

**Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI)**  
Supporting Resilient Forest Livelihoods  
through Local Representation

# **Decentralization, Institutional Choice and the Production of Disgruntled Community Representation under the Modified Taungya Forest Management System in Ghana**



**Prince Osei-Wusu Adjei**

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## **Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI) Research Programme**

The Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI) is a research and training program, focusing on environmental governance in Africa. It is jointly managed by the Council for the Development of Social Sciences Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC). It is funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The RFGI activities are focused on 12 countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. The initiative is also training young, in-country policy researchers in order to build an Africa-wide network of environmental governance analysts.

Nations worldwide have introduced decentralization reforms aspiring to make local government responsive and accountable to the needs and aspirations of citizens so as to improve equity, service delivery and resource management. Natural resources, especially forests, play an important role in these decentralizations since they provide local governments and local people with needed revenue, wealth, and subsistence. Responsive local governments can provide forest resource-dependent populations the flexibility they need to manage, adapt to and remain resilient in their changing environment. RFGI aims to enhance and help institutionalize widespread responsive and accountable local governance processes that reduce vulnerability, enhance local wellbeing, and improve forest management with a special focus on developing safeguards and guidelines to ensure fair and equitable implementation of the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) and climate-adaptation interventions.

REDD+ is a global Programme for disbursing funds, primarily to pay national governments of developing countries, to reduce forest carbon emission. REDD+ will require permanent local institutions that can integrate local needs with national and international objectives. The results from RFGI Africa research will be compared with results from collaborators in Asia and South America in order to enhance RFGI comparative scope, and to broaden its geographic policy relevance.

# RFGI Working Paper Series Editors' Note

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James Murombedzi, Jesse Ribot

and Gretchen Walters

Struggles for control over and access to nature and natural resources; struggles over land, forests, pastures and fisheries, are struggles for survival, self determination, and meaning. Natural resources are central to rural lives and livelihoods: they provide the material resources for survival, security, and freedom. To engage in the world requires assets that enable individuals, households, and communities to act in and on the world around them. The ability to accumulate assets and the ability to access government and market services depends partly on such resources along with the political-economic infrastructure – rights, recourse, representation, markets, and social services – that are the domain of government. Democracy, which both enables and requires the freedom to act, is predicated on these assets and infrastructures. Since the 1980s, African governments have been implementing local government decentralization reforms aimed at making local government more democratic by making them responsive and accountable to citizen needs and aspirations; in many places this has been done through a decentralisation of natural resource governance to local administrations. In order to be responsive to individual, household and community demands, local governments, too, need resources and decision-making powers. There must be a public domain – a set of public resources, such as forests or fisheries, which constitute this domain of democracy, the domain of decisions and services that citizens can demand of government. Natural resources, when decentralized into the domain of local authority, form an important part of the resources of individuals, households, communities and governments, making possible this move toward local democracy.



Natural resources provide local governments and people with wealth and subsistence. While nature is not the only source of rural income, the decentralization of natural resources governance is a core component of local government reform. However, governance reforms have been implemented in a context broadly characterized by an enduring crisis of the Western economic and financial systems, which in turn has stimulated privatization and liberalization in every sphere of life, including nature. The process has deprived local governments of public resources – depriving individuals and communities of a reason to engage, as a powerless government is not worth trying to influence. Privatization is depriving forest-dependent peoples of their access to formerly ‘public’ or traditionally managed resources. National governments, as well as international bodies such as the United Nations programme, titled the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD), further this trend as they collaborate with private interests to promote the privatization of natural resources. The resulting enclosures threaten the wellbeing of resource-dependent populations and the viability of democratic reforms.

The specter of climate change is deepening the crisis of enclosure. A key response to climate change has been the attempt to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions through enhancing the capacity of forests in the developing world to store carbon, ostensibly for the benefit of the atmosphere as well as the communities who use these forests. UN REDD seeks to pay communities, through their national governments, to conserve their forests as carbon storage. A plus ‘+’ was added to REDD, forming REDD+, to call for improved ecosystems services, forest management, conservation, forest restoration and afforestation to enhance the capacity for carbon storage. Designed on the basis of similar payments for environmental services (PES) schemes, REDD+ has the potential to inject vast new sums of money into local resource use and governance. In the context of fragile local governments, nascent democracies and powerful private interests, such cash inflows result in the commercialization and privatization of forests and natural resources and the dispossession of local resource users. This financialization of natural resources grossly diminishes the scope for democratic natural resource governance schemes. To be sure, the implementation of REDD+ can also learn from and avoid the pitfalls experienced in these PES schemes, especially if they represent local interests in natural resource governance decision making.

The Responsive Forest Governance Initiative (RFGI) is an Africa-wide environmental-governance research and training program focusing on enabling responsive and accountable decentralization to strengthen the representation of forest-based rural people in local-government decision making. Since January

2012, the programme has carried out 33 case studies in 12 African countries, with comparative cases Nepal and Peru, to assess the conditions under which central authorities devolve forest management and use decisions to local government, and the conditions that enable local government to engage in sound, equitable and pro-poor forest management. Aimed at enabling local government to play an integrative role in rural development and natural resource management, these case studies are now being finalized and published to elicit public discourse and debate on local government and local democracy. This Working Paper series will publish the RFGI case studies as well as other comparative studies of decentralized natural resources governance in Africa and elsewhere that focus on the intersection between local democracy and natural resource management schemes. Using the concepts of institutional choice and recognition, the cases deal with a comprehensive range of issues in decentralized forest management in the context of REDD+, including the institutional choices of intervening agencies; the effects of such choices on accountability and representation; and the relationships between local government and other local institutions. The series will also include syntheses discussing the main findings of the RFGI research programme.

Based at CODESRIA, and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the RFGI is a three year collaborative initiative of CODESRIA, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). RFGI working papers and documents, including the background papers, the RFGI programme description, and the RFGI Methods Handbook, can be found on line at:

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CODESRIA publishes *Africa Development*, the longest standing Africa based social science journal; *Afrika Zamani*, a journal of history; the *African Sociological Review*; the *African Journal of International Affairs*; *Africa Review of Books* and the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*. The Council also co-publishes the *Africa Media Review*; *Identity, Culture and Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue*; *The African Anthropologist* and the *Afro-Arab Selections for Social Sciences*. The results of its research and other activities are also disseminated through its Working Paper Series, Green Book Series, Monograph Series, Book Series, Policy Briefs and the CODESRIA Bulletin. Select CODESRIA publications are also accessible online at [www.codesria.org](http://www.codesria.org).

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# Abstract

The paper examines the democracy outcomes of the Modified Taungya System (MTS) as a decentralized forest management intervention. It addresses how reforms in the name of forestry decentralization have reinforced or weakened democratic representation in Ghana. Following both quantitative and qualitative ethnographic techniques, the paper examines the type of community representation understood as responsive and downwardly accountable leadership resulting from decentralization and recognition of local authorities under the MTS. The paper finds that the establishment of the Modified Taungya Groups (MOTAGs) creates the requisite democratic space for community representation of privileged members of MOTAGs in the communities studied. However, the intervening agent's failure to transfer adequate decision-making power and resources, disregard for policy and implementation guidelines and the dearth of arable lands for local people's livelihood security, collectively undermine the local authorities' capacity to be responsive and downwardly accountable.

