

# Promoting Cultural Traditions, Social Inclusion

## *and Local Community Participation in Environmental Development Schemes*

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### Abstract

The protection of the environment has been at the heart of local communities. The old sages, in most communities creatively fashioned cultural traditions with the goal of conserving the environment while judiciously using its precious resources. It is regrettable that local people and their time-tested cultural practices are neglected in environmental schemes, especially at the consultation and implementation stages. The thrust of the research was to highlight the benefits of incorporating local communities and their cultural traditions in all activities related to the environment using the classic example of the people of Anyinam in Ghana. Focus group discussions and direct observations were the main instrumentations used for soliciting data from the phenomenological study in a qualitative research approach. The study concludes that developmental planners and policy makers must promote the full participation of local communities in environmental schemes to aid in better infrastructure development schemes for the environment.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Traditions, Community Participation, Social Inclusion, Environment, Local People*

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## Introduction

The full incorporation of the ingenuity of local communities and their cultural traditions in environmental development schemes is imperative (Adom 2016a). This need is undergirded by the powerful conservation ethics that imbue the cultural traditions and the environmental wisdom of local people, especially the elderly sages in the society who through the narration of numerous proverbs and other wise sayings campaigned for the conservation of the environment and its resources (Adom 2016b). A rigorous analysis of the cultural traditions showcases the strong commitment of local communities to the promotion of positive schemes for enhancing the sustainability of the environment and its resources. Due to the significant, but often neglected contribution of local communities and their cultural practices to environmental protection, Kehinde (2013) advises developmental planners and policy makers that, to achieve optimum results in environmental development schemes, there will be the need for them to ensure the full and equal local community participation in the decision making and planning processes of the environment. Recent studies on environmental development have shown that the social inclusion and full local community participation are the strongest predictor of successful environmental development schemes (Infield and Mugisha 2013). For instance, Nelson and Chomitz (2011) critically examined and compared the conventional protected areas and community conserved areas and realized that the community conserved areas were less prone to any form of environmental abuse such as fire outbreaks because of the vigilance of all society members.

The truism of the matter is that the success of any form of the environmental development scheme can only thrive via the concerted efforts of all factions of the society (Schultz 2002). Thus, the collective and communal spirit evident in local communities has been the secret behind the great successes of their environmental development schemes. Hawkes (2003) corroborates that unless modern societies learn to develop a culture that engages all its citizens, that embraces and cherishes all its members, including the local communities, no amount of environmental policies and schemes can be successful. This is justifiable because when project managers and developers of environmental project partner with communities and ensures fair social inclusion, it results in greater public support and their massive involvement in the materializing of the programs for better environmental protection (United States Environmental Protection Agency 2002). Craig (1995) concurs that community participation and social inclusion give the community a voice which eventually leads to better quality decision-making and planning of programs that are more closely linked to the needs of the people. Thus, the empowerment of the local communities through full participation and social inclusion results in productive citizens who ensure the full implementation of planned environmental development schemes (UNDP 2007).

Aside from the commitment of local communities to the course of environmental protection and sustainability, they have rich cultural traditions that are embedded with the diverse environmental ethos that offers a lasting platform for every environmental development scheme. Infield and Mugisha (2013) believe that integrating cultural traditions into the planning and management of the environ-

ment will provide practical lessons to address current and future challenges of the environment and its resources. Adom, Kquofi and Asante (2016), mention of the high impact of cultural traditions such as cosmological belief systems, taboos, myths and folklores in the sustenance of the environment in the face of modernity. Likewise, Adom (2016c) and Avenorgbo (2008) reveal festival commemoration as an indirect means of promoting environmental development and conservation via the environmental sanitation programs and tree planting exercises believed to be a requirement for most of the festival organisation in local communities. Indeed, the practicability of these cultural practices even in this modern generation where the environment has been abused at an abysmal rate cannot be overemphasized. Of course, a culture-led environmental development program that ensures greater social inclusiveness and rootedness, resilience and innovation of local communities is proven as highly successful (UNESCO 2012).

