

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

Chiefs, Representation and Non-Citizenship in Forestry

Lessons from the Social Responsibility Agreement in Ghana



Frank K. Agyei

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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

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*, *Journal of African Transformation*, *Méthod(e)s: African Review of Social Sciences Methodology*, 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

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Abstract

Emerging forest policy initiatives are aiming to strengthen community engagement in forest governance by implementing interventions through democratic institutions. They are predominantly promoting elected local government institutions as being appropriate for advancing these aims, but in practice, are choosing to work with customary authorities as their local interlocutors. The extent to which customary institutions are 'democratic' is debatable. In Ghana, the Social Responsibility Agreement (SRA) is a forest management scheme that entails the devolution of decision-making powers to local authorities to represent local interest. This paper explores how democratic representation is being manifested under local leaders in the context of the SRA by focusing on: responsiveness (how represented and desired interests compare), and accountability (feedback and sanction mechanisms). The paper presents data on two concluded SRA cases from two communities in Ghana through the analysis of SRA project and policy documents, ethnography and interviews.

The SRA legal framework requires a joint representative body comprised of the chief and the customary structure, the elected local government leaders, and forest committee members. However, chiefs' authority is reinforced by cultural and historical settings enabling them to dominate and regulate activities of the representatives in the representation processes. Devoid of popular consultation, leaders largely assume local priorities relying mainly on their nearness and regular interactions with the local population, and their perception that the community is a relatively homogenous entity with common characteristics and needs. Therefore, the SRA decisions occurred without direct local participation. Nevertheless, the represented interests partly reflected some local priorities. Feedback was weak and a few privileged people learned of decision outcomes through informal meetings and family gatherings. Due to inadequate knowledge of the SRA scheme, limited interest in forest interventions, and waning trust in existing local leaders, the locals did not know why to engage, who to engage with, or how to engage and demand accountability in the SRA processes. The evidence suggests that chiefs and elected local government leaders cannot be considered to be promoters of democratic representation and local participation.

Key Words: Choice and Recognition, Social Responsibility Agreement, Customary and Elected Authority, Democratic Representation, Citizenship.

Introduction

Emerging policy initiatives in tropical forestry are predominantly proposing that to ensure effective management of the world's forest resources, it is imperative for forest management schemes to consider the input of local communities as a fundamental requirement (Brown *et al.* 2002; Macqueen 2011). Besides the proximity argument that the nearness of a rural population to the resource makes them the best placed to regulate local drivers of deforestation and forest degradation (Cronkleton *et al.* 2011; Macqueen 2011), the main thrust of the proponents' argument is that commercial forestry has failed to direct benefits to rural populations or to enhance forest conditions, thus necessitating a new paradigm of forest governance which centres on rural people's autonomy (Rebugio *et al.* 2010). Beginning from the late 1980s, governments, particularly those in Africa and Asia, have attempted to promote local representation and democratization by devolving aspects of forest management powers to locally accountable local authorities (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). These policies are based on the premise that by implementing interventions through locally accountable local leaders, public affairs get closer and become more transparent to local people (Manor 1999), which promotes more local engagement in implementation (Ribot and Larson 2005). Mostly, elected local government institutions are promoted as appropriate for advancing these aims, and in practice, much of these transfers are made to customary authorities (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Romeo 1996). The paper argues that neither elected local government institutions nor customary authorities can be considered to be democratic.

In Ghana, the Social Responsibility Agreement (SRA) is a collaborative forest management scheme that entails the devolution of decision-making powers to local authorities to represent the interests of the local population in benefit sharing.

The SRA is a social benefit scheme established to commit timber contractors to provide social amenities to communities within timber concession areas (TRMA, Act 547:s3e). Timber harvesting rights are spelled out in a contractual arrangement which is awarded through a competitive bidding process: 'No person shall harvest timber from any land... unless he holds timber rights in the form of a Timber Utilization Contract entered into in respect of the area of land concerned' (TRMA, Act 547:s1). The winner of the bid is required by law to satisfy the requirement of the SRA by undertaking to spend five per cent of the value of the stumpage fee to provide social amenities to communities and inhabitants of the timber utilization areas (L.I 1721:s13. 12b). The Social Responsibility Agreement has been implemented in Ghana over a decade and many agreements have been negotiated. The evidence is that both customary and elected local government authorities have been involved as representatives of the communities (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001, 2004). By analysing two concluded cases, the paper responds to the following questions. Which local authorities were recognized by project officials and the local population to negotiate the SRA on behalf of the people and why? To what extent did the representatives respond and account in the SRA negotiation process? To what extent did the locals engage with authorities receiving negotiation powers? To what extent were the local people able to influence SRA decisions?

The paper employs the choice and recognition framework (Ribot *et al.* 2008) as an analytic tool to examine the choice of local leaders serving as interlocutors of decision-making powers in the local arena, and the effect of the select authorities on responsive and accountable representation, and empowered citizenship. Choice refers to decisions made by central authorities and higher-level agencies as to which institutions in the local arena they should work with, and local authorities become recognized when they receive powers to function. Democratic representation occurs when recognized leaders are responsive to the needs of their people and are accountable to them (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999; Ribot *et al.* 2008). Responsive leaders articulate the interests of their people (Ribot 2004), and accountability implies constituents have the ability to sanction their leaders in response to their actions (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). Citizenship is the ability to be politically engaged and shape the fate of the public polity in which one is involved (Ribot 2011).

Four main arguments with respect to the choice of local leaders and the effect on democratic representation and empowered citizenship are advanced by this paper. One, on the basis of belief in tradition (customary practice) and already existing representative structures, the SRA process recognized both the elected local government and customary authorities to represent the interest of the people in the

negotiation process. Two, in the absence of popular consultation, representatives learned local priorities through everyday interactions with the people. The evidence suggests that to some extent, the expressed interests of community members were reflected in the represented interests. Three, the findings suggest that accountability was weak. Only the elite and a few privileged people had knowledge about the negotiated agreements, and there was no indication that the people made efforts to demand leaders to justify their actions. The paper argues that the cases depicted responsive representation to some extent despite the fact that the SRA was weak in promoting accountable representation. Four, factors including inadequate knowledge of the SRA processes and local rights, and perception that the SRA package provides little incentive for engagement discouraged local participation and weakened the capacity of the people to influence the SRA decisions.

