

HCVF assessment of Kwaie and Okumaning estates for GOPDC Ltd

ProForest conclusions: July 2010

SUMMARY - PAGES EXTRACTED BY SIAT

SUMMARY



ProForest
South Suite
Frewin Chambers
Frewin Court
Oxford OX1 3HZ
United Kingdom
telephone
+44(0)1865 243439
email
info@proforest.net
website
www.proforest.net

About ProForest

ProForest is an independent company working with natural resource management and specialising in practical approaches to sustainability.

Our work ranges from international policy development to the practical implementation of requirements on the ground, with a particular focus on turning policy into practice. Our extensive and up-to-date knowledge of the international context ensures that our work for individual companies and organisations is set within an appropriate framework. At the same time, we are able to bring a wealth of current practical experience to policy development processes and debates.

The ProForest team is international and multilingual and has a broad variety of backgrounds, ranging from industry to academia and NGOs. This allows us to work comfortably in many types of organisations, as well as in a range of cultures. We have in-house knowledge of more than 15 languages, including Mandarin, Hindi, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

ProForest was set up in 2000. Our expertise covers all aspects of the natural resources sector, from forestry and agricultural commodities to conservation, supply chain management and responsible investment.

SUMMARY

ProForest Ltd

South Suite, Frewin Chambers
Frewin Court, Oxford OX1 3HZ
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 1865 243439

F: +44 (0) 1865 244820

E: info@proforest.net

W: www.proforest.net

ProForest is registered in England and Wales,
company number 3893149

Executive Summary

General Background

The High Conservation Value (HCV) concept was developed in 1999 by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and has since been widely used in the context of FSC certification for sustainable forestry. To help facilitate the use of this concept, ProForest in 2001 developed a Global HCV Toolkit. This Toolkit has not only served as a useful guide for HCV assessment but has also enhanced interpretation of national HCV toolkits to make the concept user friendly at the national level. The concept has over the last decade gained global recognition resulting in its adoption by other forest certification schemes and increasing use outside of forest certification. It is currently being used in several areas such as land-use planning, investment and purchasing policies as well as for conservation advocacy. Appropriate use of the concept aids forest, land managers and large-scale agricultural commodities producers to improve on the social and environmental sustainability of their operations through the identification of the HCVs and the development and implementing of appropriate management systems to ensure maintenance or enhancement of the identified values.

Since its adoption, identification and management of HCVs has become an essential requirement of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certification standards. The RSPO certification for sustainable palm oil requires that all new oil palm plantations developed after November 2005 preclude conversion of areas needed to maintain or enhance HCVs. Ghana in 2005, begun a process of raising awareness and developing a national HCV toolkit through a multi-stakeholder consultation process. The national process culminated in a national interpretation document titled "An interpretation of global HCV toolkit for use in Ghana, May 2006. This document was used throughout in the identification of HCVs and for providing management recommendations for GOPDC. The assessors also used other tools and guidance developed by ProForest and the HCV Resource Network.

Background to GOPDC

The Ghana Oil Palm Company Ltd (GOPDC), a subsidiary company of the Siat group, holds oil palm plantation concessions at Kwae and Okumaning in the Kwaebibirem District in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Siat Ghana became the owner of the estate through the acquisition of erstwhile State Farm under the government of Ghana divestiture implementation programme. The company initially acquired 80% share of the estate in 1995 and later in 2009 acquired the remaining 20% to make Siat Ghana a 100% owner of GOPDC. The State Farm was established by the government of Ghana in 1975 after acquisition of the land under an Executive Instrument-30 (EI. 30). The original lease agreement for the Kwae land consisting of land belonging to Kwae, Asuom, Anweam, Minta, Mamang and Otumi stools (lease agreement dated

March 1976 taking effect from 1st April 1976 for a 50-year period). The GOPDC entered into lease agreement with the government of Ghana for the Okumaning concession on 15th December 2008 for a 50-year period also encompassing all that parcels of land belonging to Okumaning, Takorowasi and Kusi stools. However, the Okumaning agreement takes retrospective effect from 1st January 2000. Although these concessions were officially established in 1976 for Kwae concession and 2000 for Okumaning, there are still around 5,395 ha of unplanted land available for planting oil palm.

