues.
- E. Aiming to achieve improved livelihoods to be translated into local community economic development.
- F. Project Management, Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation.

Results by Component

Under the Forest and Wildlife Resources component (A1) management plans for critical forest habitat & key wildlife species were developed and implemented; (A2) the capacity of local institutions (traditional and local government) were strengthened in the area of Natural Resource Management (NRM); (A3) Initiatives like the Okyeman Environmental Brigades was restored and supported (520 members enlisted); and (A4) Community-based Advisory groups (District Facilitation Teams and Local Coordinating Teams) were established.

Under the Natural Resources Heritage Inventory component (B1) 4 critical areas for their conservation and protection (Traditional Sacred Groves) were identified for a (B1) Rapid Assessment of (their) Terrestrial and Aquatic Biodiversity; and further an (B3) Assessment of the Dependence on Natural Resources in Okyeman was done.

Under the Local Policies and Regulations component (C1) role of indigenous knowledge and traditional conservation strategies in Okyeman was Identified and assessed and evaluate for their effectiveness as conservation tools; (C2) an integrated land-use plan for Okyeman to guide land based development initiatives has been prepared; and (C3) appropriate local byelaws were enacted and adopted by respective government administrations to enhance local planning and regulatory framework for natural resource management.

Under this component (Capacity Building/Environmental Awareness) a (D1) needs analysis was conducted to (D2) produce and disseminate environmental education and public awareness materials (27 billboards around the Kingdom); (D3) an environmental education programme focusing on schools and communities (Okyeman Environment Week) was reintroduced and supported; (D4) a campaign on the negative impact of bushfires, illegal logging & mining, game meat exploitation was launched in Okyeman; and (D5) the core staff of OEF and some traditional leader were trained in Project Management and NRM laws and practices.

Under the Local economic development and improved livelihoods component, (E1) vulnerable groups (eg. women, youth, disabled) were identified and empowered; (E2) innovative sustainable natural resource using options based on results of B3 and C1 were identified and supported as Alternative Livelihoods for communities; tree plantations sites have been developed around the Kingdom to (E3) demonstrate best natural resources management practices for learning; (E4) support for small-scale income generating activities (Alternative Livelihood Schemes in bush meat



rearing, bee keeping, mushroom growing, etc) was introduced to over 300 individuals to diversify and reduce pressure on natural resources; (E5) ecotourism ventures that encourage local community involvement were introduced; and (E6) a program was developed for the establishment of arboreta around the Kingdom.

Under the Project Management component (F1) a Monitoring and Evaluation system for the project was developed for the (F2) coordination of project activities to deliver on outputs and outcomes.

Fostering Reforestation, Environmental Sustainability and Tourism in the Okyeman Area (FOREST Okyeman)

The program, funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Securities(UNTFHS) to a tune of \$1million with co-financing of an additional \$1.3 million, seeks to accelerate the SDGs through a multi-stakeholder, community-based approach to sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing in the Akyem Abuakwa (Okyeman) Traditional Area under two (2) main strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 1

*To support localised regeneration and reforestation of ecological landscape through enhanced sustainable livelihood by *restoring degraded forest in the Kingdom and placed under agroforestry schemes to improve community resilience and *establishing Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and enterprise action in the communities. It also provides support to *strengthen institutions by developing the capacities of local authorities in enforcing laws and bylaws on quality environmental governance and also develop an awareness creation system.*

Strategic Objective 2:

To contribute to increased access and quality social services to improve community resilience wellbeing and productivity by deepening the relevance of environmental science (via STEM) in Senior High Schools (SHS)and Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), improving the safe and supportive standards of schools in the Kingdom and providing adolescent girls (10-19) with s Iron Folate supplement. It also provides a Stronger Policy Framework coordination mechanism and evidence generation for improved equity and learning in the educational sector.

Progress on Results

The program has so far been well accepted by the communities, with a year more to go (2024). Out of 30 communities that were engaged 26 have been supported to establish community seedlings and nursery enterprises to supply 1,000,000 tree seedlings of indigenous tree species to supplying the Okyenhenes' tree planting initiative called Operation Cover Earth. Some 300 volunteers have been mobilised for the community tree nursery enterprise, out of which 48.3% are women. Seedlings were distributed for planting during the Green Ghana Day, which is a nationwide tree planting day (10 June).A Community Resources Management Area (CREMA) is being established as an entry point for sustainable eco-tourism in the Kingdom. A feasibility study for eco-tourism potential in the kingdom has been conducted in the off-reserve areas around the famous Atiwa Forest Reserve.

An environmental health profile of the Kingdom has been conducted to well define the geography, demographics, governance structure, cultural resources, environment, education, health issues, and other relevant factors that shape the community and human security status of the Kingdom.

A workshop on the alternative livelihood options, awareness creation and sensitization for communities in the Kingdom has been organised to facilitate the establishment of a locally tailored PES and enterprise action based on community consultation with chiefs, opinion leaders, organised groups, CBOs and members of the communities.

Additionally, the Girls Iron Folate Tablets (GIFT) nutritional supplements program is to benefit 279,044 adolescent girls (10-19) in the Kingdom who were likely faced by malnutrition, by reducing their risks of becoming anaemic and offer them the opportunity to perform well in school, as a promising indication of an educated community that promotes (ecologically) sustainable economic activities. Also the concept of environmental health education in elementary schools is being encouraged with the formation of environmental health clubs in a total of 270 schools across 9 municipalities and districts located within the Kingdom.

Project	Date/ Duration	Donor	Amount	Partners	Activities	Status
Community-based Integrated Natural Resources Management	2004 -2008	GEF/World Bank /MoFEP	\$848,000.00	FC, GWS,	Capacity building Alternative Livelihoods Tree Planting Biodiversity Inventory Management Plans Ecotourism (All in 52 communities)	100%
Private Network for Farmers	Jan-Sept, 2020	DOW Impact Fund	\$210,000.00	Village Corps, Bluetown, ESOKO	Installation of private Wifi Network. Educate farmers on use.	100%
Ecotourism Site Upgrade Grant Programme	March, 2022 -	World Bank/MOTAC/GEA	\$300,000.00	Bunso EcoPark, MOTAC, Archeng Professionals	Design and Civil works Landscape Communications	60%
Royal Dialogue on Climate Action and SDGs; A Pre-COP26 Event under the auspices of Okyenhene	November, 2021	MoF, OLAM, GCB, CBG,	\$100,000.00	SDG Advisory Unit, MoF, Min. of LNR, CIC, EPA, UN Uni, UNDP, UCAES, KNUST,	Discussed Ghana's presentation at COP 26, Glasgow Produced the "Kyebi Declaration".	100%
Land Reclamation Project	Sept 7, 2021	FPDFB	\$100,000*	FC, FPDFB	Land resurfacing Tree Planting	10%
FO.R.E.S.T OKYEMAN	Jan, 2021 – 2024*	UNTFHS	\$2,364,851.81	UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, WHO, FC, GHS, CBOs		ON-GOING