**Keywords:** Decentralization, Institutional Choice, Responsiveness, Accountability, Representation, Democracy, Modified Taungya System, Forest Management



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## Introduction

For many African countries south of the Sahara, the drive for decentralization and institutional reforms after the 1980s is not difficult to comprehend. In many cases, efforts towards decentralization are driven by what has been characterized by Ayee (2000) as the failure of centralized systems of administration to yield national development aspirations. It is further argued that decentralization holds the promise to, at least in principle, involve local people in development processes for appropriate outcomes. These among other reasons explain the sustained interest in decentralization in Africa in the last few decades. Defined as the transfer of power and resources from the central governing body to its local institutions and actors (Ribot and Larson 2005; Rondinelli and Cheema 1983), decentralization has received growing attention in natural resource management in recent times as the appropriate means for promoting environmental sustainability and to achieve local democracy and development (see Ahwoi 2010). Since the 1980s for example, many African governments have been attempting to implement decentralization. They assume that decentralization delivers downward accountability and responsiveness, and in the process, the chances of the majority of local people to participate in local governance processes are enhanced (Dinye and Offei-Aboagye 2002; Ayee 2000; Wunsch 2001; Wunsch and Olowu 1995). However, in many instances worldwide, democratic and development outcomes expected to accompany decentralization reforms and interventions have not materialized. Based on case studies in selected African countries, Ribot (2004) notes that institutional arrangements resulting from what were labelled as decentralization reforms have failed to yield the anticipated democratic outcomes (Ribot 2004; Ribot and Oyono 2005).

In Ghana, forestry decentralization policy reforms under the umbrella of collaborative forest management have taken place through a number of forestry

interventions. The implementation of these interventions in the forestry sector is premised on their prospects for local capacity building and community representation, improved micro accountability as well as enhanced citizenship and rural poverty reduction (see Ledger *et al.* no date; Abugre *et al.* 2010). One such decentralized forestry intervention is the Modified Taungya System (MTS). The Taungya System is an agro-forestry intervention whereby farmers are given parcels of land from degraded forest reserves to produce food crops and to help re-establish and maintain timber plantations. The Modified Taungya System (MTS), a revised version of the former taungya, aims at deepening local democracy and achieving improved standards of living in forest-dependent communities within Ghana's High Forest Zones through enhanced representation for local people in forestry decisions, management and benefit sharing (see Forestry Commission 2011; Abugre *et al.* 2010; Agyeman *et al.* 2003). The MTS has been implemented for more than two decades in the High Forest Zone of Ghana and for almost ten years in the Offinso Forest district (OFD) chosen for this study. The Forestry Commission (FC) of Ghana is implementing the MTS works on the premise that recognition of local actors and institutions in community forestry management will enhance local representation and participation in forestry decisions, management and benefit sharing (Forestry Commission 2011). The MTS has been implemented for about a decade in the study site. Whether the intervention has in practice delivered the anticipated community representation within the local arena required verification. I chose the MTS as a decentralized forestry case to study the nature of forestry reforms made in the name of decentralization in the high forest zone of Ghana, and to ascertain whether these reforms have weakened or reinforced democratic representation defined as a function of responsive and downwardly accountable local leadership to the local people in the intervention area (Ribot 2011a).

This paper shows how democratic representation has been subverted as a result of inadequate power and resources transferred to local authorities appointed by the customary chiefs. It further reveals how the local authorities' disregard for the MTS policy and implementation guidelines has weakened local democracy in the intervention area. For example, the MTS implementation guidelines emphasise the election of local representatives, regular meetings of the local people with their representatives, and the use of the MTS Constitution to ensure responsive and accountable representation. However, contrary to the policy prescription, there exists no constitution to guide the MTS implementation on the ground; local representatives are appointed by customary chiefs and regular meetings have been replaced with occasional emergency meetings.

The following section sets out the theoretical perspectives and defines key terms used in this paper. Section Three provides a summary of methods and procedures followed by a detailed narrative of the MTS case with focus on its historical context and the institutional landscape for its implementation in Section Four. In Section Five, the field results and discussion are presented by examining how responsiveness and accountability are subverted through the processes of operationalizing the MTS in the intervention areas studied. Section Six gives a summary and conclusion on the study.





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## Conceptualizing Decentralization, Institutional Choice and Representation: A Theoretical Framework

The concept of decentralization has become an ‘omnibus’ word used by politicians, policy makers, and global and regional development actors sometimes to mean different things to suit different and peculiar circumstances (Adjei and Kyei 2011). Rondinelli and Cheema (1983) define decentralization as the transfer of responsibility for planning, decision making or administrative authority from central government to its field organization. Similarly, Ribot and Larson (2005) note that decentralization involves the transfer of power from central government to actors and institutions at lower levels within the political-administrative hierarchy of the state. Different shades of definition have been shared by scholars on the concept of decentralization. However, the notion of transferring power and support from central agencies to local actors and institutions to perform defined sets of responsibility and to derive benefits from their performance remains fundamental.

Decentralization reforms prior to the 1970s sought to achieve efficient development outcomes through local government structures (see Kyei 1998). Conversely, the new wave of generic and sector-specific decentralization reforms since the 1980s is often premised on their local democracy and rights-based outcomes (Wollenberg *et al.* cited in Ribot and Larson 2005). Some scholars have argued that decentralization enhances local democracy through pathways such as accountability, transparency, enhanced institutional capacity at the local level, empowerment and community participation in decision making (Ribot 2011a; Marfo 2004; Burden 2005; Grindle and Thomas undated; Packel 2008; WHO

2006; Kyed and Buur 2006; Manor 1999; Lind and Cappon 2001). For example, in West Bengal, decentralization reforms have provided for significant local decision making. In addition, a wide range of local democratic opportunities have been created following decentralized reforms in Brazil and South Africa (see Heller *et al.* 2007). Similarly, local institutional recognition which allows local people's knowledge to be captured in decision making and promote local engagement in the implementations of such decisions has accompanied decentralized reforms in some parts of Africa after the 1980s (Adjei and Kyei 2011; Ayee 2000). Contrary to these outcomes, there are cautions against enthusiastic generalization of positive democracy and development outcomes of decentralization. Schneider (2003) and Conyers (1983) argue that decentralization does not always create a wide range of local democratic opportunities that provide the enablement for significant representation and involvement of local people in decision making.

Despite the varying empirical and theoretical observations about the democracy outcomes of decentralization reforms, in all such reforms, the choice of local institutions and/or actors is made by intervening agents. Local actors are chosen in the name of decentralization to receive some form of powers and resources from intervening agents and to enable them to perform decentralized sets of responsibilities at the local level (see Ahwoi 2010). Ribot (2011a) defines institutional choice as the identification of local partners with whom intervening agencies work and to whom they transfer power or provide support. Along with choice comes recognition of the local institutions and actors. Recognition is achieved when local people are chosen, and their cultural traits and socio-cultural institutions are acknowledged, engaged and appreciated through genuine participation in dialogue and decision making (Ribot 2011b). How does choice relate to recognition?

The choice and recognition framework depicts that institutional choices made in the process of decentralization reforms beget recognition of local institutions (Ribot 2011a). In most cases, local authorities and/or institutions are chosen in the name of decentralization for the purpose of democratic representation of local people acknowledged. Democratic representation following Ribot (2002) denotes responsiveness and accountability of local representatives to the local people. Local institutions or authorities are democratically representative when local populations can sanction them appropriately (hold them accountable) and when authorities have the ability to deliver on demands signalled as preferred by citizens (responsiveness) (see also Manin *et al.* 1999 cited in Ribot 2002). The effectiveness of decentralization is dependent on whether local authorities receiving powers and support are responsive and downwardly accountable; i.e. whether or not it

produces democratic representation at the local arena (Ribot 2002). Conversely, accountability should denote the capacity (power, resources etc.) to demand representation. Even though a number of factors could count, arguably there is a central tendency for the effectiveness of local representation to be inextricably linked to the adequacy of power and support that intervening agents are prepared to transfer to local authorities.

