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An Overview of Biodiversity Conservation in Ghana: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to which Ghana became a signatory in 1992, and other Multilateral International Environmental Agreements enjoin signatory Parties to develop strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. In this regard, there has been a Biodiversity Country Study for Ghana, a National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) and a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Both *in situ* (use of both traditional and scientific methods - sacred groves and protected areas), and *ex situ* (gene banks, zoological and botanical gardens) approaches have been used in biodiversity conservation in Ghana. The effectiveness of the former has, however, diminished in recent times because of rapid population growth, urbanization, human migration and resettlement, influence of western technology, foreign religions and beliefs, human encroachment, deforestation, poaching, etc. Ghana's environmental conservation initiatives hold quite promising prospects, especially with the current collaboration between local traditional authorities, NGOs, government institutions, academic and research institutions, and the realization that more flexible multidisciplinary and holistic approaches to biodiversity conservation are more likely to yield better results. The main objective of biodiversity conservation is to ensure that the use of biological resources does not diminish the variety of genes and species, or destroy important habitats and ecosystems worldwide. The major problem facing biodiversity conservation in Ghana today is the rapid population growth and its resultant urbanization, over-exploitation of forests, need for more agricultural land, etc. The current situation needs a serious appraisal of national population programmes, especially in the areas of implementation and censusing, as well as initiation of environmental awareness campaigns involving stakeholders like environmental NGOs, governmental organizations, District Assemblies, traditional authorities, and the mass media. Poverty alleviation programmes targeted especially at rural communities are also steps in the right direction.

Introduction

Throughout the world, there has been increasing interest in environmental issues, especially the current deteriorating state of the global and local environment, largely as a result of undesirable human activities. The current increased rate of biodiversity loss is of special and immediate concern, because of its negative implications for human survival on earth. The loss of each species comes with the loss of potential economic benefits (e.g. natural products that increase world food supply and the medicines humans depend on), as well as a

loss of ecosystem balance.

Biodiversity is of both direct (source of food, medicines, construction materials, raw material for industry, recreation, etc.) and indirect (ecological research, education, etc.) benefit to human populations, hence the need to ensure its conservation for posterity. The primary objective of biodiversity conservation is to ensure that biological resources are used in ways that do not diminish the variety of genes and species, or destroy important habitats and ecosystems. Biodiversity conservation can be undertaken *in situ* (maintenance, protection, and