The next section describes the choice and recognition framework and representation which are the analytical framework for the study. This is followed by a description of efforts towards collaborative forest management in Ghana to provide a context to appreciate the SRA concept. Then the policy framework of the Social Responsibility Agreement is described. This is followed by the research setting, methods for data collection and the analysis. The last section presents and discusses the results of the study followed by the concluding discussions.

Choice and Recognition, Discretionary Power, and Democratic Representation

Choice refers to decisions made by central governments and higher-level agencies as to which authorities or institutions at the local arena that they should work with and therefore transfer power or offer support to (Ribot, Chhatre and Lankina 2008). A range of local authorities including elected leaders, customary leaders, NGOs, churches, and private individuals could be the target of the choice. Targeted authorities become recognized when they receive powers to function. Power refers to resources and domains of decision-making over which citizens can interact and attempt to influence public decisions (Ribot, Chhatre and Lankina 2008). It is around meaningful (relevant) discretionary powers that recognized authorities are able to represent the people responsively and inspire the people to engage as citizens (Ribot and Larson 2005; Ribot, Chhatre and Lankina 2008). To be discretionary, the transferred powers should be free from external or central control (Ribot and Larson 2005; Ribot, Chhatre and Lankina 2008). The main concept in discretion is choice, so an individual with discretionary power should have the freedom to select between several options when need be (Mensah 1998).

Representation as a concept has received much scholarly attention (Eulau and Karps 1977; Pitkin 1967; Ribot 2011; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2002; Wellstead *et al.* 2003). Pitkins (1967) describes four distinct but interconnected dimensions of representation, arguing that for individuals (or institutions) to be representative, they must achieve some minimum in all the dimensions of representation: formal; descriptive; substantive, and symbolic representation. Formal representation denotes the institutional rules and procedures through which representatives are chosen. The rules and procedures entail sanction mechanisms

designed to ensure that representatives conform to the desires of the represented. Descriptive representation incorporates functional and social representation which looks into occupational correspondence and social characteristics between the representatives and the represented (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2002). Substantive representation denotes the resemblance between the actions of the representatives and the interests of the represented. Symbolic representation depicts the effective representation of the feelings of the represented. It illustrates the power of the representatives to invoke feelings in the represented. Together the four dimensions constitute a coherent whole with strong causal relations existing among them, but many studies treat the different dimensions as alternative and valid terms (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2002).

Eulau and Karps (1977) argue that in order to make Pitkins' (1967) approach to representation useful, the concept should be perceived as a compositional phenomenon since representation does not refer to one particular target of political activity but to several targets. The multidimensional nature of representation complicates the concept; it is possible for a representative to be responsive to constituents with respect to constituents' policy needs and at the same time to be unresponsive to their substantive needs. Therefore, it is important to know the focus of representation under a given context, because 'even if attention is given only to policy responsiveness, research cannot simply neglect some of the classical questions of representational theory, such as the issue of representing the district's will as against its interest, or the issue of the focus of representation' (Eulau and Karps 1977:248). In representing a constituency, representatives might perceive a geographic area such as a district, a functional grouping such as an ethnic group, or individual persons as foci for the representation process, and therefore the relationship between the compositional nature of representation and the focus of representation complicates the concept (Eulau and Karps 1977).

In current times, the focus on the substantive interest of constituents described earlier by Pitkins (1967) is gaining more weight. Wellstead *et al.* (2003) advise that the focus of representation should be on the substantive needs of constituents. They argue against descriptive representation with the view that resemblances in the socio-economic characteristics between representatives and constituents do not necessarily enhance the representative-constituent relation. They propose that the focus of representation should be on the articulation of constituents' substantive needs, asserting there should be a 'shift of emphasis from a representation based simply on standing for, to that of acting for' (Wellstead *et al.* 2003:10).

An emerged notion of representation that emphasises the articulation of constituents' interests and their engagement in the decision-making process is democratic representation. Democratic representation occurs when recognized leaders are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people and provide accountability to them (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999; Ribot, Chhatre and Lankina 2008). Leaders are said to be responsive when they translate the needs and aspirations of the people into policies (Ribot 2004). In other words, responsive leaders articulate the interest of the people. Accountability is counter power and it involves answerability and enforcement. Answerability obliges leaders to justify their decisions and actions to the people they represent whiles enforcement suggests that there are positive and negative sanction mechanisms in place to serve as checks and balances on the powers of leaders (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999). Downward accountability occurs when constituents receive answers and are able to sanction leaders. Shah (2007) explains the necessity of accountability to the democratic environment to be that it opens the way for the represented to exercise control on the activities of their representatives.

Collaborative Forest Management in Ghana

Serving as an umbrella concept to denote all the forms of partnership between the state forestry agency and local communities, the essence of the Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) scheme is to fulfill a dual mandate of sustainable natural resource management and equitable benefit sharing. It seeks to create mutual working partnerships between the state Forestry Department and the local population. The scheme is rooted in the guiding principles of the 2012 Forest and Wildlife Policy which places strong emphasis on the need to employ collaborative approaches in the management of Ghana's forest resources (Forest and Wildlife Policy 2012). The CFM notion has been used, for example, through the concepts of Community Forest Committees and Forest Forums, to create platforms for stakeholder consultation and forest policy discourses between the state forest agency and local communities. The approach is also used in the area of forest restoration and forest conservation. Key examples are the Dedicated Forest and the Modified Taungya System. Under the Dedicated Forest, communities put forward their ancestral lands to be jointly managed by the state forest agency and themselves. The Modified Taungya System allocates parcels of land to farmers who are neighbouring forest reserves to cultivate food crops to meet their subsistence needs and the farmers in return for help to re-stock portions of degraded forest reserves. By getting pieces of land to provide food crops and the rehabilitation of poorly stocked forest areas, both the local communities and the state forestry agency benefit from the arrangement (Forestry Commission 2010; Marfo 2009). The CFM has promulgated policy to guide programmes and activities, and uses consultative approaches in policy formulation, work planning, project development and participatory monitoring.