Institutional arrangements established under decentralization reforms may or may not produce democratic institutions and representation in the local arena (Ribot 2004; Ribot and Oyono 2005; Heller *et al.* 2007; Adjei and Kyei 2011; Ayee 2000; Schneider 2003 and Conyers 1983). Often, democracy goals including downwardly accountable and responsive local leadership for which recognition is given to local representatives have remained nominal and symbolic. With the choice and recognition approach used in this study, democracy outcomes of decentralization are conceptualized as a function of representation, and the nature of representation is seen as a function of responsiveness and accountability of local authorities to the local people. In that regard, responsiveness is operationalized as local authorities' awareness of local peoples' preferred needs and effectiveness of articulation of the preferred needs to yield desirable responses, whereas accountability is operationalized as the delivery of reports on performance to the local people (answerability or feedback mechanism) as well as the availability and effectiveness of sanctions (Ribot 2004). Specifically, whether local authorities report or provide information on their performance to local people and whether local people have the wherewithal to sanction local authorities effectively based on their reports or information on performance were the bases for assessing downward accountability.

It is observed through the above review of the literature that, in practice, the possibility of local authorities to be downwardly accountable and responsive to the local population is dependent not only on authorities' capabilities to do so. Rather, democratic representation outcomes of decentralization also depend on who and how choices of local authorities are made, the adequacy of powers and resources transferred to local authorities, and the extent of their autonomy to exercise decision making powers, as well as mechanisms for and effectiveness of sanctions available. These are necessary pathways through which decentralization may produce local democracy as they influence accountability directions either upwards or downwards, and the ability of local authorities to satisfy the needs signalled as preferred by the local authorities. Hence, these variables provided a theoretical framework for this study.



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## Research Methods and Procedure

Four forest-dependent communities were used for this study following both qualitative ethnographic and descriptive statistical techniques for data collection and analysis. The four communities were chosen as study sites because of their substantial experience in the practice of the MTS under Community Forest Management Project and the National Plantation Development Programme. Data collection was undertaken over a period of twelve months between September 2012 and February 2014, when interviews were conducted and questionnaires were administered. A purposive sample of two hundred respondents comprising five project (forestry) officers drawn from the staff of the District Forest Service Division (DFSD) who represented the intervening agents at the local level, 15 local representatives and 180 local people were involved. The 15 local representatives included traditional authorities, taungya headmen, taungya committee members (executives) and District Assembly/Unit Committee representatives. The 180 local people consisted of both Modified Taungya Group (MOTAG) farmers and non-MOTAG farmers within the communities. The quantitative data collected were organised and analysed using descriptive statistics with the help of the SPSS Version 16.0. Significantly too, transcription of interview data, vignettes, and direct quotations formed the basis of analysing the qualitative field data. The choice and recognition framework (Ribot 2011a) was followed for evaluating the democracy effects of forestry decentralization using the MTS case. In that regard, the extent of responsiveness and accountability of local authorities were important variables to observe how the kind of forestry decentralization reforms occurring through the MTS affects local representation and democracy.





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## Case Description: The Modified Taungya System (Mts)

### **A Historical Context**

Attempts towards decentralization in Ghana date back to the colonial era with the introduction of indirect rule (see Ayee 2000; Adjei *et al.* 2012). However, until the 1980s earlier decentralization efforts were characterized by practices of deconcentration involving the transfer of merely administrative powers from central governments to their field agents and partners (Adjei and Kyei 2011). But the practice of deconcentration has often produced upward accountability; hence in most cases it subverts democratic local representation (see Adjei and Kyei 2011). Thus, deconcentration approaches that characterized earlier attempts towards decentralization in Ghana achieved no more than effective central government administration and by and large ignored efficient local democratic governance and development (Kyei 1998). Forestry decentralization like the case of other sector specific reforms in Ghana is informed by a review of unsuccessful attempts in the past. Compared to initial attempts, the period after 1987 has witnessed much significant modification and improvement in the institutionalization of decentralization, and capacity development of local government structures to deliver local democracy and development goals (Ahwoi 2010). Successive governments of Ghana from 1988 have continued to pursue or support generic and sector-specific institutional reforms in the name of democratic decentralization (devolution) towards participatory and effective local governance. These reforms have significantly informed forestry governance interventions including the MTS.

Implementation of the Taungya System (TS) in Ghana dates back to the 1960s (see FC 2011 cf. Agyeman *et al.* 2003) in response to the high rate of forest resource degradation and the acute shortage of farmlands experienced by farming communities adjoining forest reserves in the High Forest Zones of Ghana at the time. Under the old TS, participating local farmers received degraded lands within forest reserves on which they planted trees interspersed with their non-permanent food crops. Farmers engaged in the TS had the right of access and use over forestlands they received for the cultivation of food crops together with trees until such a time that the canopy closure of maturing trees made it impossible for the continuation of food crop production. In spite of its initial successes for improving households' food security and reparation of degraded portions of forest reserves, the old TS was short-lived. After years of implementation, the TS became unpopular with forest authorities and later abandoned in the 1980s (FC 2011; Agyeman 2003) due to unfair representation of landless and migrant local farmers in forestry decisions and benefit sharing, inequity in land allocation to the participating farmers and insecure access to forestlands.

In the 1990s however, as part of forestry decentralization (governance) reforms, the Taungya System was reintroduced following modifications to the old TS. The new system, the Modified Taungya System (MTS), aims at deepening local democracy and achieving improved standards of living in forest dependent communities within Ghana's High Forest Zones through enhanced local people's representation in forestry decisions, management and benefit sharing (see FC 2011; Abugre *et al.* 2010; Agyeman *et al.* 2003). With the MTS, participating farmers continue to nurture the tree plantation into maturity after harvesting their food crops. In this way, local people re-establish forest plantations in degraded portions of protected forestlands and also co-manage the forest resources with the support of the District Forest Service Division (DFSD), which represents the Forestry Commission (FC) of Ghana as the intervening agent. Unlike the old TS, the MTS is established under an agreement between the local authorities on behalf of the local people and the Forestry Commission (FC) in which roles and benefit sharing arrangements are specified. Through the MTS, the FC aims to promote effective local representation in forestry management decisions by ensuring and supporting effectively constituted local democratic structures for implementing the MTS. To achieve this, participating farmers are expected to be members of local Modified Taungya Groups (MOTAGs) with democratically selected local authorities that is broad based with fair representation of gender, origin, age, etc. (FC 2011). How this has worked in practice and its associated democracy outcomes is discussed in the following sections.

## **Institutional Landscape of Decentralized Forestry: Case of the MTS**

Generally, Ghana's forestry management setup is characterized by a set of regulatory processes, mechanisms and institutions through which political actors influence forestry actions and outcomes. Following the 1980s efforts towards institutionalizing decentralization in Ghana, the forestry sector has also been driven by a participatory governance approach. Decentralization and participation as the basis of the revisions of the institutional landscape of Ghana's forestry governance is impelled among other reasons by the desire to resolve the problem of neglected forest-adjacent people and other non-state stakeholder institutions in the management decisions and benefit-sharing processes of forest resources. This was demonstrated by the enactment of a forest policy in 1994 giving rise to the concept of collaborative forest management in Ghana. This follows decades of hierarchical governance that was highly centralized with the Forestry Commission being the main responsible agency for forest resource management (see Ros-Tonen *et al.* 2009).

