

Internship Report – James Awuye

Name of Employer: Tropenbos International Ghana

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The purpose of this internship is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Master of Science in Transition Management by the Justus-Liebig -University of Giessen, Germany.

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Again, I cannot forget the immense contribution of World University Services, especially Miss Julia Gronemeier for purchasing my flight ticket for this internship. I say thank you and may the good Lord reward you all abundantly.

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1.0 Introduction

This short report contains the description and activities of the three months internship done as a mandatory component for the award of MSc. in Transition Management. The internship was undertaken with Tropenbos International Ghana from June to August, 2015. As the adage goes” when the last tree dies, the last man dies”. The importance of the forest and for that matter trees cannot be under estimated. Despite the benefits derived from the forests, most forests especially in developing countries are being over exploited mostly through illegal means. I have always been interested in issues concerning the environment since my childhood days and that influenced my choice of studies right from the senior secondary level. Based on the desire to contribute to the eradication of depletion of the forest cover, I found a strong linkage with the operations of Tropenbos International Ghana and opted to work with them and improve my knowledge towards achieving that desire. Prior to the commencement of the internship, I requested to be part of the team undertaking the project; “Supporting Intermediaries with Information and Guidance to Comply with the Timber Legality Assurance System and Engage in Advocacy on the Domestic Market Reform”. As a result, I set up some personal objectives to achieve during my stay with them. These include;

- To understand the functioning and working conditions of Non-Governmental Organizations
- To experience working in a professional research environment
- To apply my acquired knowledge from the classroom
- To measure my strength and weaknesses in the area of research
- To improve on the organization of research project (planning, preparations, permissions, etc.)
- To build network

The report of the internship includes all programmes and activities I participated in achieving all or part of my stated objectives. It will also include a description and activities of the organization, conclusion and recommendation sections.

2.0 The Organization

Tropenbos International (TBI) is a Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organization established in 1986 as a Dutch response to the growing concerns about the depletion and deterioration of tropical rain forests globally. In view of this Tropenbos International whose motto is “making knowledge work for forests and people” streamlined its main activities on four key global issues for improving forest management for people, conservation and sustainable development. These issues are (1) productive landscapes, (2) sustainable timber trade, (3) local governance and community management of forests and (4) innovative financing mechanisms. TBI has created a

forum for discussing issues concerning forest and development of mutual benefits to developing countries and the Netherlands. For improving knowledge and institutional capacity in order to encourage sustainable management of tropical forest resources, TBI extended its operations to a number of developing/tropical countries known as “country programs”. Country programs are a key component of TBI’s approach. They form the foundation for integrated programs of collaborative research, capacity building and dialogue projects. In each country program, TBI creates networks between researchers, policy makers and practitioners, and between national and international partners. Each program is essential for both national and international agenda and also relevant for comparative analysis of forestry sector issues across a range of situations.

The operations of the organizations are decentralized to deal with specific problems pertaining to the country of jurisdiction in line with the broader objectives of the parent organization. In TBI’s vision, tropical forests have critical contributions to make in providing the range of goods and services required by local communities and the people of the world which includes poverty alleviation, provision of ecosystem services and fostering sustainable economic development. TBI engages in partnerships at multiple levels. Within its country programs, partnerships with national forest sector organizations help TBI to develop its research and capacity building agenda and communicate the message while research partners generate relevant information.

Functions

For partners and stakeholders in partner countries, the Netherlands, the European Union and internationally, TBI fulfil a variety of functions including;

- ❖ Intermediary and knowledge broker
- ❖ Needs-oriented developer of knowledge and capacity
- ❖ Platform for and facilitator of evidence-based multi-stakeholder dialogue
- ❖ Agenda setting and advice
- ❖ Fostering critical and reflective thinking
- ❖ Networking and linkage for forest actors

In view of this, the Ghana chapter of TBI aims at bridging the gap between forest policy, management and science; providing a forum for discussing forest issues; and carrying out relevant research and training. The objective of the program is that “forestry actors in Ghana deploy sound and adequate information for poverty reduction policies that improve forest-dependent livelihoods and increase forest cover and services in rural areas”. The organization focuses on the broad theme of forest dependent livelihoods in the High Forest Zone of Ghana, with special emphasis on governance for sustainable forest-related livelihoods.

