

SCI-SLM Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

Mission to Ghana (24–27 July 2011)

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1. Introduction

This BTO report summarises the main issues arising during the short mission to Ghana by Sabina Di Prima (SDP) of the TAG-team. It is a briefer report than usual due to time constraints.

SDP is grateful to the SCI-SLM Ghana team, in particular Conrad Weobong, Margaret Akuriba and Prof Saa Dittoh for the remarkably efficient organisation of this mission. Despite the limited time available, it was possible to cover a very tight programme including a visit to two of the selected community initiatives (CIs). The visit was concluded with a wrap up meeting with the entire team to discuss progress and plans.

SDP flew to neighbouring Burkina Faso under the auspices of a different programme, namely IFAD filming project “Sustainable Land Management Technologies for Climate Change Adaptation in Africa”. Therefore, only part of the cost of the road trip to Ghana and the expenses in situ were covered through the SCI-SLM TAG budget.

2. Objectives

The aims of this mission were:

- To visit two of the four selected communities: Kandiga in Kassena/ Nankana district (Upper East Region) and Moatani in West Mamprusi district (Northern Region);
- To review the baseline, namely the characterisation forms, for the four selected CIs;
- To discuss progress, challenges and expectations;
- To plan in preparation for the upcoming Annual Regional Steering Committee in Uganda (23–28 October).

3. Activities

Community visits

Visits were made by Conrad Weobong, Margaret Akuriba and SDP to two communities: Kandiga and Moatani – both active in composting and non-burning of crop residues.

The visit at *Kandiga* was facilitated by Thomas Kambonga (District Agricultural Officer) and Gregory Awekiya (extension agent). At Kandiga there were complaints regarding the slow rate of decomposition of the crop residues due to the lack of rain. After extensive discussion, it turned

out that some women are already experimenting, at individual level, to overcome the challenge of slow decomposition. One of them mentioned to sprinkle salt to accelerate decomposition but salt is an external input that has to be bought at the market. Other people mentioned that they have recently decided to cover their compost heaps with soil and let the ants do part of the work for them. According to the TAG, the issue of decomposition should be further investigated and solutions could be developed as a result of a joint experimentation (*cum* monitoring) with the support of the SCI-SLM project.

One of the UDS students carried out soil sampling and analysis of the carbon stock at Kandiga under the supervision of the SCI-SLM Ghana team. Results are already available and publishable.

There was common agreement among the community members on the main inputs required for the compost: millet stalks, ashes, rice husks, cow dung, soil, household organic waste and water. The community observed that the crops that perform best (higher productivity) under composting are groundnuts and maize.

When visiting the field of one of the community members, Mrs Adia-Inga Agamikre, it was observed that her farm would benefit from road runoff harvesting. In fact, the field is strategically located in the proximity of a dirt road. Others could follow her example.

The visit to the women's group at **Moatani** was facilitated by David Agongo of Zagsilari. The most relevant change since the last TAG visit is the relocation of the village to a new site about 1-1.5 km from the original one. The relocation occurred in 2011 as a result of a number of deaths among the community members. In addition to the fields around the new settlement, the Moatani community continues cultivating the original fields. While the new site has the advantage of readily available water through well(s), the disadvantage is the transport of the compost material to the original fields. The problem could be solved by means of a donkey cart at a minimum cost (about 300-400 GH¢ for the cart and 200 GH¢ for the donkey). After extensive discussion, it turned out that Zagsilari had provided the Moatani community with two donkeys and two carts. Unfortunately, the donkeys died after the community had fully paid the price back to Zagsilari. Another donkey was bought with the savings of the women's group but passed away as well. Given the number of deaths occurred in the village the TAG suggested to check the water quality at the original site - water pollution may be the cause of the deaths.

There was common agreement among the community members on the main inputs required for the compost: cereals stalks, soya bean leaves, groundnut leaves, manure, household organic waste, ashes and water. They also provided details of the compost layers: 1. use water to wet the compost pit; 2. add rough material (bigger cereals stalks); 3. manure; 4. water; 5. soft material (soya bean leaves, groundnut leaves, household organic waste); 6. water; 7. ashes; 8. manure; 9. water.

The Moatani community learned the composting technique from the neighbouring Boamasa women's group. However, they further adapted and improved the technique. The main differences

relate to the compost application and the typology of composting pits. While the Boamasa apply compost not fully degraded, the Moatani apply only mature compost with better results in term of productivity: 12 bags (100 kg each) of maize per 1 ha with compost application vs 2 bags (100 kg each) of maize per 1 ha in the control. The Moatani community also adapted the structure of the compost pits to the soil type in their compounds. They built underground pits in the new site where soil is less compacted and compost pits with above ground shallow walls in the original site.