The environmental state of the Anyinam town in the Ashanti region of Ghana clearly pictures the full participation of local community members, fair social inclusion and implementation of cultural traditions in promoting the development of the environment. As a result, negative environmental challenges such as drought, bush fires and the like have not been recorded in the township. The study was thus carried out to ascertain how the traditional council of the town ensures the full participation and social inclusion of all community members toward a consensus objective of environmental development. Also, the study sought to find out the cultural traditions and its successful implementation procedures that have been the bedrock to the success in all the environmental development projects in the Anyinam town. Moreover, their classic example is to enlighten the world, especially development planners and policy makers of the great essence of ensuring the promotion of cultural traditions, full community participation and social inclusion in environmental development schemes.

### **Cultural Traditions in Environmental Development**

Culture lends itself to many interpretations. Soini and Dessein (2016) view culture as the customs, arts and social interactions of a particular social group. These customs of the people include the shared knowledge, beliefs, values and norms which are transmitted usually with some modifications from one generation to the other via socialization procedures (Avenorgbo 2008). In a general sense, culture is viewed as the totality of a society's distinctive idea, beliefs, knowledge and practices (Tansey and O'Riordan 1999) or the accepted ways a community makes sense of the world around them. The cultural traditions are progressive, dynamic and not static (Willemsen 1992). The cultural traditions have evolved over time through adaptive processes (Berkes 2012). This debunks the assertions made by some early scholars that cultural traditions are static and lack of change syndrome (Finnegan, 1991). However, the cultural traditions do have a normative element and as such exerts a conservative force on developmental change (Rigsby 2006). It is this conservative element that links the past (ancestors) generation to the present (living) and the unborn (future) generations. Therefore, though cultural traditions inherited from the forebears can change in content, the change does not generally affect the spirit or philosophical implications that undergird them.

These cultural traditions are rich in the developmental ethos because they are products of countless years of experience borne out of informal experimentations, dynamic insight and skills of the earlier generations of humankind (Warren 1991). Moreover, they have stood the test of time and are reliable and locally oriented (Mapira and Mazambara 2013). Therefore, when they are applied to modern developmental schemes like the environment, they achieve great successes.

The cultural traditions have a great affinity with environmental protection. The International Institute for Environment and Development (1992) concurs that the cultural traditions in most African societies are environmentally friendly and sustainable and have contributed immensely to nature conservation and sustainability. These cultural traditions such as taboos, festivals, myths, folklores, sacred groves, totems and cosmological belief systems have been resilient and strong enough to prevent habitat and species destruction. Cultural beliefs and traditions aids in avoiding resource exploitation (UNESCO and UNEP 2013). The significant roles that these cultural traditions play in environmental protection is due to the wisdom of the forebears that is latent in them (Rigsby 2006). The reasons behind the institution of the numerous cultural traditions by the intelligent forebears were indirectly to conserve the environment and its precious biodiversity resources (Avenorgbo 2008). The sorry state of Ghana's environment coupled with the dwindling numbers of her rich biodiversity resources is attributed to the rejection and abandonment of the cultural traditions due to excessive influence of Western traditions (Adom 2016d). Thus, there is a call for project managers and planners of environmental development schemes to consider the worth of these cultural traditions of local communities and incorporate them fully into the programs and initiatives for the environment (Adom 2016a; Awuah-Nyamekye 2013).

### **Community Participation and Social Inclusion in Environmental Development**

The term 'community' has been defined and described by many authors. For instance, Breuer (2002) describes it as a group of people within the same geographical confines and/or with similar interests, identity or interaction. Wates (2000) in a similar description refers to the term 'community' as people within the same geographical area coming together to achieve a common objective even though individually, they may have certain differences. These two definitions reiterate the main concept of community as a people defined by a set geographical boundary that joins forces to work hard in achieving an agreed popular goal irrespective of personal viewpoints. The term is gleamed with the ideology that the larger consensus decision and choice are in the best interests of the entire society and all society members must rally behind and support it wholeheartedly.

