

Assessing the training needs of our project participants

Implementing a training component for the participants is a major objective for 2010, in order to better assist them to improve their efficiency and skills relevant to their economic activities.

In June and July 2010 Microsfere in collaboration with CRAN (a microfinance NGO striving to reduce poverty and its effects among disadvantaged groups and communities in rural Ghana) undertook



a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) in order to identify the training needs of the 479 participants of the Microsfere project in both the Kakum Conservation Area and the Amansuri Wetland in the areas of a) microcredit training, b) business training & financial literacy and c) technical training.

The second component of the TNA was to examine participants' willingness to enter into new activities and to receive training on them, notably activities with high added value that are compatible with biodiversity conservation (e.g. grasscutter rearing, mushroom cultivation, aquaculture, bee keeping, snail rearing, soap making, etc.).

The final component was to assess the training needs of the loan officers of the two microfinance institutions that Microsfere is collaborating with, so that the loan officers can later on provide regular training to the project participants.

While assessing the above, the key parameters taken into account where the

literacy level of the project participants, the cultural relevance of the methods used and of the recommendations proposed, the fact that training must be provided within the communities, and the fact that Microsfere's objective is to improve participants' livelihoods while conserving the natural resources and biodiversity of the protected areas.

The TNA involved individual interviews with a sample of participants and Focus Group Discussions in each community. The TNA identified a long list of training topics, but training needs had to be prioritised taking into account the demand levels of the participants and the financial capabilities of Microsfere.

With the final TNA submitted this September, Microsfere should be ready for the implementation of the training programme in November and December 2010.

Coexistence between forest elephants and farmers



With an estimated population of at least 206 animals and an estimated increase of about 10% since the year 2000, forest elephants

are the largest mammals of Kakum National Park.

Despite significant decreases in elephant poaching in the last couple of decades, co-existence between elephants and villagers around the park is not always harmonious. Elephants often raid cropland around the park in search of food, thus causing significant damage to people's properties. The Wildlife Division has been promoting simple yet efficient measures, such as pepper fences (ropes smeared with a mixture of hot pepper and oil) that function as deterrents to elephants.

The arrival of the Microsfere project has been very welcome by the villagers who had been complaining previously that the creation of the National Park had only imposed restrictions on them without providing any direct benefits for the people.

Interview with Daniel Ewur, Manager of the Kakum National Park

It has now been 3 years since Microsfere started its vital collaboration with the Wildlife Division (of the Forestry Commission) in order to improve the livelihoods of people in six communities around the Kakum National Park and to protect the natural resources.

We took the opportunity to ask Daniel Ewur, the Kakum National Park Manager, his views about the project.

What has the Microsfere project brought to the villagers? The Kakum people are excluded from the classical banking system because they do not have any collateral. Microsfere has given them the opportunity and tools to increase their incomes in order to better support their families.

What has been the impact on the natural resources? Though it is still early to tell, it is important to note that Microsfere and the Wildlife Division always go to the field visits together in order to ensure that people have understood that the Microsfere project is here because of the need to protect the National Park and its resources. Furthermore, the Microsfere participants, most of which have embraced the need to protect the park, put pressure on people conducting or intending

to conduct illegal activities, such as poaching or logging. Also, some people who were previously engaged in illegal activities have now managed, thanks to the Microsfere project, to focus on other types of activities.

How would you describe the collaboration so far? I consider that it has been excellent, in terms of information exchange and transparency on behalf of Microsfere.

How do you see the future of the project? Many communities have been approaching us and expressing their wish to participate to the Microsfere project. So ideally, I would like to see the project expanding in additional communities all around the park. Currently the 6 communities we are targeting are on the western and northern part. Another desire I have for the project is for it to introduce additional products, such as new income-generating activities – as far as I know this



is going to start as of next year. In the long term it would be very much appreciated if the project could be exported to other protected areas, such as Bia National Park.