In spite of these, the bias of existing CFM projects towards the state forest agency attracts intense concerns. Marfo (2009:19) has observed that most CFM programmes

have focused mainly on ‘securing the integrity of forest resources and not so much as an instrument to devolve power, secure tenure rights and fight poverty’. Asare and Nassah (2012) make a similar note that while the CFM framework places several responsibilities on local communities, their benefits in terms of secure access to the forest and the share of forest revenue are inadequate. Therefore, the CFM has instrumental objectives focused on forest outcomes rather than empowerment. Considering that most interventions initiated by the state forestry agency focus on promoting the integrity of forest resources with limited interest in community benefits, it is possible that community participation in CFM projects may be discouraged (Marfo 2009).

Policy Framework of the Social Responsibility Agreement

In Ghana, land is communally owned and is held in trust on behalf of the people through the stools and skins (customary heads). Where necessary, the government, backed by the laws of the country (for example, Article 20 of the 1992 Constitution) have the right to constitute any land it deems fit for forest reserve. Though forest management rights fall in the jurisdiction of the Forestry Commission, the local communities being the landowners have rights to revenues from the exploitation of the resource. According to Section 267(6) of the 1992 Constitution, the net revenue accruing from stumpage/rent after providing for the Forestry Commission’s management fees and 10 per cent for the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands, shall be deemed as 100 per cent and distributed by the arrangement: 25 per cent to the stool through the traditional authority for the maintenance of the stool in keeping with its status, 20 per cent to the traditional authority, and 55 per cent to the District Assembly within the area of authority where the stool lands are situated. The arrangement does not make any explicit mention of the inhabitants of the stool land.

Unlike the royalty payment, which goes to the stool, the SRA policy was developed to ensure that a share of benefits of forest resource allocation goes to the people living on the stool land. The Timber Resource Management Act (Act 547) was accordingly enacted to introduce a competitive bidding process for the award of timber rights, which requires prospective timber contractors to apply for timber rights in the form of a Timber Utilization Contract (TUC). Section 1 of the Act states that ‘No person shall harvest timber from any land to which Section 4 of the Act applies unless he holds timber rights in the form of a Timber Utilization Contract entered into in respect of the area of land concerned’. In fulfilling the requirement for the award of the TUC, prospective investors, among other conditions, are expected to document plans ‘to provide social amenities for the inhabitants of the contract area in accordance with the relevant Social Responsibility Agreement’ (L.I 1721: s14.1. V). The SRA Policy is

therefore the formal arrangement enacted to direct the share of forest benefits to the inhabitants of forest fringe communities.

Before the enactment of the SRA policy, some contractors provided social and developmental benefits to communities but the practice was not common. Some contractors rehabilitated road networks, sunk bore holes and contributed by building schools and clinics for the people living in the area of timber operations to sustain good relations with local authorities and a positive working environment (Kotey *et al.* 1998). However, evidence shows that since timber firms were not legally obliged to provide such services, some contractors denied communities the benefits and in most cases, chiefs received the benefits in the form of 'drink monies' without the knowledge of the entire community members. The situation resulted in a series of conflicts between the people, timber firms and forestry officials (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001, 2004). Thus the pre-SRA era was mainly characterized by irregularity, uncertainty, and chaos.

The SRA policy document clearly delineates the limit of the benefits and identifies the target of the scheme. The SRA guidelines developed by the Forestry Commission provide a framework for negotiating and concluding the agreement. In terms of the guidelines, the negotiating team should include a) representatives of the community - the stool land chief, village chief, elder, Community Forest Committee members, the unit committee and Assembly Member of the community, and b) the applicant for the Timber Utilization Contract - the Managing Director and/or the Bush Manager. The District manager of the Forestry Services Division and District Chief Executive of the Local Government system serve as witnesses to the process. The representatives have to select the type(s) of services to be provided and the place(s) in the community where the services should be located. At the negotiation platform, officials from the local District Forest office mediate in the process to make the two parties reach a consensus and serve as a guide to the value of the 5 per cent. In essence, the guidelines provide an operational plan for the representation of community interests.

It is now over a decade since the birth of the SRA policy, but much of the evidence shows that effective representation of community interests is not happening (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001, 2004; Mayers and Vermeulen 2002). Ayine (2008) examined nine SRAs and observed that five of them had no mechanism for representing community interests. Further, he reported that in all the SRAs, traditional leaders purported to represent the people without consulting the wider community members to solicit their interest before negotiating with the timber contractors. Marfo (2001) reports that in some SRAs, some communities claimed they were not involved in the negotiation process whilst others claimed the negotiated agreement was not representative of their interests. Citing Friends of the Earth Ghana, Ayine (2008) reported how members of some communities concluded that SRAs were not aware of the existence of

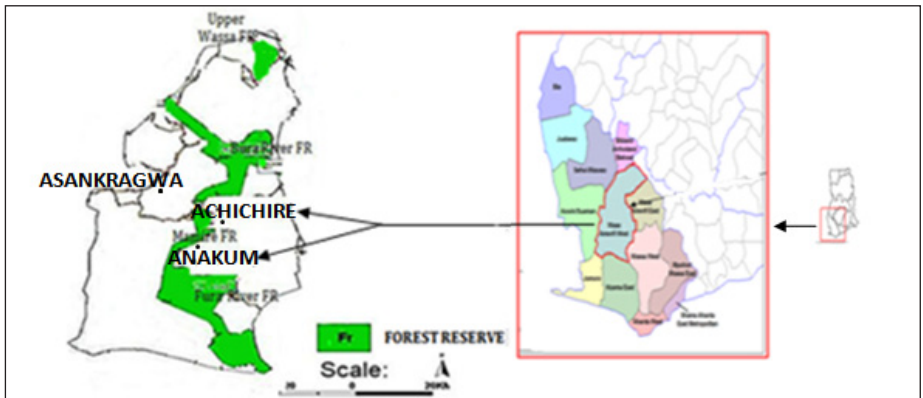
such agreements but perceived the given social benefits as gifts from the firms. The poor representation of communities under the SRA could be explained by several related factors. First, the reliance of customary authorities (chiefs and elders) as the representative body is problematic because the representivity of customary authorities has been questioned by case studies (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001, 2004; Ribot 1999). Kassibo (2002) and Ntsebeza (2004) argue that customary authorities are often not representative given that they provide less systematic accountability to the general public. This is because the positions of customary leaders are inherited for life and the possibility to sanction them is limited, therefore restricting their accountability (Lutz and Linder 2004). Second, there is a lack of local capacity to properly monitor compliance with the negotiation process and the outcome since the process is treated as confidential by the parties involved (Ayine 2008). Moreover, other scholars have argued that collaborative forest management arrangements in Ghana have been used as conduits to implement the main objective of the Forestry Commission, that is, the management of the forest (Asare and Nassah 2012; Marfo 2009). Therefore, the SRA process is just a symbolic process, but the actual interest lies in the timber concession.

