

Microsfere participates to a capacity building workshop for Protected Areas

Microsfere was one of the two NGOs invited to participate to a workshop organised by the Wildlife Division held from 11 to 14 April 2011 in Accra, along with a number of Wildlife Division Protected Area Managers and Regional Managers.

As part of a follow-up on Protected Area Management Effectiveness workshop organised in 2010 by the IUCN sub-regional office in Burkina Faso, the Wildlife Division received support in the process towards the review of Management Plans

for 7 Protected Areas in Ghana, including the Kakum National Park, which is one of the two sites where Microsfere operates.

The aim of the workshop was to introduce practitioners to the processes involved in the development of management plans for Protected Areas (PAs), discuss PA governance, and identify stakeholders in PA management.

The seminar involved presentations from the various PA managers highlighting the current conditions in which they were operating, and group discussions. The topics discussed comprised the governance of PAs, stakeholder analysis, steps for drafting a management plan,

monitoring and evaluation and business planning. At the end of the workshop, each PA developed a timeframe to review its existing management plan, and it was agreed that by the end of August 2011 each PA would be ready with a draft revised management plan.

Microsfere was also invited to participate to the process for the revision of the Kakum National Park management plan; this is very welcome, as it implies that the organisation is being recognised as a key stakeholder in the area, and its rural development and biodiversity conservation efforts are being acknowledged by the competent public authorities of Ghana.

A promising micro-entrepreneurship: soap-production from cocoa

In the Kakum Conservation Area where cocoa production is one of the major activities, cocoa by-products are abundant and currently unused. Thanks to the technical training provided by Microsfere in collaboration with CRAN in the beginning of the year, a new potential opens up for project participants interested in diversifying their economic activities: the production of soft soap, locally called "alata samina."

Alata samina is produced using two cocoa by-products: cocoa butter from discarded cocoa beans and potash salt from cocoa pod husks. These two products in addition to palm Kernel oil are the basic ingredients for the production of alata samina, for which there is great demand for household use.

The production is relatively easy: first the palm oil and the cocoa butter are boiled together, and then potash salt derived from the cocoa pods is added to the boiling oils and continuously stirred and beaten. This process creates a foamy mass at the top, which is scooped and then spread and sun dried. Once the soft soap has cooled down, it can be packaged.

Start-up costs for setting up an alata samina production unit amount to about 560 GHC (about 280 €), as one needs to invest in material such as boiling pot, bucket, measuring scale, metal barrel and construction material for the creation of a shed. If however one already has a shed, the

start-up costs are much lower (around 280 GHC – 140€).

The advantage of this product is that its production is relatively easy with few risks, it is not perishable, and there is a great demand for it both in local and regional markets. Furthermore it is an activity that requires a rather short preparation time (just three weeks between the acquisition of the material and the sale of the soap).

A significant number of project participants (mainly women) showed a strong interest for this new activity. A total of 78 people participated to the alata samina training provided by Microsfere and CRAN, and many of them started immediately the production of the soap. About 16 participants requested Microsfere's support in the form of loan in order to start up.



Photo: CRAN

What is an Important Bird Area?



Microsfere's projects are taking place in Kakum National Park (Central Region) and in the Amanzuri

Wetland (Western Region), both of which are Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The identification of IBAs is a global initiative of Birdlife International, which stems from the need to prioritize conservation objectives and actions aiming at birds and their habitats throughout the world. According to the Birdlife website "it is impossible, both practically and financially, to develop separate projects to conserve all species at risk in the world, one by one. Thus the identification of particular sites, which are important for many species together, is a key component of BirdLife's priority setting."

Kakum National Park and the adjacent Assin Attandanso Reserve (together called "Kakum Conservation Area") are among the best studied areas in Ghana and more than 266 bird species have been recorded there. In the Amanzuri wetland a total of 105 bird species have been recorded. But why is it so important to focus on birds? Birds have been shown to be very effective biodiversity indicators, providing clear and reliable information on the status of ecosystems and other animal species.

Photo: Ravinder Sehgal