In 2009, some men of the Nabulugu village came to Moatani to learn their composting techniques. However, up to now, at Nabulugu composting is done at individual and not at community level.

Unfortunately, during the visit to the original Moatani site it was noted that the composting pits were in disrepair. It became evident that the transport of resources/ materials (compost, manure, water, etc) to and from the original site and the new site represents a real bottle neck that could undermine the continuation and spreading of the Moatani initiative. The TAG agreed with the idea of the SCI-SLM Ghana team to support the Moatani women's group in overcoming the bottleneck. The support should be granted also on the basis of the effort already made by the women's group to address the problem by themselves and with their own resources.

Finally, during the TAG visit it was uncovered that at Moatani there are actually two women's groups, one for each section/ clan of the village, under the same chief. The two women's groups are virtually the same in terms of organisation and activities carried out. The two groups come together for meetings and trainings.

The SCI-SLM Ghana team will set up an exchange visit between the two communities active in composting and non-burning of crop residues before the end of September. The idea of the exchange visit was enthusiastically received in both communities.

Meeting with SCI-SLM Ghana team

SDP met with Prof Saa Dittoh, Margaret Akuriba and Conrad Weobong to review the baseline for the four selected CIs, discuss progress, challenges and expectations and plan in preparation for the upcoming Annual Regional Steering Committee in Uganda. The following points were discussed and agreed:

- The baseline, namely the characterisation forms, for the four selected CIs should be completed in August. The TAG noticed that the team had collected far more relevant information than those actually included in the characterisation forms submitted in the last progress report to CEAD. The TAG stressed again the importance of the TEES and SRI test as well as the area under SLM in the CIs;
- The exchange visit between the two communities (Kandiga and Moatani) active in composting and non-burning of crop residues will take place before the end of September;
- In September, the team will organise a partnership training/ stakeholder meeting and link it also with a National Steering Committee meeting. It should be noted that the above-

mentioned activities as well as the exchange visit had been postponed for lack of funds – the instalment for 2011 is yet to be received;

- The SCI-SLM Ghana team will facilitate/ set up the visit to Uganda by one representative of the CIs as part of the South to South exchange promoted by SCI-SLM. The visit will coincide with the dates of the Regional Steering Committee meeting (23–28 October);
- In preparation for the third Regional Steering Committee meeting, the Ghana team will prepare a presentation on the carbon stock study they have conducted. They will also present their reflections on the refinement of the SCI-SLM methodology (Field Activities and Programme Development Processes) based upon their experience;
- The SCI-SLM Ghana team will actively seek opportunities to publish the results of their studies on the CIs together with the other interested SCI-SLM partners.

Finally, the Ghana team acknowledged the effort of the CEAD coordination unit over the last two years. However, given the demands of a challenging programme like SCI-SLM, they made some suggestions for further improvement:

- Regional reporting in addition to individual national reporting to provide the overview of achievements (in terms of South to South exchange, cross-fertilisation of principles and ideas, methodology) for the project as a whole – to be circulated to the SCI-SLM partners and beyond through website, etc;
- In addition to the general e-mails to all the SCI-SLM partners, there is need for direct guidance to the individual country programmes through 1) visit to the country and 2) tailored e-mails to address specific issues that require guidance at country level. In this respect, CEAD should take more initiative and promote more interaction;
- South to South exchange is still marginal and too limited to the annual Regional Steering Committee (RSC) meeting. How can SCI-SLM achieve this ambitious goal?
- Regular communication on the transfer of funding to help planning at country level. It is unfortunate when the programme cannot go at full speed for lack of funds;
- The website requires additional work to become a valuable means of communication. It should be interesting, informative and visually attractive (catchy). In this respect, the major effort is required from CEAD who should also set the example with a dynamic and update webpage for South Africa. The collaboration of all the SCI-SLM partners in providing timely and adequate (quality and quantity) material is also a pre-requisite;
- As for internal communication, it is always a good practice to change the title of the e-mail if the subject/ content has changed.

The TAG fully supports these suggestions for further improvement.

4. Conclusion

This was a very intensive and productive mission, combining visits to two communities and detailed discussions with the national team. As commented by the SCI-SLM Ghana team, this mission was very timely and extremely useful especially for the review of the baseline/ characterisation forms.