As a member of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, GOPDC has committed to achieving full compliance with the RSPO requirements for sustainability in all of its existing and future operations. Therefore, ProForest was asked by GOPDC to undertake an assessment of the likely presence of HCVs in the unplanted areas of the company's estates.

Biophysical environment

The estates lie within the wet equatorial climate region of Ghana characterised by bimodal high rainfall pattern with medium temperature and high humidity. The annual rainfall in the region ranges from 840.1 mm to 2121.2 mm with an average rainfall of 1380.0 mm. Temperature of the area generally ranges between 26 and 30 degrees Celsius. The topography is gently undulating with gentle slopes which are generally less than 10% with an altitude of 120m to 168m above sea level. Besides the gazetted forest reserves in the area, the estate is mainly a farmland with mosaic of cocoa, oil palm and citrus plantations interspersed with food crops such as maize, cassava and plantain. There are small pockets of fallow lands and degraded secondary forests. Besides, the gazetted secondary forest reserves including Nsuensa and Aiyola which are a few kilometres from the estates, there are no primary forests in the landscape.

The two estates encompass land belonging to seven landowning communities: Kwae, Asuom, Minta, Anweam and Mamang for Kwae estate and Okumaning, Takorowase and Kusi for the Okumaning estate.

The HCV assessment methodology

The overall objective of this assessment is to collect both primary and secondary data and to verify such data in the field in order to effectively identify HCVs and potential HCVs. Appropriate strategies are recommended for GOPDC to map manage and monitor the HCVs that exist in the unplanted areas of the two estates. The method used by the ProForest team was to compile relevant reports and scientific literature, carry out stakeholder consultations with government and NGO representatives and field visit to GOPDC operations. The assessment methodology and the findings in this report follow the recommendations of the Ghana HCVF Toolkit (GFTN, 2006) and HCV assessment guidelines produced by ProForest.

HCV Findings

In Ghana, inhabitants of landowning communities have traditional land use rights over their land with the exception of gazetted forest reserves or legally acquired areas of their land such as those areas acquired by GOPDC through the government of Ghana. Although the estates have been legally acquired, they are being use by the local farmer for farming purposes. The current mosaic of agricultural crops has resulted from government’s inability to develop the State Farm when the land was acquired in 1975. This in part has been due to the fact that majority of the inhabitants of these communities are farmers and have been farming on the land until the acquisition and continue to cultivate the unused parts of the land.

Despite the land being intensively and extensively cultivated by local farmers, some parts of it were identified to contain conservation values that are deemed to be of critical significance at the local level, making them HCVs. The HCVs identified are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of HCVs finding

HCV	Description	Present	Potential	Absent
HCV1.1	Protected areas			
HCV 1.2	Concentrations of threatened or endangered species			
HCV 2	Large landscape level forests			
HCV 3	Rare or threatened ecosystems			
HCV 4.1	Forests critical to water catchments			
HCV 4.2	Forests critical to erosion control			
HCV 4.3	Forests providing barriers to destructive fire			
HCV 4.4	Forests that play a critical role in climate regulation			
HCV 5	Forest areas fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities			
HCV 6	Forest areas critical to local communities traditional cultural identity			

The two concessions owned by the company have been established on agricultural lands that are owned by traditional authority representing different communities, known in Ghana as “*stool*”. While some areas have been planted since November 2005, it has always been done on agricultural land and not by converting natural vegetations. This situation of the two concessions within a landscape highly transformed by human action during the past decades in part explains why few HCVs mainly social HCVs were identified during this assessment.