The 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy introduces various forest governance arrangements involving a kind of multi-stakeholder institutional participation with a wide array of different actors and institutions sometimes with competing claims and interests (Forestry Commission 2011; Ros-Tonen *et al.* 2009). Within these governance landscapes, the Forestry Commission and its subdivisions, Stool land-owners, District Assemblies, Community-Based Organizations in forest-fringe communities, farmer groups, timber contractors and other forest users, NGOs, administrators of stool lands, research institutions and private plantation development agencies continue to gain the recognition of central government as relevant actors and institutions variously supporting the management of forest resources. These institutional supports in the forestry sector occur both on and off reserves under different collaborative forest management initiatives supported by the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy, and strengthened through the National Forest Plantation Development Programme launched in 2001. Some of these institutions have formalized stakes but many others serve as informal partners in co-management whose roles notwithstanding cannot be underestimated.

The implementation of collaborative forestry governance since the 1990s is based on the Forestry Commission's expectations that the involvement of all relevant actors could contribute to sustainable forest management and improvement of stakeholder representation, especially those who were hitherto marginalized in decisions and benefit sharing. This is represented in the 1994 forest and wildlife policy with the provision that, '*promotion of public awareness and involvement of rural people in forestry and wildlife conservation to maintain life-sustaining systems, preserve scenic areas and enhance the potential of recreation, tourism and income generating opportunities....*', supports the

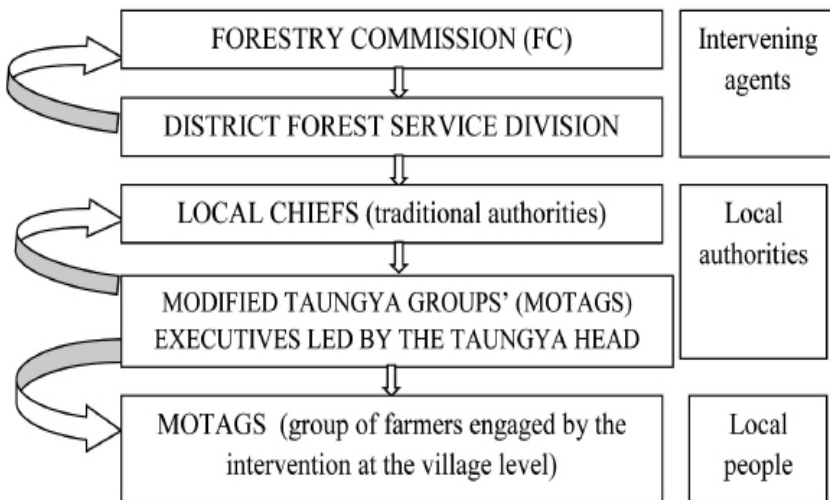
implementation of the MTS (see FC MTS Implementation Guidelines 2011). With the kind of forest policy and programmes receiving support in Ghana, there is an increasing tendency for narrowing central government’s control and role in forestry in the country, as the influence of other stakeholders on forest governance increases.

From the FC of Ghana, the MTS is designed as a decentralized forestry management intervention following a collaborative approach to yield sustainable forestry, local livelihoods and democracy (see FC MTS Implementation Guidelines 2011). However, it is necessary to verify the actors and local institutions supporting such collaboration within the local arena where the MTS is being operationalized. This is important in understanding the institutional framework of the MTS in the context of Ghana’s decentralized forestry management interventions. It is also important because, sometimes even where customary laws and codified conventions guarantee the rights of traditional councils and some local actors to participate in forestry management negotiations, these have often been overridden by statutory laws. The following section identifies the intervening agents and the local institutions recognized to receive power and resources and their decentralized responsibilities in implementing the MTS intervention.

### Actors and Institutional Roles for the MTS Implementation

Figure 1 and Box 1 depict the actors, institutional structure and role differentiations defined in the MTS implementation guidelines.

**Figure 1:** Implementation structure of the MTS



**Box 1:** Decentralized responsibilities of the primary actors under the MTS

Institution	Decentralized Responsibility
FC	Provides requisite powers/resources through the DFSD to the MOTAGs through their representatives for tree plantation establishment and management
DFSD	Provides needed training to the MOTAGs on tree plantation establishment Works with local authorities to supervise tree plantation established by the MOTAGs Distributes resources to the MOTAGs on behalf of the FC
Traditional authorities (local chiefs)	Support the taungya head and other executives in discharging their forestry responsibilities Serve as local advisors to the DFSD field staff, taungya heads/executives and the MOTAGs on forestry matters
Taungya Executive (taungya head)	Negotiates with the FC through the DFSD for resources on behalf of the MOTAGs Allocates resources received to individual members of MOTAGs for tree plantation establishment Assists and supervises MOTAG members in the discharge of their responsibilities and to share in their rights of engagement
MOTAGs	Contribute labour for the re-establishment of tree plantations Protect the regenerated tree plantations against illegal logging, farming, fire and any form of abuse of the re-established plantations Participate in MOTAG meetings on forestry matters

The implementation of the MTS has involved choice and recognition of local institutions and representatives by the Forestry Commission (FC). The FC represents the central body responsible for the identification of local institutional partners and representatives of local people for the MTS implementation. At the local level, the FC works through the District's Forest Service Division (DFSD) in rolling out the MTS. In pursuit of policy goals, the FC through the DFSD



chooses and works with the village chiefs and the executives (representatives) of the MOTAGs within the local arena.

MOTAGs are groups of farmers recognized by the DFSD at the local level to receive power and assets to participate in the re-establishment and management of tree plantations in degraded portions of forest reserves under a benefit-sharing agreement. In line with the provision of the FC's guidelines for the establishment and management of MOTAGs (see FC 2011), the formation of MOTAGs and the implementation of the MTS are expected to follow democratic principles for effective representation of the local communities in forestry decisions, management and benefit sharing. In addition, to avert abuse of power received by local representatives from the intervening agents, and to guarantee local people's rights of engagement in forestry decisions and democratic representation, each community MOTAG is expected to possess and be guided by a constitution from the FC. Each MOTAG receiving recognition, power and support from the FC through the DFSD should also have an elected board of representatives, led by a taungya headman. The elected board of MOTAG representatives is to serve for a fixed period of two years and a maximum of two terms, which is to be determined through general MOTAG elections. In addition, the local people (MOTAGs) are expected to have monthly meetings with their representatives (MOTAG executives) in order to engage with them on their needs signalled as preferred. On the other hand, the local representatives are to have quarterly meetings with the project officials to engage with the intervening agents for their support to make them responsive to the local people. These defined mechanisms and processes for the MTS implementation are to empower the local people to engage with local authorities, demand responsive and accountable representation, and to sanction local representatives who are considered unresponsive and unaccountable to the MOTAGs. Findings on how the MTS has been operationalized in the selected study sites and the nature of representation produced have been presented and discussed in the next section.