3.0 Internship Activities

The Project: “Supporting Intermediaries with Information and Guidance to Comply with the Timber Legality Assurance System and Engage in Advocacy on the Domestic Market Reform”.

In a bid to curb illegal logging and trade in illegally sourced timber products, the EU instituted the Forest, Law, Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan. This is to regulate the importation of timber and related products to the EU States from timber exporting countries. Ghana is a major exporter of wood products and exports about 60% of her products to the EU market. This subsequently led to the entering of a bilateral Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between the EU and Ghana in 2009 to ensure trading in only legal timber products both in the domestic and the international markets. The key component of the VPA is the implementation of a Legality Assurance System (LAS). The LAS is expected to monitor, control and verify the management and use of Ghana’s forest resources to ensure that only legal timber products are produced, sold and/ or exported from Ghana (*Gyimah, 2012*). According to the National Forestry Forum-Ghana, about 80% of logging is sourced illegally. It is also estimated that 97,000 people’s livelihoods are dependent on chainsaw milling activities which provides approximately 84% of the lumber in the domestic market (Bas et’al, 2010).

In order to ensure compliance with the tenets of the VPA, TBI Ghana began this project in 2013 to educate Small and Medium Forest Enterprises especially in the domestic timber industry and Civil Society Organizations on the Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS) compliance. Participants at the various sensitization workshops organized nationwide were mainly members of the various associations within the timber industry. These include Domestic Lumber Traders Association; Ghana Timber Association (GTA), Ghana Timber Millers Organization (GTMO), Furniture and Woodworkers Association of Ghana (FAWAG), Woodworkers Association of Ghana (WAG), Ghana Carpenters Association, Artisanal Millers Groups (ATM), as well as a few people from Civil Society Organizations.

Basically, my internship was exclusively focused on the TLAS project. The project is being undertaken nationwide and is funded largely by the European Union. The approach to achieve the set objectives for this project is through education about the VPA particularly to the SMFES whose main source of livelihood is dependent on the forest resources and supply wood/ timber mainly to the domestic market. In order to achieve accurate results and disseminating information easier and faster, the country is divided into two zones, namely the Northern Zone comprising Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Northern, Upper East and West Regions and the Southern Zone made up of Greater Accra, Central, Eastern, Western and Volta Regions of Ghana. TBI has also adopted the trainer of trainers’ strategy whereby some members of the various groups or associations are trained (known as Peer Guidance Team (PGT’s)) for onward training of their members to transfer the information to the larger society. These PGT’s receive both technical and financial support from TBI Ghana for their activities. I participated in the workshops that

were organized to educate a section of the SMFEs in some parts of the country due to the large target area. I took part in most educational campaigns held in the Northern Zone specifically in Tamale, Yendi, Bolgatanga, Wa as well as distribution of training manuals to the PGTs for similar workshops in Dormaa Ahenkro and Techiman. I participated in another PGT-led training programme held in Takoradi in the Southern Zone. As part of the routine programme of the organization, regular seminars are organized and I had the opportunity to attend a seminar on stakeholder analysis organized by TBI Ghana. I also participated in the launching of the training/ educational manual for the SMFEs on sourcing wood legally and TLAS compliance. Since all the workshops organized for these stakeholders were on the same theme which was replicated in other regions, it is imperative therefore to explain one. In all the sensitizations workshops organized, there were three presentations each covering background to the VPA, legal sourcing of wood and the LAS. Participants were taught about the FLEGT/VPA which has been elaborated above and the long term benefits and effect on the economy as well as the environment. These include sustainable management of our forest resources and increasing our exports drive to earn more foreign exchange by adopting the right approach to harvest timber. Through the VPA, illegally sourced timber cannot enter the EU market and even if the laws are strictly enforced now in the domestic market as well.