In order to appreciate the entry point of customary and elected local government authorities in the SRA, it is important to understand their sources of legitimacy. Ghana is politically and administratively divided into a hierarchy of regions, districts and electoral areas. All the communities form part of a particular electoral area, which forms part of a particular district and then a particular region. At the base of the structure is the Unit Committee headed by the Assembly member, an elected body. The Unit Committee structure consists of elected and appointed members. The Assembly member and members of the Unit committee represent the electoral area, and they are expected to provide organized representation mechanisms and ensure transparency and participation of the local population in national agendas. Parallel to the local government structure is a constitutionally recognized customary system which recognizes customary authorities (mainly chiefs) who are custodians of communal lands to represent their communities in land-related issues. A typical customary system in Southern Ghana is made up of a hierarchy consisting of the paramount chief (*Omanhene*), divisional chief (*Ohene or Apakanhene*) and the village chief (*Odikro*). The village chief is a caretaker chief who is usually appointed by a divisional/paramount chief. The divisional chief who occupies a stool with its own stool land is higher in status than the village chief but lower in status than the paramount chief. All the levels of chiefs have councils of elders who aid in administrative functions and advise the chief on developmental issues.

Research Setting and Methods

The study was conducted in two communities, Achichire and Anakum, in Wassa-Amenfi West District, Western Region of Ghana (Fig. 1). Wassa-Amenfi West District was chosen to complement previous studies on SRA that occurred mostly in the Ashanti and Eastern regions such as Offinso, Juaso and Akim Abuakwa Traditional area (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001, 2004). The study communities were purposively selected due to the availability of concluded agreements and ease of access to the area. The Achichire community has concluded several SRAs in the past whereas the Anakum community had concluded two agreements at the time of the research. At Anakum, only one documented agreement was obtained whereas at Achichire four cases were obtained from which one was randomly selected. At Achichire, the Agreement was concluded with Swiss Lumber Co. Ltd, and at Anakum, the Agreement was concluded with Abaawa Hagar Enterprise. Achichire and Anakum have a population of about 3,500 and 4,000 respectively. Both have elementary schools, a clinic, a bore-hole water facility, and electricity.

Figure 1: Map of Ghana showing the location of the Achichire and Anakum communities in Wassa Amenfi West District



The leadership composition is similar in the two communities with the customary and the elected local government structures being the dominant representative bodies and the scale of activities of youth and religious leaders being minor. The customary system comprises the head chiefs with divisional chief status and their council of elders. The head chiefs inherited their position whereas the elders were appointed by the head chiefs in consultation with their family members. Elected structures consist of the Assembly members, Unit committee and the Development committee members. Members of the Assembly and the Unit committee were elected to a four-year term of office through universal adult suffrage. All the adults in the communities forming part of the same electoral area participated in the election. On the other hand, members of the Development committee were locally elected by adults in the individual communities. Community governance is the duty of the existing authorities with each leader having a specific role and the chiefs playing active roles in all the developmental projects. The activities of the customary structure are prominent in the areas of conflict resolution, serving as first contacts to the community, and for consent and permission for implementing projects. As custodians of communal lands, the local population reports land-related issues to the chief. Development projects initiated by the District Assembly are implemented by the Assembly and the Unit committee members. In conducting their duties, the elected structures report the progress of their work to the head chief. Religious leaders and leaders of youth associations handle issues concerning members of their group.

The main social stratification is that of the native-migrant status as migrants are perceived as subjects by the customary structure. Migrants of various ethnicities live in the area and are involved in cocoa farming, the main economic activity in the area. With the natives being Wassa-Amenfi, dominant migrant groups include the Akuapim, Akyem, Asante-Akyem, Larteh, Gurushi, and Moshi. Farmland, the main economic resource, belongs to the natives and is the property of the lineage. Lineages have elders who administer land to family members who want to farm. Besides engaging in cocoa farming, natives keep subsistence farms to feed themselves and their families. Portions of family lands may be leased to either migrants or non-family members for seasonal farming but they are not usually sold to them. Migrants who work on leased lands pay for using the land in either a monetary form or through a share-cropping arrangement with the landowner. Besides that payment, migrant farmers also make a payment to the head chief on a yearly basis in the form of 'donations'. As a caretaker, when a migrant establishes cocoa plantation on leased land and chooses to leave the community, the plantation reverts to the native family land owners. Migrants report their farm activities on leased land to the original owner and it is the original owner who has the absolute right to the land.

Sampling Strategy, Data Collection and Analysis

The study targeted four categories of people for data collection: community leaders, community members, timber contractors, and officiating authorities of the SRA intervention (Table 1). Efforts were made to obtain native and migrant respondents when sampling community members. This is because there were several migrants in the study communities and the SRA package covers all the inhabitants of the affected areas which includes both natives and migrants. Within each community the researcher interviewed the chief and his council of elders, current and past Assembly members and Unit committee members. Leaders who were not interviewed had either moved away from the communities or were not available for interview. The timber contractors who concluded the SRA agreements with the communities, Swiss Lumber Co. Ltd and Abaawa Hagar Enterprise, and officials from Asankragwa Forest Service Division, Asankragwa District Assembly and the Resource Management Support Center were interviewed. The Resource Management Support Center is the institution responsible for the Collaborative Forest Management Program of which the SRA is part. In addition, 80 residents from the communities were interviewed (40 natives and 40 migrants). Within each community, 20 natives and 20 migrants were randomly selected (a list of community members was obtained from local leaders). The approach for data collection was mainly ethnography, informal conversation, semi-structured interviews, surveys, and policy and project documents analyses.