On the other hand, the term 'participation' has always been rightfully explained by many authors as the voluntary involvement of all stakeholders in developmental issues. The World Bank (1996) defines participation as 'a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect them.' Thus, local people who are stakeholders in developmental issues are by this definition and description of the term 'participation' required to partner with project managers and policy makers in the planning and

implementation of policies of development in their local communities and nations as a whole. This has not been the case in many instances. This is because most of the local communities are sidelined in decisions of development in local communities. This may have accounted for Breuer's definition of participation as the process of enabling people to be actively and genuinely involved in making decisions on development as well as the planning, formulation and implementation of policies affecting them.

Sometimes developers and project managers play lip service that local people must be involved in decision making but they are just merely consulted and sometimes their views are thrown off board. Thus, the term 'local community participation' ensued calling for the factorization of local people with a higher degree of power to have a greater or equal share in developmental issues with development planners. Njunwa (2010) explains community participation as the process of regarding local people as potential and equal partners in development processes with development collaborates. He justifies Pretty et al. (1995) use of the term 'interactive participation' as the best form of participation that ensures that community members partner in joint analyses and plans in the use of resources in development. Other meager forms of participation that require less community involvement such as manipulative, consultative and functional forms of participation tagged as the lower forms of participations are not the thrust of this research and as such will not be discussed. However, the usage of the term 'community participation' as an end, requiring the empowerment of local communities to fully take decisions and/or have greater part in decisions will be employed in this discussion. The researcher, thus, puts forward this working definition for local community participation as the empowerment and giving of greater power to local communities, promoting their full partnering in developmental schemes with donor agencies and development planners from its inception that is planning to its implementation stages while utilizing the creative local traditional knowledge evident in their cultural traditions in all developmental issues affecting them directly and/or indirectly. This working definition prioritizes the massive involvement of local people and their knowledge systems in development schemes.

There is also the need for ensuring that the involvement and empowerment of the local people would not be in the preserve of the advantaged members of the local communities such as traditional authorities, elders, and the more privileged. This has been the case in most local communities where the less advantaged and marginalized in the society, including the poor, the aged, the disabled, women, and children are ignored and their views abrogated in developmental issues. This brings to the fore the term 'social inclusion'. Westfall (2010) explains that social inclusion involves the society valuing all its citizens irrespective of their gender, age or status in the society and enabling their full participation in developmental issues in the society. This is crucial because these often marginalized members of the society are proud members who are directly affected by any development scheme. They are required to also implement the agreed policies. The marginalized in the society can equally contribute meaningfully to decisions regarding the environment which, when implemented, could lead to successful achievements in the society. The Charity Commission (2010) suggested that social inclusion aids in

the promotion of equality of opportunities for the often neglected and marginalized members in the society. This is keen in ensuring the maximization of development as well as the benefits all in the society gain from developmental schemes. World Bank (2013) and Silver (2015) believe that social inclusion would promote shared prosperity in the society with the poor and marginalized, promoting democracy in the society.

The full participation of local communities and the social inclusion of all members of the society deliver numerous benefits in the promulgation of environmental development schemes and as such must be enabled and promoted. Njunwa (2010) contends that it ensures the promotion of the bottom-up approach that proposes for all members of the society to share their views in a democratic fashion and contribute to the decision making processes regarding how to improve the state of the environment. This leads to better, appropriate and more sustainable decisions (Breuer 2002). The full involvement of every faction of the community in environmental development planning makes everyone in the society responsive and accountable to ensuring that humane practices that enhances the environment and deliver more benefits to the society in its health and economy are undertaken. Craig (1995) adds that full local community participation and social inclusion results in an improved local level communication system between developers and the community. It opens the tenets of information such that ill activities on the environment by any person could be easily relayed to the responsible leadership for appropriate steps to be undertaken to arrest them promptly. More importantly, it gives local community members a sense of ownership to the environmental development scheme and as such deepens the resolve of every member of the society to make the scheme work (Breuer 2002). This is true because when people are not involved in developmental projects, they are likely to oppose or boycott their implementation (Rowe and Frewer 2000). Mostly, such environmental development projects, stepped in local communities are abandoned after project officers leave the local communities. Thus, for a sustainable and continuity of the developmental agenda regarding the environment in local communities, Njunwa (2010) opines that the key is in the promotion of the full participation and social inclusion of all members of local communities.