Again, on legal sourcing of wood, participants were made to understand that trees will definitely be harvested for various purposes including their businesses but the right procedure to acquire the harvesting right is of key concern. The laws of Ghana allow three types of felling permits which are Timber Utilization Contract (TUC), Salvage Permit and Timber Utilization Permit (TUP) and participants should apply for the appropriate permit in consonance with the law to keep them in business. It was emphasized that the TUP is only for community activities and not for commercial purposes. Depending on the intent and conditions that the stakeholders find, permission could be granted under one or more of the felling permits mentioned. For instance, salvage permit can be granted when there is the need to clear trees for developmental projects such as constructing road networks, human settlements, building schools; hospitals etc. are to take place. In this case, the stakeholders can apply for the permit to harvest those affected trees.

TLAS is an essential component in implementing the VPA and participants were educated on that. The implementation of the TLAS is adhering to the legal requirements agreed in the VPA. Ghana as a country has her own laws concerning timber. For example The Timber Resources Regulation, 2012 (L.I. 2184) makes it mandatory to adhere to the TLAS. Implementing the TLAS means, certain laydown procedures must be strictly followed to produce legal timber for the market. The VPA seeks to assist the country to enforce these laws. The key elements of the TLAS include Wood Tracking System, Verification of Compliance, and Independent Audit of the LAS and the issuance of FLEGT License (i.e where product is meant for the EU market). Participants were given the chance to air their concerns, suggestions and ask further questions for clarity. Throughout my encounter with the participants at the various workshops, one initial perception that kept running through was that the VPA is an imposition on the Government of

Ghana by the EU to deprive her citizens of their livelihoods. It is an undeniable fact that most of them have lived on this “illegal business” for more than decades and trying to regulate their operations now is like a bitter pill to swallow. Fortunately, such erroneous impressions were debunked by the PGT and the TBI Ghana project team in a matured way. Some of the participants agreed that the VPA is a nice idea to promote sustainable forest management but had issues with alternative sources of livelihood since according to them if the laws are implemented to the latter, majority of them will be jobless unless the Government finds alternative sources of livelihoods for them and reduces the bureaucracy in the granting of the felling permits. In ensuring compliance with the FLEGT/VPA, I believe these concerns by the stakeholders should be given the needed attention to achieve the set objectives.

4.0 Conclusion

Working as an intern with TBI Ghana was really an eye opener since it was the first time of working outside the teaching field. Even though educating people is not new to me, educating people who are not obliged to accept your information which goes contrary to their expectations is challenging. It offered me the opportunity to understand and study the operations of a viable NGO like TBI. Though not all the personal objectives set for myself were fully met, I take consolation from the fact that this internship helped me to assess my strengths and weaknesses and to work more on my weakness and improve upon my strengths. At least I can confidently boast of knowledge gained on FLEGT/VPA through my association with TBI Ghana which I had no idea previously.

4.1 Recommendation

Considering my personal experience both on and off the field gives me the desire to commend TBI Ghana for the good work done. As prevalent in most non- governmental organizations, TBI Ghana also relies on donor support for its operations and would therefore recommend them to other benevolent organizations, institutions and private companies to support them financially to continue to research and educate people about the need for sustainable management of our environment. Finally, I am in total support for the trainer of trainers strategy included in their methodology in disseminating information to the SMFEs but I would like to humbly appeal to the management to consider these observations to improve on their educational campaign now and in the future.

The PGT who organizes workshops for their members on behalf of TBI should be mindful of their time and preparations in organizing workshops. This helps to curb the situation of rescheduling meeting at the last hour at the expense of the organization thereby saving the coffers of TBI Ghana. This was the case in Bolgatanga where the PGT could have continued the journey to Navrongo for the workshop but had to reschedule the date due to organizational lapses. The resource person had to embark on the journey again from Kumasi the following week.

Solution: The PGT should not be given 100% “autonomy” in organizing workshops but rather team up with the project coordinators from TBI Ghana. That could avert this situation since programmes organized by the project coordinators proved more successful compared to that of the PGT’s.