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## Results and Discussion

### **The Production of Disgruntled Responsiveness under the MTS**

What the author calls ‘disgruntled responsiveness’ is when needs are articulated but responses are not forthcoming or sufficient. This occurs when local representatives through available processes are able to articulate the views and preferred needs of the local people whom they represent to the intervening agents expected to consider those views and supply such needs. However, these preferred needs are often not satisfied due to limited powers and recognition of the local authorities to influence intervening agents’ decisions to consider and respond favourably to the needs and views of the local people. The kind of responsiveness produced out of the MTS in the Offinso Forest District (OFD) is perceived by the local people in the villages studied as largely disgruntled. Villagers in the OFD have experienced the implementation of both the old TS and the MTS for well over a decade. Close to 90 per cent of the inhabitants in the OFD are farmers and land remains a vital asset for most households in the intervention areas. Nonetheless, about 70 per cent of available lands in the rural communities are covered with reserved forest either under State control or private individuals, making access to land by local inhabitants for food crop cultivation very difficult. In an interview with the chief of one of the MTS intervention communities, it was understood that food shortages and a high incidence of poverty were problems saddling his community due to inadequate farmlands outside of forest reserves. In the past for instance, local people survived through accepted but illegal means of acquiring portions of forestlands for farming activities following some form of informal agreements with forest supervisors. In several other cases, inhabitants ignored forest protection measures and resorted to ‘secret’ and illegal farming within reserved forests – hiding

their activities from the foresters. Decades of such encroachment on forestlands for food crop farming and illegal logging adversely affected households' quality of lives by contributing to deforestation and forest degradation that characterize the Offinso Forest Reserves as a whole. The problems of insecure land rights coupled with the fear of involvement in illegal coping (livelihood) strategies informed the design of the MTS and makes it a vital intervention for forest-dependent communities according to the chiefs of the villages studied. Considering the land-shortage challenge affecting the majority of inhabitants in the district, local people participating in the MTS and the Forestry Commission recognize the MTS first as a relief to the landless farmers and vulnerable local people in the district. Farmers in the intervention areas perceive the implementation of the MTS as an important solution to the scarcity of arable land, even though it largely serves the primary reforestation goals of the intervening agents. Degraded forestlands transferred to the local people is a primary requirement for satisfying not just the livelihood needs of the local people but also for achieving the reforestation targets of the intervening agents.

In the four communities studied, for example, land for food and tree crop cultivation, financial assets for land preparation and transportation to and from the plantation sites, as well as fire-fighting and pruning equipment were found to be the three most pressing forestry needs signalled as preferred by the MOTAGs. Even though the local inhabitants have used varied means such as discussions at meetings and making complaints to the taungya heads and village chiefs to make their preferred forestry needs known, local authorities have not in any particular year been able to satisfy the needs requested by the participating farmers in the implementation processes of the MTS. Table 1 represents the results of interviews with the taungya heads (the most influential local authorities for the MTS implementation at the community level) of the selected villages in the OFD on MTS farmers' (local people) requests for their preferred forestry needs for 2008/2009, and local authorities' responses to the requests made. It can be observed from Table 1 that when the local people in the communities studied indicated their preference for 2 acres of land on average, they received a quarter or half acre; although most farmers requested fire fighting and pruning equipment, none of the farmers received it, and when they requested financial support none was forthcoming.

**Table 1:** Local People's Forestry Needs Signalled as Preferred in the Study Communities

Intervention areas	MOTAG members	Preferred average size of forestland signalled by each member in acres	Size of forestland obtained in acres
Community A	Males	2	1/4
	Females	2	1/4
Community B	Males	2	1/4
	Females	11/2	1/4
Community C and D	Males	2	1/2
	Females	2	1/2
Financial capital for land preparation		Number of farmers who made a request	Number of farmers who were granted their requests
Community A	Males	20	0
	Females	35	0
Community B	Males	22	0
	Females	30	0
Community C and D	Males	15	0
	Females	15	0
Fire-fighting/ pruning equipment		Number of farmers who made a request	Number of farmers who were granted their request
Community A	Males	20	0
	Females	30	0
Community B	Males	22	0
	Females	30	0
Community C and D	Males	18	0
	Females	15	0

On account of local authorities' ability to provide the forestry needs of the local people, the majority of the farmers engaging with their representatives perceive their performance as unsatisfactory. This is evidenced by an assertion made by a member of the fire fighting volunteers established by the Chief and taungya head in Community A at the OFD.

The local authorities have done well to establish forest taskforce and fire volunteers in this community against illegal logging and fire which threaten our taungya Forest, but we have no equipment to work with. The chain saw operators (illegal loggers) go into the forest in the night prepared, sometimes with guns. But what has been given to us is a torch light; nothing we need to work well has been provided. When we sometimes hear of chain-saw operation in the forest, we are unable to react because equipment and support that we have requested from the leaders have not been provided to us. (Interview with a fire-fighting volunteer at Community A on 7 January 2013)

In addition to the concern of the fire volunteers, a respondent who was refused a parcel of land in 2008/2009 on the grounds of laziness complained:

One decision taken by the taungya head that I have not been happy about is his refusal to give me even a quarter acre of forestland for farming. I do not understand why the taungya head excluded me from the group that received forestlands. I went with my parents to beg him but he did not listen. I also complained to other influential local authorities to talk to the taungya head on my behalf, but he still refused to give me part of the land. Since then I decided against seeing him again to plead for land because I think he hates me. (Interview at Community C, 7 January 2013)

Even though the DFSD transfers degraded forestlands to the local authorities every year for distribution to local people, for each year since 2002, lands received from the DFSD following negotiations with local authorities have not been adequate for the local authorities to meet the forestland needs of the MOTAG members over time. Available data for Community A as shown in Table 2 depicts that parcels of land negotiated for by their representatives on behalf of the MOTAG members from 2002 to 2007 have been reducing disproportionately with the increases in the size of the MOTAG group members willing and qualified to receive land to sustain their livelihoods. The ensuing trend in the growth of local people's interest in the MTS due to non-availability of arable lands outside reserved areas which disproportionately matches with degraded lands received is common in the OFD communities where the intervention is being implemented. In instances where local people have preferred 2-3 acres of degraded forestland in a year, local authorities provided between a quarter and one acre to ensure that all 'hardworking' MOTAG members in the community obtained a portion of forestland transferred by the DFSD to the communities, no matter how small.

**Table 2:** Forestland Received for MOTAG Members in Community A

Community A	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Degraded forestland received from the DFSD (in hectares)	25	55	82	48	86	30
Number of MOTAG farmers involved in the sharing	50	72	183	130	264	245
Average land size obtained (in hectares)	0.50	0.76	0.44	0.37	0.33	0.12

*Source:* OFD Report obtained through an interview with a Technical Officer, DFSD in October 2012.