### Methodology

The researcher carried out a social and cultural oriented phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln 1994) that delves into the significant roles that cultural traditions, social inclusion and local community participation play in environmental development roles and as such adopted the qualitative research approach. Creswell (2009) adds that the qualitative approach is chosen by researchers who seek to find an understanding and description of phenomena from the angle of participants who have experienced it. The researcher wanted to glean the comprehension on how cultural traditions, and social inclusion and local community participation has aided in the smooth undertaking of environmental development programs from the perspective of the residents in the Anyinam town.

The phenomenology study method was employed for the study. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describes this method as using varied data collecting procedures in



generating data from the perspectives of participants who have experienced the phenomena. This is aimed at gaining a richer interpretation of the phenomena from an insider's perspective. The classic example of the residents in Anyinam in the implementation of cultural traditions and the quintessential roles of social inclusion and local community participation in promoting positive environmental development schemes is exemplary and as such merited rigorous analysis. The phenomenological study approach was seen as the best research method that could yield 'thick' data regarding their approaches to environmental development. Focus Group Discussion interviews, consisting of five (5) elders in the traditional council, Eight (8) elderly members and Six (6) youth of the Anyinam town that lasted for more than one hour for each group were conducted by the researcher. In-depth personal interviews with the Chief of Anyinam and the Chief Linguist of Otumfuo Osei Tutu II were also conducted. Personal interviews were conducted with the chief and chief linguist because of their special positions that they occupy in the society and as such must be accorded the needed respect by treating their inquiry personally. Also, they may not have willingly disclosed sensitive information to the researcher and as such holding a private interview was seen as the most appropriate. The respondents were purposively sampled by the researcher because of their expertise in aiding in obtaining the required data for the study. The focus group discussion interview was adopted by the researcher because it afforded him to generate greater information from the participants in the cohort. This is because some participants recalled greater detail in the group interview format (Pope et al. 2000). A semi-structured interview guide was used in conducting the interviews because it allowed flexibility in the framing of ancillary questions as and when it became necessary all in the quest of generating deeper interpretation of the phenomena under study (Schuh and Upcraft 2001). In addition, direct observations of the promulgation of environmental activities that implements cultural traditions, social inclusion and local communication participation were undertaken by the researcher. This assisted the researcher in gaining first hand information (Kumekpor 2002) on how the residents of Anyinam utilized cultural traditions in environmental activities and included all members of the society in environmental protection activities.

The obtained data were analyzed and interpreted using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach. In this analytical method, the researcher immerses himself into the participants' perspective to get a sense or generate a deeper interpretation of the experience studied while highlighting analyzing points by heavily on individual quotations of respondents (Fade 2004). Smith and Osborn (2008) opine that the interpretative phenomenological analysis is a dual interpretation process. The researcher makes meaning of the world of the participants and then tries very hard to decode the responses of participants while making sense of the participants' meaning making. The researcher perused the collected data severally to immerse himself in the data. The data were then patiently transformed into emergent themes. Relationships in the strands of data were sought and themes with similar interpretations were made. The general portrait from the data was finally written in a coherent narrative report.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the presentation of the findings of the study and the various emergent themes that were developed through the implementation of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

