

MFANSI SACRED GROVE

BACKGROUND

Sacred groves have been repositories of biodiversity particularly in this era when the land/forest degradation has assumed an unprecedented dimension. By virtue of their characteristics, they should be conserved to perpetuate their biological diversities. Indeed Ghana can boast of multiples of the sacred groves scattered all over.

Regrettably most of them are being degraded and the fear is that if nothing concrete is done about them they are most likely to be wiped out leading to massive loss of biological diversity and its related benefits.

“Mfansi” Sacred Grove is located at Kato (a suburb of Berekum) and it lies in the southern-most edge of the community. The sacred grove is approximately about four kilometres from the Berekum town centre. By conservative estimate the sacred grove is about 40 acres and it is characterised by tall tropical plants some of which are the following:

- i. Wawa
- ii. Mahogany
- iii. Ceiba
- iv. Odum
- v. Cidrella
- vi. Asanfena
- vii. Wabire etc.

Historically the sacred grove houses a shrine called “Mfansi” and it is bordered on its southern edge by the sacred “Bodwese” stream. The stream is seasonal but tends to overflow its banks whenever there is torrential rainfall. The stream has

in it species of aquatic organisms that include: mud fish, some species of tilapia, crabs and a variety of aquatic weeds.

THE NEED FOR THE PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF THE SACRED GROVE:

Indeed, available pockets of sacred groves in the region are being subjected to all sorts of degradation including encroachments, illegal logging, bushfires and others. The Sacred grove is obviously the last hope of remnants of typical tropical forests in the region since it is clearly uncommon to notice any rich forests aside "Mfansi" Sacred Grove.

The Grove may not necessarily be the perfect rich source of biodiversity since virtually all of them have been interfered with human activities and most invariably bushfires. With religious links of the "Mfansi" sacred grove (shrine) and the fact that Kato community has protected it over the years make it quite unique among the sacred groves in the region and the nation as a whole.

Secondly, the present status of the sacred grove relative to the totally degraded surrounding lands tend to give credence to the local effort put in by the community in protecting this rich natural heritage.

Thirdly, its strategic location along Sunyani – Berekum road (international road) makes it one of the most highly rated potential for tourist attraction.

Finally, now that tourism occupies very strong position in terms of raking in foreign exchange and thereby having been put on priority agenda in both national and international perspective puts this sacred grove in a unique position for urgent development. It is against this background that any development of

this sacred grove to mimic the much publicized “Kakum” National Forest will be a big plus for the community, the region and the country as a whole.

DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE:

Any development initiative of the grove should emphasize on the protection and conservation with the long term objective of making it a tourist attraction destination that would benefit the Kato Community and the Country at large.

The short term/specific objectives of any initiative may include the following:

- a. Re-demarcating the entire sacred grove/re measuring the size of the grove to determine the actual size and planting cassia at the boundary/periphery.
- b. Introducing tropical timber species that are rare or nearing extinction through enrichment planting.
- c. Introducing medicinal plants for the purpose of research into plant medicine.
- d. Enlarging the periphery of the grove through tree planting to serve as buffer.
- e. Exploring the possibility of developing the site as a miniature of “Kakum” National Park.
- f. Reintroducing NTFPs (Non-timber forest products) such as snails, rattan edible mushrooms etc.
- g. Fencing the grove with wire mesh to trap species of animals including ungulates and furthermore to prevent other species that may be introduced from escaping into the surroundings.

INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES TO ACHIEVING DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROVE:

The very nature of any development initiative of the “Mfansi” Sacred Grove calls for nothing short of not less than five years sustained implementation of components of the initiative. The initiative (project) then will have to be divided into five phases viz. phase 1 (first year), phase 2 (second year), phase 3 (third year), phase 4 (four year) and phase 5 (fifth year).

Phase 1 (1st Year)

Proper demarcation of the entire grove involving surveying, pillaring and developing the cadastral plan.

Additionally identification of flora and fauna will also be carried out.

Phase 2 (2nd Year)

- ❖ Boundary clearing of the entire grove and planting cassia at the periphery.
- ❖ Fencing the sacred grove with wire mesh.

Phase 3 (3rd Year)

- ❖ Development of good peripheral footpath that can be used by tourist for hiking around the grove and in addition construction of a small footbridge across the “Bodwese” stream
- ❖ Procurement of tree seedlings for enrichment planting
- ❖ To introduce medicinal herbs/shrubs into the grove

Phase 4 (4th Year)

- ❖ Introduction of Snail/mushroom and relevant NTFPs into grove
- ❖ Introduction of various species of animals (eg. Pangolin. Tortoise etc.) into the grove’s ecological system

Phase 5 (5th Year)

- ❖ Building a security post at the main entrance to the grove
- ❖ Development of narrow footpaths within the sacred grove to facilitate movement by tourists
- ❖ Final monitoring and evaluation of the development initiative.

LIKELY OUTPUTS

1. Sacred Grove expanded to over 40 acres (by conservative estimate) through peripheral/buffer establishment
2. Fencing/construction of footbridge effected
3. Rare/endangered tropical plant species introduced and protected
4. Medicinal plants introduced
5. Species of animals introduced
6. Security post constructed
7. Sacred Grove developed to tourist attraction destination
8. Local economy boosted directly from tourism and indirectly from multiplier effects

COLLABORATORS:

- i. Environmental Protection Agency
- ii. Forest Services Division
- iii. Tourist Board
- iv. Municipal Assembly
- v. Newmont Ghana Gold Limited
- vi. Wildlife Division
- vii. International Donors.