Again, the essence of this TLAS project is to disseminate information to the grass-roots stakeholders who have direct impact on our forest resources. In this vein, targeting the right people in the industry will help achieve the purpose of the project. I observed that we had the highest “stakeholders” at the Yendi workshop in the Northern Region but surprisingly, some of them did not even know the associations they belong to and one mentioned a profession outside the targeted professions. To me, the “large alien” turnout is not a sign of a successful organization but the right “few” people would have made the impact TBI Ghana aspires to achieve.

Solution: Information should be sent to the various associations on time and again the project coordinators should not be left out.

Last but not the least; I would like to also commend and thank the drivers of TBI Ghana for their safety precautions exhibited on the road throughout my trips with them.

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Appendix

Report on Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS) book launch at NODA Hotel, Fumesua-Kumasi on the 17th June, 2015.

In their quest to disseminate information about Timber Legality Assurance System /Voluntary Partnership Agreement (TLAS/VPA) to the grassroots, Tropenbos International Ghana has developed manuals to educate stakeholders. This programme was organized to formally launch these books which will serve as a guide for compliance with Timber Legality Assurance System. The programme started at 10:58 am with an open prayer. Dignitaries and participants were formally introduced. This was followed by the introduction of the chairman for the occasion, Prof. Frimpong and his acceptance speech to superintend over the programme.

In his welcoming address, the Programme Director of Tropenbos International Ghana (TBI Ghana), Mr. S. K. Nketiah spoke briefly about the Forestry sub-sector and his outfit's contribution towards sustainable forest management. He pleaded for attention to the Small and Medium Forest Enterprises (SMFE's) which employ significant number of people within the forestry sub-sector. According to him the Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS) project is in line with the mission of TBI Ghana and expressed his appreciation to the European Union, Government of Ghana, Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Forestry Commission and other local and international partners for their immense contribution in helping Tropenbos International Ghana achieve its mission. He therefore advised stakeholders within the industry to embrace TLAS since it has come to stay.

On his part, the representative of the European Union Delegation to Ghana, major donors of the project indicated that LAS was the core reason the European Union entered the bilateral Voluntary Partnership Agreement with Ghana in order to trade in timber from only legal source. He revealed that the EU has since 2013 funded 5 Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade/Voluntary Partnership Agreement (FLEGT/VPA) related projects in Ghana alone including the TLAS project and contributed to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to undertake other Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade/Voluntary Partnership Agreement (FLEGT/VPA) projects in Ghana totaling over 3 million Euros.

A representative from the Forestry Commission (FC), Mr. Zormelo, commended Tropenbos International Ghana for the strides made so far and indicated that the Forestry Commission is gearing more attention to the domestic market now to ensure that Legality Assurance Scheme succeeds. He elaborated on the benefits of sustainable forest management and stressed that the survival of our forest depends on the contributions and efforts of every citizen.

The project coordinator of Timber Legality Assurance System (TLAS), Mr. Boakye gave an overview of the project and briefed participants about the progress and level of achievements for the two (2) years project which began in 2013. He indicated the project is being carried out nationwide and has employed trainer of trainers' strategy to get to the wider target audience about TLAS. Tropenbos International Ghana assists these trainers with the needed supports both technical and financial to achieve the broader objectives of the project by complying with TLAS.

In her address, the Deputy Minister of Forest and Natural Resources, Miss Barbra Serwaa Asamoah debunked the notion that the implementation of TLAS is an attempt to rip stakeholders of their livelihood and also as an imposition on Ghana by the EU but rather it is geared towards sustainable forest management. She indicated that the nation loses millions of Ghana cedis annually due to illegal timber and over 80% of timber on the local market are sourced illegally. She expressed the government's commitment to ensure equitable distribution of resources and sustainable forest management through the implementation of the TLAS. She therefore advocated for all hands to be on deck to realize this dream and commended TBI Ghana for its good works.

The Minister was joined by the chairman of the programme to formally declare the books launched. In his closing remarks, the chairman of the occasion also commended TBI Ghana for their good works. He lamented on the serious implications should TLAS be in full force since only about 20% of the timber in the local market are sourced legally. He indicated the benefits Ghana will derive with the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union (EU) to trade in only legal wood and expressed his appreciation to the European Union for their support.

By:

James Awuye (Intern)

Tropenbos International Ghana