Table 1: Category and sample of respondents from the Achichire and Anakum communities

Category of interview	Community	Population (N)	Sample (n)	Mode of selection
District forest officers/ Resource Management Support Center	Asankragwa and Kumasi	5	5	All
Local leaders	Achichire	17	8	Purposive
	Anakum	13	7	Purposive
Timber contractors	Achichire	2	2	All
	Anakum	2	2	All
Local citizens (household heads)	Achichire	1,200	40 (20 natives and 20 migrants)	Random
	Anakum	1,300	40 (20 natives and 20 migrants)	Random

Data collection occurred over a period of six months between 2012 and 2014 with semi-structured questionnaires, interview guides, and survey questions. Interview guides and semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the community representatives (chiefs, assemblymen) and other actors (contractors, the Forestry Commission). Surveys were used to collect data from the community members. The questions were tested and refined in early 2012 after interviewing community members and local leaders at the Achichire community. Prior to the community surveys, the author consulted the assembly member and members of the customary structure before meeting the people. All the members sampled were asked to participate in the study and those who expressed interest were surveyed. The semi-structured questionnaires and interview guides collected data including who represented the people in the SRA process and why, which interests were presented as community needs and why, and how did the leaders account to the people. The surveys collected data on who the communities perceived as their representative(s) and why; which needs the people perceived to be their interests for the SRA, and how the people demanded accountability from the representatives. Data collection was done by the author using the Twi language, a common dialect of the respondents. The author speaks and writes the Twi language fluently. The duration of the interviews and surveys ranged between 30 to 60 minutes. Data were entered and analysed in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistics were mainly descriptive including frequencies.

Responses from community leaders, timber contractors, and officiating authorities of the SRAs were analyzed together and a separate analysis was carried out for respondents in the communities. When analysing responses to 'what' 'who' and 'how' questions, for example to questions such as 'who should represent the community', the answers to the 'bodies' were recorded. The recorded answers were coded and codes that were repeated were added until all the responses had been studied. The study employed content analysis for analysing the 'why' questions but in this case, it combined the observations recorded during the interview and respondents' direct responses to each question to locate the reasoning underlying respondents' responses. When asked the question 'who do you think is appropriate to represent the people and why?', the underlying reasons given to support the preferred representative(s) were sought from the texts. A list of underlying reason(s) was generated for each respondent after systematically reading the responses and observations of all the respondents. The next stage of the analysis looked for common patterns in the underlying reasons provided by respondents and clustered them according to common reasons such as belief that the existing structures should represent the people. The findings were compared and presented in tables and graphs for clarity.

Findings from the Cases

Narrating the Negotiation Process

The negotiation process started with consultation of the head chiefs by officials from the District forest office to make arrangements for the SRA. One official explained the rationale for consulting the chief to be that ‘the chief is the leader of the people and he is the custodian of the communal land that is why his consent is sought’ (E1, 5 April 2012). One timber contractor added that ‘without consulting the chief, harvesting trees from the forest could be described as stealing since the land belongs to the people and he is their leader’ (C1, 13 July 2012). The position of the chief as the customary head of the people and therefore as first contact to visitors has an historical origin in rural settings in Ghana. After the consultation, the chiefs together with their elders and the elected local government structures discussed and listed some possible amenities which they presented to the contractors on the negotiation day. One chief noted that, ‘wisdom is not in one person’s mind so I always consult my elders whenever I have to make any decision concerning the community’ (A1, 2 May 2012). The negotiation occurred between the chiefs, elders, unit committee members, assembly members and the timber contractors. One chief commented that ‘the committee chairman is very active, and they (members of the Unit committee) implement the items we receive from the contractor’ (A1, 2 May 2012). The role of the District forest officials was limited to facilitating the process by helping the representatives and the contractors reach consensus on the list of items and documenting the process.

Leaders Receiving Negotiation Powers and the Reasons for Choice

The SRA process recognized both the elected leaders under the local government system and the customary authorities to negotiate and conclude the agreements on behalf of the people. An official from the District forest office noted that ‘I informed the chief, the assemblyman and the committee chairman to make arrangement for the SRA negotiations and made sure that they were all present for the negotiation’ (E2, 10 April 2012). Prior to the negotiation day, both the elected and customary leaders meet to deliberate on the list of items to propose as the community interests (Table 2). One chief noted that ‘when the forest official informed me about the need for the SRA, I assembled my elders and the Unit Committee chairman to discuss items of interest which we presented on the day of negotiation’ (A1, 2 May 2012). A member of the Unit Committee in one of the communities noted that, ‘the chief asked the contractor to meet us (elected structures and the council of elders) in order for us to collect some benefits for the community’ (B1, 15 January 2013). Preparation for the negotiation was characterized by the gathering of leaders and building of consensus on possible needs to serve as community interests.

Table 2: Number of preparatory meetings prior to the SRA negotiation and participating institutions

Community	Number of preparatory meetings	Number of leaders and institution	Convener
Achichire	1	6 customary leaders, 1 Unit committee member	Achichire chief
Anakum	1	7 customary leaders, 4 Unit committee members	Anakum chief

The analysis of interviews from the SRA officiating officials and a senior policy maker aimed at exploring the rationale behind the composition of community representatives disclosed the two main reasons to be the recognition of already existing structures and belief in traditional conventions. One forest official noted that ‘the assembly and the unit committee members are responsible for handling developmental projects in the communities... the District Assembly and the District forest office works with them often..., some of them are part of our rehabilitation program’ (E3, 10 April 2012). The same reasoning was noted

by one chief; 'the committee chairman is very active, and they (members of the Unit committee) implement the items we receive from the contractor' (A1, 2 May 2012). The elected structure is therefore featured in the SRA process due to their involvement in developmental duties in the communities. As custodians of communal lands, chiefs have historically represented their people on land-related issues. One officiating officer indicated that, 'the chief is the leader of the people and he is the custodian of the communal land, ... as the 'owner' of the land and leader of the people, he is the right person to negotiate for them' (E1, 5 April 2012). Another officiating officer clarified that 'chiefs are not necessarily promoted by the legal framework of the SRA as the sole representatives of the people, but it comes down to weak institutions as communities are weak in representing themselves and the customary structure tends to be a strong institution in doing this job' (E4, 12 June 2012).

