

2011: Celebrating Forests

Home to about 80% of world's biodiversity and 300 million people, forests provide for the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people, almost a quarter of humanity.

Forest conservation and sustainable management are not just about vegetation conservation; they have deeper implications for and direct links with human health,



poverty reduction, climate regulation, food resources and wildlife conservation.

In order to raise awareness on the vital role of forests, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests.

According to Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director General of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), "the air we breathe, the food, water and medicines we need to survive, the variety of life on earth, the climate that shapes our present and future—they all depend on forests. 2011 must be the year when the world recognizes the vital importance of healthy forests to life on earth – for all

people and biodiversity."

Microsfere's activities fall within the context of the International Year of Forests: striving for the improvement of the livelihoods of fringe communities in Kakum National Park and Amansuri Wetland, Microsfere aims at the conservation of the vital forest resources found in those two areas: Kakum is a relic of the significantly degraded evergreen tropical rainforest of the West Coast of Africa, while in Amansuri 70% of the habitat mosaic (lagoon, grassland, forests and rivers) consists of a swamp forest, the most extensive one in Ghana remaining intact.

Implementing capacity-building training for project participants

"How interesting to know that bees work all year-round to give me money, with a one-time investment! That's it; no need for much land, weeding or chemicals! And they can also help pollinate crops. I can't wait to start keeping them! I am happy I made time for this training.» Stephen Appiah, participant in Kakum.

Following a rigorous Training Needs Assessment (TNA) conducted in June and July 2010, Microsfere implemented between November 2010 and January 2011 an intensive training programme targeting its 479 beneficiaries.

The aim of this training, implemented with the support of CRAN (a microfinance NGO striving to reduce poverty and its effects among disadvantaged groups and communities in rural Ghana), was to increase the capacity-building of our participants in two areas: business and technical skills.

The **business training** was addressed to all 479 beneficiaries in both project sites, though only 302 finally participated. It consisted of the following 10 modules: 1) Entrepreneurship & business plan development; 2) Effective communication; 3) Effective time & resources management; 4) Savings & increasing business profit; 5) Proper record keeping; 6) Good customer care & marketing skills; 7) Business diversification & investment opportunities; 8) Cost-benefit analysis; 9) Difference between revenue & profit; and 10) Prudent/effective credit management.

The **technical training** was addressed

to the 258 participants who had indicated during the TNA an interest in applying improved techniques or starting new micro-enterprises. The technical topics taught were: 1) Small ruminants rearing; 2) Pig rearing; 3) Improved cocoa farming techniques; 4) "chorkor" smoker for fish; 5) Agroforestry; 6) Bee-keeping; 7) Grasscutter rearing; and 8) Soap making.

Six of the eight technical topics taught (cocoa farming techniques, "chorkor" smoker, agroforestry, bee-keeping, grasscutter rearing and soap making) are "biodiversity-compatible activities" as they either relieve pressure on natural resources or they introduce alternative livelihoods that have no impact on protected resources.

In addition, Microsfere provided training to the loan officers of the two Microfinance Institutions that handle the day-to-day microfinance operations of the Microsfere project. The aim of this training was to increase the loan officers' capacity-building in financial literacy and microfinance principles' training for the project participants in a regular and long-term basis.

This training programme brings Microsfere one step closer to its objectives of improving livelihoods by promoting biodiversity-compatible activities and ultimately protecting natural resources & biodiversity.



Beneficiary Interview: Agnes, fishmonger



Agnes, 31, lives in the village of Kengen in the Amansuri Wetland. Both she and her husband are involved in the fish smoking business: she prepares the smoked fish and

her husband is selling it.

In which solidarity group do you belong? I am a member of the "Ko Eyele" group which has ten members; all of us are female and in the fishmongering business.

In how many loan cycles have you participated? Our group is currently in its 3rd loan cycle. I personally received 100 GHC (50 €) in the 1st cycle, 250 GHC (125 €) in the 2nd and 350 GHC (175 €) in the third. In all cycles I used the loans to buy fresh fish and smoke it; I have managed to buy fish at larger quantities and at more interesting prices.

Why did you choose this economic activity? Because Kengen is by the sea and fishing and fishmongering are thriving businesses here.

What benefits did you derive from the business training provided by Microsfere? I can now calculate my profits, and also make decisions to divide my profits as follows: 40% for savings, 40% addition to my capital, and only 20% for spending.