The past and current intensive use of the land for agricultural purposes has meant that there are no areas left unfarmed to accommodate concentrations of rare,

threatened or endangered species (biological HCVs). However, this was not the case with social HCVs.

At a country level, there is no contiguous block of forests that can be considered as HCV 2 according to the Ghana HCV Toolkit.

Although communities such as Asuom depend on streams and rivers as sources of water for household use, Rivers Subinsa and Bobri were identified as critical water sources for Takorowase and Kwae respectively and have therefore been classified as HCV 4.1. No areas were identified as being of high importance for erosion control, fire prevention or climate mitigation.

Consultations with all the relevant communities in GOPDC concessions area did not identify communities' dependency on Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) or other kind of services provided in the concessions besides those from the rivers and streams. It was also noted during the consultations that the compensation process for the inhabitants and farmers on the concession areas to be cleared for new planting is following a Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process with communities generally giving their consent except for Okaikrom and Atobriso who are migrant communities. The FPIC is crucial under this situation and GOPDC should ensure that FPIC are obtained from each community prior to conversion of that community's land into oil palm plantation. Additionally, the compensation process is being implemented by state institution, the Lands Valuation Board.

It was identified that local communities in GOPDC concessions have high traditional and cultural links to the land. A number of cultural and spiritual sites including Bunukesieso on Aboabo River at Aboabo and Apaam shrine for Kwae were identified. Some rivers are also sacred for communities such as Rivers Bobri and Abena and for Kwae; and River Aboabo for the Aboabo community. Finally, other value of importance for communities can be "taboo days", and ancient burial grounds.

Maps of the HCV areas are included in the main report. These include:

- Maps of the river and streams identified to provide basic needs for local communities established in GOPDC neighbouring;
- Maps of the culturally significant areas for local people such as "sacred grove", cemetery and areas of high importance to perform traditional rituals.

Although GOPDC has strived to ensure that pockets of vegetation are left and maintained within the oil palm plantation to serve as refugia, the assessment team identified some non-compliance with the company's internal procedures to ensure adequate conformity with environmental requirements. This includes instances where the requirements for riparian buffer zones had not been met. The assessment team also observed obstruction of flow of River Apesika during land preparation. Additionally, evidence gathered from the field visitation and from the GOPDC environmental management reports and also from Kwae community suggests that River Bobri which is a source of drinking water for the people of Kwae has been polluted by GOPDC through discharge of effluent from the mill. Concrete steps needs to be taken by the company to modify operational systems and to prevent such

occurrences in the future. Further recommendations are made in this report for mapping, management and monitoring of the HCVs identified. The recommendations include:

Conclusions

As the landscape has been heavily modified by a long history of human occupation and farming, there are not many biological features of major importance for conservation. However, it is important that GOPDC ensures that its activities in the concession are executed in a manner that maintains ecological health and quality of rivers and streams that are the main sources of water and act as spiritual sites for the communities within and fringing the concession. In this regard, a strict adherence to the Ghana buffer zone policy of 2008 is highly recommended. Water quality management will need to be fully integrated with all aspects of plantation operations in the field, including road building, land clearing and preparation, terracing and buffer zone protection for rivers and streams. A particular attention will have to be paid to the Kwaie community case and the damages done to the Bobri stream.

With regards to HCV 5, discussions with local communities suggested that there is very low dependency on the landscape for protein through hunting. Local communities claimed this has resulted from previous conversion of the land into farms. This notwithstanding, the wildlife monitoring reports of the GOPDC BDPs indicates that wildlife population in the BDPs is increasing. In order to ensure that these BDPs acts as “safe havens” for wildlife species in the area, GOPDC needs to collaborate with the local communities to ensure that hunting is prohibited in these BDPs.

Management of HCV 6 areas will require a pro-active, genuine commitment to community engagement to jointly delineate and protect from conversion all areas identified as social HCVs. These areas are of spiritual and cultural importance to the local communities. Their protection is crucial for local cultural identity.