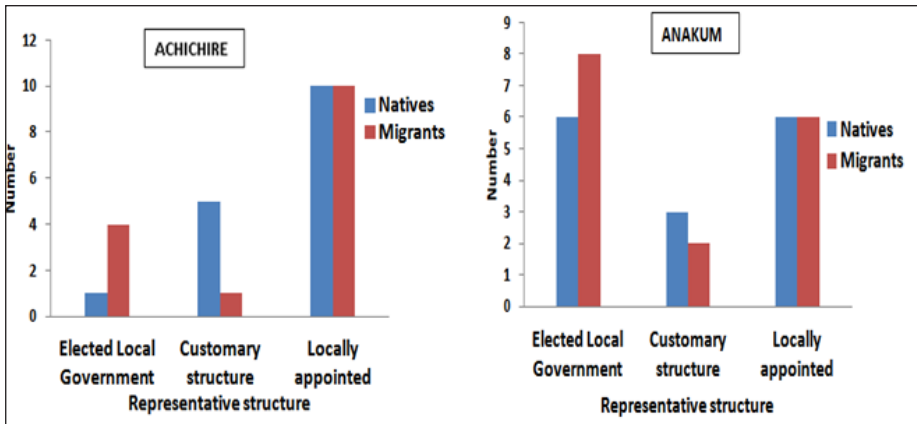
One policy maker explained the motivation behind incorporating both the customary and the elected structures as community representatives to be that,

In order to make the process transparent and balanced, the SRA includes the various representative structures at the community including the Community Forest Committee. In the past, only one particular leader would claim the benefits without the knowledge of the community. We want to avoid problems associated with such situations. The process also ensures that at least three community members witness the process as observers (E4, 12 June 2012).

At Achichire, the chief, his council of elders and the Chairman of the Unit Committee negotiated the interest of the people whilst at Anakum, the chief, his council of elders, the assemblyman and members of the Unit Committee represented the people.

Further analysis explored how the preferred representatives by the communities compared with the actual representative group. Responses from the people indicated various preferences that could be grouped into three categories for clarity of analysis (Fig. 2). The preference for the chief and members of the council of elders was termed the Customary structure. Preference for members under the local government system was termed Elected Local Government. The preference for a locally elected/appointed committee was noted as Locally appointed. At Achichire both natives and migrants tend to agree on their choice for the Locally appointed but differ sharply on the Elected local government and the Customary structure. Migrants prefer the elected authorities more than the Customary structure, but the opposite is the preference for natives. At Anakum, both natives and migrants prefer the Elected local government and the Locally appointed structures.

Figure 2: Representative categories and the proportion of preference by natives and migrants n= 31 for each community (some respondents did not make any selection)



Further analysis revealed that the use of the existing structure motivated the preference for the elected authority. For instance, community members made statements like this about the elected local government structure: ‘it is their work... all development work is handled by them...they are part of the District Assembly and they have been trained for such work ‘ (D1, 4 July 2012). On the other hand, community members prefer the locally appointed structure because they perceive it to be a competent and accountable structure. One community member revealed this about the locally appointed community committee: ‘they are involved in development work in this community and as for me, I think they should do the work because whenever they collect the monthly water fee and funeral dues, they keep them well’ (D3, 2 July 2012). Others hold the view that the locals can demand accountability from the locally appointed group since they perceive them to be ‘ordinary people’ like them. In a focus group discussion comprising of 16 native and migrant farmers at Achichire, the following was noted concerning the locally appointed committee:

Anyone can stand to be appointed into the group, normally those who are less busy contest for the position. Some of the current members had wanted to stand for the Unit Committee (elected local government) seat but were not available during the voting period. If an appointed member squanders our money, we (community members) will sack him. The current leaders are doing their work well unlike those who came before. The account of the monthly water fee and funeral fee they provided was not convincing so we (community members) sacked

them from power. ...we don't allow the assemblyman and the unit committee members to do the work for us because the current assemblyman does not live in this community, and only two Unit committee members live in this community. We (community members) cannot trust them, they may use some of our money to develop their respective villages (D8, 6 February 2014).

It is evident that the interest in the locally appointed body is influenced by their ability to demand accountability from them, and partly by their trust in the structure.

Community Perception about their Collective Interest for the SRA

The people identified various items as their collective interest which should have been negotiated for the SRA. The interests could be put into eight categories for clarity of analysis (Table 3). At Achichire, Communication, Health and Transport were common interests for both natives and migrants whilst at Anakum, the people indicated all the listed interests except for Trade and Security. Unlike Anakum where natives and migrants indicated similar interests, the preference for natives differed to that of migrants at Achichire. Most natives at Achichire preferred Trade, Communication and Health whilst the migrants opted for Energy and Transport.

Table 3: Collective interest identified by natives and migrants (Achichire n=108; Anakum n=120). Respondents were asked to indicate their first three priorities. Interest categories that received more than 10 indications were noted by ** and below 10 indications by *

Interest Category	Achichire		Anakum	
	Native	Migrants	Native	Migrants
Trade	**			
Communication	**	*	**	**
Health	**	*	**	**
Energy		**	*	*
Security		*		
Transport	*	**	**	**
Education		*	*	*
Financial Contribution			*	*

Both natives and migrants provided similar reasons for their choice of needs. For instance, for communication needs, they explained that because there is no telephone service in the communities, relaying information is always a problem. They explained the difficulty of travelling a long distance to provide information to

a relative or friend. On the issue of transportation, they noted that the poor roads discourage commercial vehicle drivers from working in the area, thus constraining their movements.

Interests Presented on behalf of the Community

The list of interests presented as community interests were placed into 8 categories for the purpose of analysis (Table 4). The lists were items that representatives perceived to be the priorities of community members. When asked why the people were not consulted about their specific interest for the agreements, two main reasons were given. First, the representatives claim to share similar needs and concerns with the people since they live in the same communities. As a result, they did not see the need for consulting the people. Secondly, representatives alleged that the people do not participate in community meetings and so calling for a community gathering will still result in the leaders meeting. A comparison of the desired and represented interests showed that some of the expressed interests were reflected in the represented interests. However, at Achichire three desired interests were not represented and at Anakum, two were not represented. Community representatives and SRA officiating officials explained that not all the desired interests could be provided by timber contractors since the negotiating partners have to agree on possible social amenities whose cost must not exceed five per cent of the value of the stumpage fee in consideration. One elder noted that ‘contractors cannot provide us (the community) with telephone service. That is not their work... we (elders) have spoken to the MTN people (telephone service provider) to plant one of their service poles in this community. We hope that they respond to us fast on that’ (A4, 1 July 2012).

