

Regenerate and preserve the Atewa Forest Reserve

In the eastern region of Ghana, the Atewa Forest is one of the few examples of highland evergreen forest. Designated as a globally significant biodiversity area, yet it is endangered by mining and poaching. Ghanaian civil society and local communities are struggling to preserve their natural resources and conserve the biodiversity of this landscape.

People who are putting pressure on the Atewa Forest are extremely poor. By providing effective support for the sustainable management of their natural resources, deforestation can be halted and they can become defenders of their ancestral territories against mining and poaching.



GHANA

Full cost: 335,000 euros
Duration: 3.5 years
Start: April 2021



A project implemented by:



And supported by:





The site and its biodiversity

The Atewa Forest (17,400 ha), whose name in the local language means "Head of many waters," is located northwest of Accra. It is home to the sources of three major rivers Densu, Birim and Ayensu, which supply nearly five million Ghanaians with drinking water.

The site was designated a forest reserve in 1926 and officially protected by the government in the decades following independence. It became a Globally Significant Biodiversity Area in 1999.

It is a biodiversity hotspot with more than 750 varieties of plants, 250 species of birds and 53 mammals. More than 100 species are listed as threatened or near-threatened on the IUCN red list (two of which are critically endangered). Two species of butterflies and one of frog are endemic to Atewa. In addition, the Crowned Mangabey (*Cercocebus lunulatus*) has recently been observed, making Atewa one of the last natural habitats of this primate.

Major issues

In 2019, Ghanaian authorities began clearing access roads to the top of the

Atewa Forest to allow for bauxite drilling trials without first conducting an environmental impact assessment.

Open-pit mining would irreversibly damage the forest, degrade waterways and endanger already endangered species.

In addition to this legal mining context, there is also the increasing illegal mining activities of *galamseys*, as well as pressure from poaching, illegal logging and unsustainable agricultural activities.

If nothing is done, it is not only the complete destruction of this forest that is looming, but also the increased vulnerability of the surrounding populations.

Committed partners

The NGO **A Rocha Ghana (ARG)** works with communities to develop programs that benefit both local people and environment. These include biodiversity conservation interventions to move towards sustainable management of ecologically important habitats, and community capacity building to address climate change and environmental threats.

ARG has a strong experience in establishing CREMAs (Community Resource Management Areas) on the outskirts of protected areas in Ghana.

ARG is particularly involved in the Atewa Landscape through advocacy to transform this reserve into a National Park and supports local community governance.

The project and the prospects for change

The project aims to ensure sustainable management of the Atewa forest, by and for the benefit of local communities, through the development of alternative income-generating activities and the strengthening of community-based natural resource management organizations.

The objectives of the project are the following:

- Contribute to the development of sustainable economic sectors (certified organic cocoa, Non-Timber Forest Products such as Grains of Paradise or Voacanga) that allow communities to increase their sources of income and protect the Atewa forest and its exceptional biodiversity.
- Strengthen biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resource management through:
 - (1) Restoring degraded areas, rehabilitating former mining areas and the edges of watercourses, reforesting the forest periphery and supporting the development of agroforestry;
 - (2) Strengthening community-based governance structures (CREMA);
 - (3) Establishment of forest patrols and an efficient biomonitoring system.
- Strengthen civil society to sustain their actions for the environment.

Expected results

Biodiversity Conservation

- 50,000 trees planted;
- Mobilize local stakeholders and form a « Landscape Governance Board »;
- Strengthen 2 CREMAs and create a third;
- 3 Conservation Funds Created;
- 100 patrollers trained and using a reliable biomonitoring system;
- 1 environmental awareness book created for school children.

Socio-economic Development

- 12 cooperatives and producers' associations created;
- 300 producers trained in good agricultural practices, including 150 cocoa farmers;
- Construction and equipment of 2 processing and packaging centers for Non-Timber Forest Products (Grains of Paradise and Voacanga);
- Support cocoa organic certification.