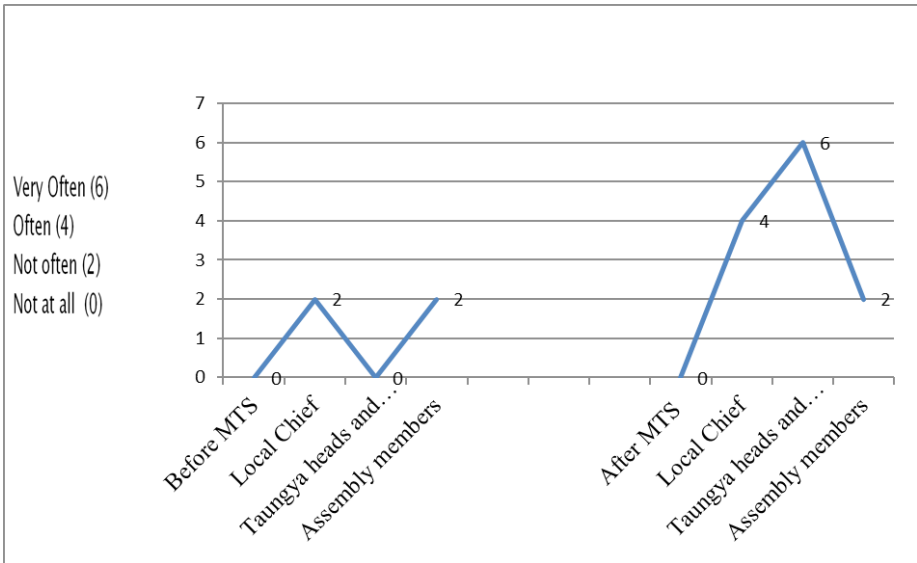
In practice, the MTS implementation and the kind of representative leadership produced at the local arena fail to meet the expectations of the local people from the intervention. In effect, the high demand for forestland by the farmers creates an avenue for abuse of powers by the taungya heads who control the distribution of the limited forestlands to the MOTAG members, and the neglect of the intervening agents' responsibility to ensure that, apart from land given in smaller quantities, the MOTAGs requests for financial assistance are appropriately considered. The production of disgruntled responsiveness through the MTS is attributed by the local authorities to limited power and resources transferred by intervening agents to meet local peoples' forestry needs.

### **Power and Financial Resource Constraints to Responsiveness**

In the making of the MTS, there is adequate evidence that the leadership status of local chiefs and other representatives given recognition by the FC and the DFSD are strengthened significantly. This development is particularly significant in the risen status of the taungya headmen recognized by the local people and intervening agents as the most influential local representatives on forest resource access, utilization and management in the intervention areas. Increases in the status of local representatives is evidenced by the significant increase in the number of local people who frequently consult them for their forest resource needs, or seek redress from them for other socio-economic problems. This is important because compared to the rate of consultation with them before the MTS implementation and their choice and recognition as local authorities on community forestry matters,

the situation was different. As shown in Figure 2, following the implementation of the MTS, there have been some improvements in the frequencies at which local people engage with the village chiefs and the taungya head in Community A where these data were recorded. This prevailing situation in Community A is not dissimilar in the other intervention communities of the OFD. Figure 2 indicates that with the implementation of the MTS, the status of the customary chiefs and taungya heads rose while that of the elected Assembly members stayed the same. This was based on the frequency in which community members consulted those local authorities for redress for their forest-related issues.

**Figure 2:** Frequency of Consultation of MOTAG Members with Local Authorities



However, in the intervention areas of the OFD, local authorities’ decision-making powers received from the intervening agents are highly limited to their influence over the MTS project implementation at the community level. Hence, notwithstanding the increased consultations with the local authorities following the MTS intervention in the OFD, changes in the powers of local interlocutors granted by the intervening agencies hardly lead to any significant influence of local authorities on project legislations or local forestry policies. Within the local arena, powers transferred to local chiefs, taungya headmen and other local representatives have minimal effect on their ability to hold project officials (representing the intervening agents) accountable to the local people

or challenge the resource-related decisions of government representatives in the implementation process of the MTS. It was observed from this study that, even with their powers strengthened, local authorities' ability to shape the intervention remains unchanged even when revisions of the forestry arrangement would enhance their capacity to be responsive and downwardly accountable.

This work further revealed that the project officers and taungya headmen of communities A, B and D are not oblivious to the forestry needs considered by the local people as preferred. In Community A, the taungya head claimed,

I have used every opportunity I get at district forestry meetings and visits to our community by our forest technical officer to request for bigger forestland sizes and some grants or even advance payment of part of the financial benefits due us from revenue to be accrued from the tree outputs. These requests have been made over and over again, the project officers say there is no money, and so this is what I have been telling the farmers... I cannot really tell whether they (the intervening agents, author's words) will provide financial support to us but I have made them aware of the farmers' concerns. I go for forestry meetings from time to time and any time I attend meetings, I remind them but nothing has been done about it

In an interview with the taungya heads of communities A and B, it was shown that, apart from improvements in their powers to allocate forestlands and tree seedlings from the DFSD to the MTS farmers and to supervise and sanction farmers who fail to fulfill their forest plantation and management responsibilities, there has been no change in local authorities' powers to mobilize and utilize financial resources, to change project plans or to influence high-level decisions made by intervening agents on financial and forestlands resource to be transferred to the local authorities. Primarily, decision-making powers of local authorities in the MTS project revolves only around their ability to determine which MOTAG members would, on a yearly basis, be engaged in the project and by their engagement derive benefits from the project. Thus, the right of local people to engage with local authorities supervising the MTS intervention at the village level, influence forestry decisions and demand responsive and accountable representation in the local arena is granted by their exclusion from or inclusion in the project. Aside from their discretionary powers to decide which local people must engage, taungya headmen and local authorities affected by the project and to whom power and resources are transferred only implement forest-resource-related decisions taken by the high-level intervening agents with little or no capacity to influence such decisions to enhance local democracy.



## **Accountability Mechanisms and Practices under the MTS**

One primary objective of the MTS project designers was to achieve downward accountability in the intervention areas. In the implementation guideline (FC 2011), there are copious mechanisms by which the local people affected by the intervention (the MOTAGs) are to leverage for effective, accountable and transparent local leadership in community forestry. As tabulated in Box 2, accountable local leadership promised through the MTS is associated with regulations on the selection of representatives and transparency through the organization of periodic meetings, proper documentation and reporting on performance regarding any forestry transactions related to the MTS. These codified mechanisms are reinforced by the prescriptions and administration of sanctions based on performance of defined responsibilities of the local representatives. For example, MOTAG members are by right supposed to elect their executives for a fixed period of service and to sanction elected authorities for unsatisfactory performance when necessary. On the other hand, they are mandated to deliver their decentralized responsibilities (see Box 1) and to be sanctioned including the prescription of exclusion or dismissal from the MOTAGs when deemed necessary for poor performance. Local representatives are further enjoined by the FC as a code of conduct to hold periodic meetings with the MOTAG members and the DFSD to serve as platforms for information disseminations and farmers' needs assessment and redress. The MOTAG guidelines and Constitution are designed to jointly support accountable and responsive representation within the local arena. Nonetheless, in the intervention areas studied in the OFD, guidelines for the organization of MOTAGs, the election of representatives and engagements with local authorities have not been followed after almost a decade of implementation (see Box 2).

As shown in Box 2, according to the MTS guidelines the MOTAG members are to elect executives (representatives) every two years; these elected representatives are to serve a maximum of two terms (four years); the representatives must ensure proper documentation, dissemination (reporting) and safekeeping of all transactional documents; the executives must be guided by a MOTAG constitution to avoid abuse of power and ensure effective representation. Further monthly meetings of MOTAG executives with members of MOTAGs must be organized to ensure accountable and transparent representation; problems with executives or members are to be reported and appropriate sanctions prescribed including dismissal where necessary.