Table 4: Represented and desired interests compared

Interest Category	Achichire		Anakum	
	Represented interest	Desired interest	Represented interest	Desired interest
Trade				
Communication				
Health				
Energy				
Security				
Transport				
Education				
Financial Contribution				

Accountability Mechanisms

There were no formal mechanisms for communicating the outcome of the negotiations to the people, though news of the negotiations reached a portion of the population. Representatives noted that the people do not attend community gatherings so they were not motivated to arrange one to convey the negotiation's outcome. Instead, they perceived that since they live in the same locality with the people, they expected them to recognize their activities under the SRA. One elder echoed that '...the people get to know what happens when we (the representatives) implement the outcome of the intervention in the community' (A2, 4 May 2012). With the exception of members of the council of elders and the elected structure inquiring about the SRA processes, none of the 'ordinary' community members made an attempt to influence the process or the outcome of the negotiated agreement. The representatives shared three main reasons for this observation. One, some of the elders have the perception that the people are satisfied with their actions in the sense that the various projects they are undertaking under the SRA meet the exact needs of the people. Two, others hold the view that the locals are more concerned with their livelihood activities and are not interested in community-level interventions. On this, one elder indicated that

...Usually, we organize community meetings outside the chief palace at the community durbar grounds in the morning as early as 6 am but the people don't come for the meeting and no one can force them to come. You see, only few people will come and the rest will either stay home or go to their farms (A3, 2 May 2012).

The third perspective, which was noted mainly by the elected structure, was that 'there are several programs going on in the community and I think the people cannot participate in all of them, they have their cocoa farms and other works to think about' (B2, 4 July 2012).

Without any formal community consultation or feedback provision, some of the people had knowledge of the negotiated agreement and could identify in detail the processes leading to the negotiated agreement and the list of interests presented as community interests. The people who had knowledge of the intervention were either in a leadership position, have occupied a leadership position (that is, the elite) or are related to members in leadership positions. Leaders who participated in the representation process speak about the intervention at their homes to their family members and relatives as they discuss community issues with them. The wife of a former elected local government authority confirms that; 'I don't normally

attend community durbar but my husband tells me everything that goes on over there, he is the one who informed me about the intervention you are describing' (D6, 2 July 2012). It is through these informal discussions that information on the intervention reached the people.

However, none of the people reported having participated in the process or made any attempt to influence the process or the outcome of the negotiated agreement. The main reasons that emerged were lack of knowledge about the SRA scheme, lack of interest in forest-related issues, the view that forest interventions like the SRA has little economic incentive, and mistrust for local leaders. The people had no knowledge of the SRA and thus do not know why to engage, who to engage with, or how to engage in the process. For instance, 'today is the first time I'm hearing about the SRA' was a common statement recited by the people. Though they acknowledged the implementations of SRA projects such as road repairs, they perceived the Ghanaian government to be behind those projects.

Yet still, the few who had knowledge of the intervention were not engaging. They were either not interested in the SRA or felt that their involvement in the process cannot bring about any change in the SRA process and in their economic status. Some community members share the view that though the SRA may enhance community development, yet it does not appeal to their personal economic needs. The narrative of one native farmer was that:

Oh, the contractors come here all the time and we see them with roofing sheets, cements, and chairs... I think they may bring other things, maybe money, but I cannot tell...I am concerned with my farm and my children, I have to pay their school fees so I should think about how to sell my cocoa produce to cater for them (D5, 4 May 2012).

Another perspective which was shared mostly by the youth was echoed by one old migrant that

I was born in this community, we are from Akuapim, and I don't attend community meetings because the leaders won't take anyone's view. ...nobody attends the meeting because nothing can change (D7, 2 July 2012).

Besides these, respect for local culture, fear and lack of knowledge of the rights of the people weakens the capacity of the people to influence SRA decisions. Most migrants could not comment on issues concerning the customary chief for fear of losing farmland or being sacked from the community. Similarly, natives who perceived the leaders as their uncles, fathers and grandfathers could not contest them in public.

Conclusion and Discussions

Conclusion

The study started with the aim of exploring local leaders receiving negotiation powers and to examine the extent to which the representatives responded to the needs of the local population and accounted to them. The evidence indicates that both the customary and the elected local government leaders were recognized by project officials to represent the people. Besides these structures, the local population had other preferences: locally elected or appointed representatives. The records reveal that the representatives did not consult the entire population prior to or after the negotiation process but relied on their knowledge of the needs of the people in negotiating the agreements. Representatives shared the perception that members of the community have similar needs to theirs and through regular day to day interaction with the people, they get to know local priorities. In the absence of democracy, the represented interest reflected to some extent the interests that the local population indicated as their priorities. Means of feedback were weak as there was no public information provision. Only a few privileged people got to know the outcome of the negotiation process, and no sanction mechanisms were applied in the cases. Therefore, the cases under study depicted to some extent responsive representation but were weak in promoting accountable representation. The evidence further indicates that the local population did not engage local authorities or the SRA processes due to lack of incentive and inadequate knowledge of the SRA processes.

Local Discretion and Accountability Relations under the SRA

Theorists explain that to achieve the assumed benefits of decentralization including the promotion of greater participation and responsiveness of governments to local citizens, meaningful powers should be transferred to representative leaders (Bazaara 2006; Ribot 2011). Much scholarly work that has reflected on representative democracy has asserted

that locally accountable local leaders should be the target of these transfers (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Mandondo 2000; Ribot 1999). The debate on who the actual representative local leaders are has long featured in the representation literature and many of the studies on representative democracy have suggested that the representativeness of a local leader can be ascertained only through empirical evidence (Marfo 2001, 2004).