**Box 2:** Field observation of MTS implementation procedure

Forestry Commission's Guidelines for Accountable and Responsive Local Leadership under Mts	Field Observation of the Actual Implementation Procedures at the Village Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MOTAG members (local people) shall elect executives (representatives) every two years</li> <li>• Elected representatives by MOTAG members must serve a maximum of two terms (four years)</li> <li>• MOTAGs and their representatives must ensure proper documentation, dissemination (reporting) and safekeeping of all transactional documents</li> <li>• MOTAGs and their executives must be guided by a MOTAG constitution to avoid abuse of power and ensure effective representation</li> <li>• Monthly meetings of MOTAG executives with members of MOTAGs must be organized to ensure accountable and transparent representation</li> <li>• Shortcomings of members are to be reported and appropriate sanctions prescribed including dismissal where necessary</li> <li>• Quarterly Meetings of MOTAG executives with DFSD Staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taungya heads are appointed by local chiefs to work with the MOTAGs</li> <li>• Taungya heads nominate other executives for approval from village chief and DFSD field staff</li> <li>• Monthly MOTAG meetings are replaced with occasional emergency meetings (in most cases once a year) for allocation of forestlands to farmers</li> <li>• Four year maximum term of office for executives (taungya heads) is replaced with tenured office occupancy</li> <li>• Quarterly MOTAG executives' meetings with DFSD staff is reduced to occasional meetings and informal interactions</li> <li>• Non-existence of MOTAG constitutions in all four areas as a guide for effective engagement of executives by members</li> </ul>

Also quarterly meetings of MOTAG executives with District Forest Service Division (DFSD) staff must be organized to discuss and resolve the needs of the community members. However in practice the taungya heads were appointed by local customary chiefs to work with the MOTAGs; the taungya heads then nominate other executives for approval by the chiefs and DFSD field staff.

Monthly MOTAG meetings were replaced with occasional emergency meetings (in most cases once a year) for allocation of forestlands to farmers; the four-year maximum term of office for executives (taungya heads) has been replaced with tenured office occupancy. The quarterly MOTAG executives meetings with DFSD staff were reduced to occasional meetings and informal interactions. In all four communities studied, there existed no MOTAG constitution to guide the implementation of the intervention.

In Community B, for 2008/2009, there was only one MOTAG meeting convened by the taungya head, an appointee of the local chief who has served in that capacity for eight years. The meeting was organized to levy an amount on the local people by the taungya head for the demarcation of degraded forestlands before distribution to MOTAG members who paid the levy. Within the eight years of his service, there was no call for elections of representatives. He works with the village chief to supervise farmers in the implementation of the MTS plantation development once the DFSD releases degraded forestlands to the community. There were no meetings convened to explain to the MOTAG members how much forestland was transferred to the community by the DFSD, or how much financial contribution was realized from MOTAG members for the demarcation and distribution of forestlands to the individual farmers. When he attended district forestry meetings with the intervening agents, he often reported to the local chief and not the entire community of MTS farmers. In Community D, the most recent election of a taungya head happened in 2005 following the resignation of the then taungya head. From 2005 to date the implementation procedures and experiences in communities A, C and D have not been different from the situation and experiences in Community B.

A number of factors contribute to the failure of the local inhabitants to demand adherence to the MOTAG guidelines. However, local people's unawareness of the provisions in the guidelines for MOTAGs' organization and the MTS implementation occurs as the most pronounced factor. In the local arena, at least in the communities studied, farmers engaging in the MTS intervention and the local authorities recognized to receive support from the intervening agents are ill-informed about the existence of any MOTAG's implementation guideline. Thus, the perceived intent of the project designers to promote downward accountability through the MTS guidelines is somewhat different on the ground. Table 3 shows the results of selected local people's claims of their awareness of key provisions in the guidelines for the establishment and management of MOTAGs published by the Forestry Commission. Table 3 indicates that only 20 per cent, 5 per cent and

18 per cent of the total respondents in all four communities were aware of the requirement to hold elections for MOTAG representatives, possess a MOTAG constitution and to organize monthly MOTAG meetings respectively.

**Table 3:** Local people's level of awareness of MOTAG implementation guidelines

Community	Awareness	Election of MOTAG representatives	Possession of MOTAG constitution	Monthly MOTAG meetings	Totals
A	Yes	3	1	5	9
	No	17	19	15	51
B	Yes	4	2	4	10
	No	16	18	16	50
C & D	Yes	5	0	2	7
	No	15	20	18	53
Total	Yes	12	3	11	26
	No	48	57	49	154

Significant numbers of farmers in the communities are ignorant of their rights to vote and be voted for, to choose their own representatives, right to information on the MTS etc., which then undermines their demand for accountable local leadership. In the field, a marked departure exists from the prescribed guidelines recommended to drive downward accountability and transparency through the MTS implementation. The intervening agents choose to work with and transfer power and support to individuals that they (intervening agents and local chiefs) perceive to be 'competent' in community forestry to serve as taungya heads. Because of the residual control that the village chiefs have over the land, their voices and choices are often misconstrued by the intervening agents (DFSD and FC) as the voices and choices of the local people. Thus, in the four villages where the MTS was studied, the taungya heads are the nominees of the chiefs in consultation with the DFSD. In effect, the taungya heads end up as an extension of the chiefs and the intervening agents and to whom they (the taungya heads) account and not to the local people whom they claim to represent.

Policy requirements that enfranchise the local people to elect their own representatives whom they can hold accountable are ignored. In communities A and B for instance, taungya heads were recommended by the local chiefs, and out of respect for their chiefs and a lack of sufficient information about the MOTAGs organizational guidelines, local people accepted and endorsed them as 'competent' representatives. In the same

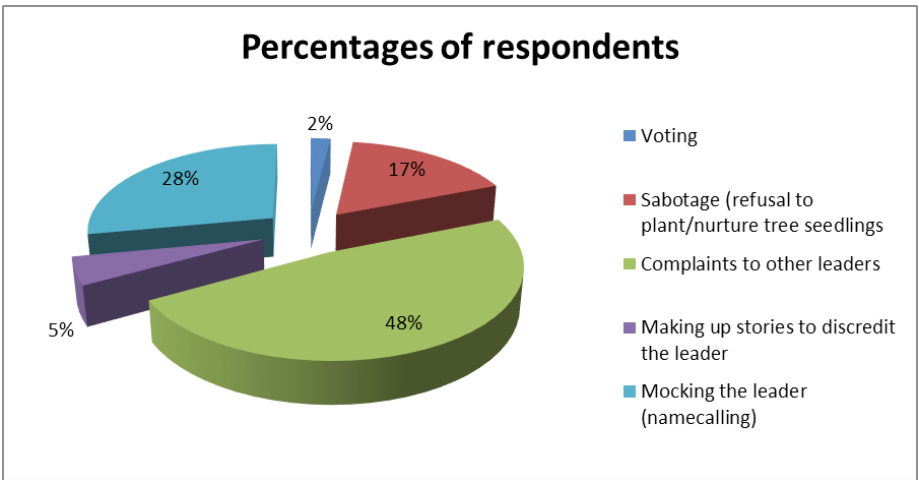
two communities, local representatives receiving recognition from intervening agents have worked as taungya headmen for almost a decade without elections or re-elections, or regular MOTAG meetings required for needs assessments, reporting on performance and transparency. In these intervention areas, such taungya headmen with whom intervening agents choose to work and to whom power and support are given often decide which local people they prefer to work with on MOTAG executive boards. Further, MOTAGs in the OFD for almost a decade of their formation and operations have worked without any prescribed constitution that defines representatives and local people's rights, responsibilities and sanctions, which then creates spaces for unresponsive and unaccountable local leadership. This has been so for many reasons. Primarily, the intervening agents (here, the FC and the DFSD) to a greater extent prioritize the green development goals of the MTS including its livelihood sustainability and forest regeneration goals over its local democracy goals. This is informed by the findings that the MOTAG members (the farmers) are very much aware of their tree cultivation responsibilities and the sort of livelihood outcomes that could be derived from their commitment to the planting and management of trees from the DFSD and local representatives. However, a greater percentage of the farmers is ignorant of who to choose local leaders to represent them for the benefits of accountable and responsive local leadership and how to do so. In effect, the intervening agents provide support for achieving the development goals (i.e. degraded forestlands and seedlings), but fail to provide adequate information about the procedural requirements for MOTAGs formation to the farmers as well as support and supervise their observance. As a result, the requisite processes of MOTAG formation and management expected to produce or reinforce downward accountability and responsive leadership is ignored and subverted which to a greater extent is attributable to the negligence of the DFSD and the FC working as the intervening agents.