In Africa, Ribot (1996) has noted that village chiefs have been proven to possess the power to influence government policies. Other past studies on chiefs' role in community representation have shown that the customary structure has played a significant role in the processes leading to the representation of community interest (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001, 2004). Ayine (2008) has therefore described chiefs and customary leaders as a powerful constituency in the SRA negotiation and representation processes. The cases in this study revealed that the chiefs and the customary structure played the most vital role and appeared to possess the most influential position because the chiefs served as first contacts, the convener of meetings, regulated the activities of representatives, enjoyed leading roles, and were treated as the central representative body by the timber contractor, SRA officiating officials and the elected local government body. Indeed, the customary structure was the most recognized local interlocutor to receive meaningful powers to respond to. It can therefore be argued that the customary structure existed as the main local authority with intense discretion through the processes. In this case they were able to represent the community interest. However, the customary structure did not promote democracy under the SRAs.

Though the elected local government authorities participated in the negotiation process, their works were regulated by the head chiefs, and their influence was limited. One elected local government leader who reflected on the discretion of the elected local government authorities noted that 'the chief asked me to come and participate in the negotiation of the SRA... I have negotiated several SRAs at Asankragwa and Akropong, it is the chief who sent me to negotiate for the community' (B3 15 January 2013). Having the perception that they are accountable to the head chief, the elected structure undertakes activities in accordance with the directions of the head chief. He further narrated that 'I have been sent so I need to talk well so that when I return, they (chief and elders) will know I did my work well' (B3 15 January 2013). Mensah (1998) outlines that an official who exercises discretion should have the authority to select between several options and freedom to vary standards when necessary. Though the elected authorities were part of the representative body that negotiated the Agreement, the list of items presented as community interests were selected mainly by the customary structure. At Anakum, members of the elected authorities together with the customary structure selected the list of community interests but at Achichire, only the Unit committee chairman was involved in the selection process. Similarly, unlike

Anakum where some members of the Unit committee were involved in the negotiation process, at Achichire the Unit committee chairman was the only elected person present for the negotiation. Therefore, the elected structure has limited space and does not have complete discretion in the representation process since its inception and its works under the SRA processes are largely dictated by the head chief.

Harriss, Stokke and Törnquist (2004) in Ribot (2011:2) reflect that, ‘...the test for democracy is not about the existence of formal democratic rights and institutions, but whether they have real meaning for people’. Such a meaning in local democracy is contingent on whether democratic local institutions have discretionary powers to respond to local priorities (see Ribot 2003, 2008, 2011). However, for the cases in the study the elected leaders did not have complete autonomy in selecting local priorities and negotiating in the interests of the people.

The practice of providing chiefs and traditional authorities with considerable land and resource allocation powers has persisted historically (Kotey *et al.* 1998). Despite questioning the representivity of customary authorities by the study of case studies (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001, 2004; Ribot 1999), the evidence indicates that governments bypass the elected local government structures to support the customary authorities (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Romeo 1996). Kassibo (2002) and Ntsebeza (2004) argue that customary authorities are often not representative, given that they provide less systematic accountability to the general public. The evidence reveals that the chiefs and the council of elders did not employ any mechanism to ensure information dissemination or the engagement of the local population in SRA decision-making. SRA decisions occurred outside the domain of the people. Lutz and Linder (2004) explain that because the position of customary leaders is inherited for life, the possibility to sanction them is limited, therefore restricting their accountability. The data reveals that in the Ghanaian context, factors including local people’s fear of being sanctioned and inadequate knowledge of the SRA processes reduced the local population’s ability to demand accountability from the SRA decision makers.

Representation without Participation

By definition, responsiveness is achieved when leaders meet the needs of their constituents, and from the evidence the articulated interest reflected to some extent some of the local priorities. According to Verba and Nie (1972) and Miller and Stokes (1963), a measure of congruence between the actual services delivered (or decisions taken) and local priorities could indicate some degree of responsiveness. In a negotiation process such as the SRA, there is always the possibility for the timber contractor to reject some of the presented interest. It thus becomes unrealistic to discern the meaning of

the presence or lack of overlap of delivered and desired priorities. Therefore, with some resemblance in the delivered and desired services, it could be noted that there was some degree of responsiveness.

However, the notion of congruence as a measure of responsiveness has been questioned, especially in relation to participatory democracy. For instance, Verba and Nie (1972:304) reflect that ‘just because leaders agree with citizens and that agreement increases as citizens become more active, can we be sure that it is citizen activity that is causing leaders to respond by adopting the priorities of the citizen?’ Evidently in the case of the SRA where the locals are not engaging in the SRA processes and the local authorities, it becomes doubtful to attribute leaders’ behaviour to citizens’ influence, except perhaps if it is occurring through subtle and hard to discern informal processes. Clearly in the absence of accountability mechanisms, other factors including what Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999) describe as ‘public-spirited leaders’ and the nature of the SRA policy framework, which specifies the types of social amenities to be collected (mandates), might explain why leaders were responsive to the constituents’ interest. Significantly, the customary structure under study was perceived to have a crucial responsibility for negotiating the content of the SRA for its constituents. Unlike the royalty payment that goes to the Stool (customary leaders), the representatives acknowledged that the SRA benefit goes to the inhabitants of the Stool land. It might be that following Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999), the ideology of local leaders is committed to these services whether or not they know of local desires that enabled them to be representative. The evidence of customary leaders implementing projects such as education and health facilities, electricity extension, establishment of community centres and traditional palaces under the SRA has also been captured by previous works (Ayine 2008; Marfo 2001; Mayers and Vermeulen 2002).

The inability to know what motivates leaders is particularly important because it is through downward accountability that the benefits of decentralized reforms including popular engagement in natural resource management are expected to be realized (Aggrawal and Ribot 1999; Mandondo 2000). The motivation behind benefit schemes such as the SRA goes beyond just the provision of social benefits to local people to include their active engagement in the sustainable management of forest resources. To some extent, and probably for multiple reasons, the concluded SRAs under this study succeeded in providing social amenities to the people but due to accountability failures, the scheme was weak in engaging the local population in the management of the forest resources. The question remains open as to whether greater accountability, i.e. more democratic representation, would produce greater responsiveness and a more efficient and equitable match between what leaders have to offer and the services people ultimately receive.

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