### **Utilization and Effectiveness of Sanctions**

In the MTS implementation guidelines, the project designers recognize the need for sanctions to ensure accountable and responsive local representation. They consider periodic elections as the basic mechanism to sanction or reward local representatives and further prescribe other forms including dismissal from the MOTAGs for any member whose involvement undermines the primary purpose of the intervention-forest plantation development. Apart from the case of Community D where MOTAG members elected their taungya head about eight years ago, in the other intervention areas studied, formation of MOTAGs and the election of their executives expected to be supervised by the DFSD has not been a means for holding representatives

accountable, as local representatives (taungya heads) are often appointed by local chiefs. Even though these chiefs claim to do so sometimes with the consent of the community and the intervening agents, as symbols of traditional authority their choices never face community objections granting them the singular right to sanction effectively local representatives appointed only when they are dissatisfied with their performance. In the process, consciously or unconsciously, local representatives almost always report to the chiefs and intervening agents. Accountability thus assumes an upward trend with the MTS implementation contrary to the provisions in the established guidelines. Local people engaged in the project often resort to other unconventional sanctions and reactions to demonstrate their displeasure and dissatisfaction with local leaders, which seldom makes any significant impact. On the other hand, taungya heads have succeeded in excluding and dismissing some MOTAG members who were attempting to sabotage the reforestation objective of the project. Figure 3 shows sanctions frequently used in communities B and D in the OFD by the local people against their representatives. The majority of the respondent (48 per cent) made use of complaints to other leaders as a form of sanction. Other forms of sanction adopted by the local people were sabotage by refusing to plant or nurture seedlings, discrediting the leaders through storytelling, and mocking leaders through name calling.

**Figure 3:** Frequently used sanctions in communities B and D



In the OFD, the taungya heads effectively apply sanctions on the local people involved in the MTS intervention. On the contrary, these local people's attempts to ensure accountable and responsive local representation in forestry

decisions through sanctions make no significant impact. There have been cases of disengagement with taungya heads in the OFD. Where taungya headmen fail to listen to or consider the views of the people in forest-related decision making, they are tagged in names that depict their despotic qualities in forestry decisions. Nevertheless, such name-calling is often ignored by local authorities and intervening agents once these authorities cooperate with the project towards achieving the project designers' desired interests.

Generally, disregard for implementation guidelines and procedures for the organization of MOTAGs and selection of representatives denies the majority of local people their rights to appropriately engage local authorities to demand responsiveness and accountability. As a result, intervening agents do prioritize the green development goals of the project over local democracy goals. This was confirmed in a review session with one project officer working for the Forestry Commission (FC) in his assertion that,

The inception of the MTS intervention in the project sites was towards ensuring efficient forest resource management and local livelihood sustainability rather than promoting local democracy. However, challenges that accompanied the implementation of the MTS necessitated the design of the MTS implementation guidelines to promote efficient forest resource management and also enhance local democracy through the MOTAGs. Until recently, there existed no policy and implementation guidelines for the MTS and even now promoting local democracy is not the primary goal of the MTS intervention (Paper review discussion 6 February 2013).

What can be drawn from the above observations about accountability is that, when formal accountability mechanisms are not implemented, people will find alternative ways of sanctioning their leaders. These alternative ways may not be as productive and may even undermine the ultimate goals of the project. Hence, the pretence of democracy without democracy may be damaging to both democracy and to the instrumental objectives of the project.

### **The Mts, Community Representation and Local Democracy**

Like other decentralized forestry interventions, the MTS has enhanced local people's involvement in community forestry at least through the formation of the MOTAGs. It has also but to a limited extent enhanced local mobilization efforts and community representation in forestry management and benefit sharing. However, the kind of representation observed from the formation and management of the community MOTAGs is reduced to local authorities' attendance at forest forums

and meetings with intervening agencies when necessary, and mere articulation of the needs of their people. In addition, the involvement of the local people in the intervention areas is equally limited to implementing decisions made by central authorities. Experiences from the organizational arrangement prevailing through the MTS implementation confirms the position of Ribot and Oyono (2005) that forestry decentralization reforms taking place in some parts of Africa are failing to yield the anticipated democracy outcomes.

Democratic representation targets of the intervention anticipated through the practice of appropriate policy and implementation guidelines and rules of local people's engagement with their representatives have become nominal. In the process, local authorities are tailored to cooperate with intervening agents by working with powers and resources transferred to them no matter how inadequate they may be to warrant or strengthen local democracy. In the process the local people lose their rights to being effectively represented in forestry decisions. MOTAG members are made to support themselves through rigorous labour-intensive methods to sustain their livelihoods once they receive smaller portions of forestlands. With limited influence on forestry project decisions made by high-level intervening agents and their cooperation with project officers, local authorities end up as passive instruments enabled for achieving the development objectives of reforestation and livelihood sustainability. Even more, with limited power and resources to engage as active representatives to influence top forestry decisions or change the course of the intervention, their own chances of being responsive and downwardly accountable are subverted in the MTS project because they are incapable of providing satisfactory representation to the local people. When invited to forest forums by the intervening agents, the participation of local representatives is for purposes of reporting rather than inducing changes in district or national level forestry decisions and plans. This has been shown in frequent failures of their attempts to have their preferred needs met. Hence, intervening agents continue to retain excessive powers and resources to dominate forestry decisions over local representatives in the forestry sector under the MTS as a decentralized forest management intervention.





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## Conclusion

The Modified Taungya System (MTS) shows some features of decentralization reforms in Ghana's forestry sector. With the introduction of the Modified Taungya Groups (MOTAGs) and their executives with which intervening agents work, the intervention creates an appropriate democratic space for local people to engage in forestry decisions and participate in benefit sharing. However, considering that the effectiveness of decentralization is dependent on whether local authorities are responsive and downwardly accountable (Ribot 2002), how the MTS is currently being operationalized subverts democratic representation within the local arena. In spite of the potential of forestry decentralization reforms under the MTS, implementation failures could overturn its promising local democracy outcomes. These results confirm the dissenting view against enthusiastic generalization of enhanced democracy outcomes of decentralization (see Ribot 2004; Schneider 2003; Conyers 1983). In the case of the MTS, adherence to the MOTAG guidelines in the intervention areas of the OFD and the transfer of adequate resources and decision-making powers to local representatives are necessary. Largely, weaknesses in the organizational mechanisms of MOTAGs and implementation processes of the decentralized forestry system, as a result of limited access to arable land, insufficient power and resources transferred to local authorities and disregard for policy and implementation guidelines of the MTS, has produced a kind of local despotism rather than democratic representation. Thus, weaknesses in the local forest governance mechanisms allowed through the implementation of the decentralized forestry system are undermining responsiveness and downward accountability necessary for democratic representation.



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