### The History and Formation of the Anyinam Township

The name of the Anyinam town is etymologically traced to the local name for Ceiba (*Ceiba Pentandra*) Onyina tree. The town earned its name due to the abundance of this flora species in the area. The plural *Anyinam* literally means 'a place of several *Onyina* trees'. The preservation of the history of the town is dear to the hearts of the citizens of this town. As such, the traditional council through local community participation ensures that they conserve the Ceiba species in the town to maintain the cultural essence of its name. The town is not famed just because of the rich Ceiba but also as a result of the town being the birthplace of the first king of the Asante kingdom who is credited to be the founder of the great kingdom, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I (Adom, 2016c). This glorious past king is said to have united the seven clans that formed the Asante kingdom. Thus, as a unifier and an advocate for communalism, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I always maintained the inclusion and participation of all members of the society in deliberations of development. This communalism culture has been carefully preserved and mimicked by the current generation of residents in Anyinam. This accounts for the unity and oneness among the people. They also believe that doing things in unison would attract the blessings of the spirits and ancestors. The town is located near Kokofu in the Ashanti region of Ghana under the Bekwai Municipality in the Amansie East District. The forest tract where the king's mother sat and delivered him under one of the *Onyina* trees has been set aside as a sacred forest where the biodiversity resources in it are treated sacrosanct and as such are not abused in any way. This forest tract is called *Kwantakese* or *Tene Abasa ho* sacred grove. It is called *Kwantakese* because the pathway is said to be great. Oral tradition has it that her mother made several promises to the trees and water bodies to assist her reach a safe destination for the delivery of the child, hence the name. On the other hand, the sacred grove is also rightfully called *Tene Abasa ho* (Stretching the shoulders) due to her mother stretching her arms to hold the branches of trees for strength to endure the painful birth pangs she was going through.

Also, the town is famed for another account. It is privileged to have one of their community members appointed as one of the twelve powerful linguists that serve the great Asante king, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II. He is a living repository of the rich cultural heritage of the Asantes of Ghana. Many people tour the town especially during the iconic *Opemso* festival used in commemorating the birth of the first Asantehene. Also, the *Kwantakese* sacred grove is a potential ecotourism site and is yet to be developed as such. The town is characterized by strong community bond with high moral values especially in relation to environmental protection. The traditional council and elders in the community are very vibrant in their attempts to maintain a high moral standard in the small community, such as spearheading environmental sanitation and tree planting activities. Though the town is not rich in terms of modern social amenities, the community members live in peace and



have good health as a result of their exemplary local community participation, social inclusion and utilization of cultural traditions in addressing societal problems such as environmental degradation.

### **Cultural Traditions in Anyinam That Promotes Environmental Development Schemes**

The environmental schemes of Anyinam are regulated by several cultural traditions. These include myths, folklores, sacred grove establishment, taboo systems, the deifying of biodiversity resources, maintenance of place and historical identity, festival commemoration and cultural education of the youth. These cultural traditions have maintained and ensured the sustainability of their environment and its rich resources.

#### **Institution of Sacred Groves (Kwantakese Sacred Grove)**

The town has a gazette tract of forest that is rich with rare biodiversity species both flora and fauna species. The people hold an ancient myth surrounding the birth of the first Asantehene who is affectionately called *Opemso* (The Great One). One elderly man in the traditional court told the researcher that *'Since the place was the divine space where the great Asantehene Osei Tutu I was born, the forest must not in any way be abused and/or its resources destroyed.'* This sacred grove known as Kwantakese sacred grove has several stories surrounding it. It is believed to be stocked with spiritual beings who constantly reside in the forest tract. As abodes of the ancestors, the place and its rich resources are not to be taken. The place is not supposed to be entered. Entry into the grove is done by only the Asantehene, the Kokofuhene, Chief Linguists and traditional priests who enter the place barefooted to perform libation and offer sacrifices to the spirits of the ancestors. The chief linguist disclosed to the researcher that *'If anyone who is not supposed to enter the sacred place does so, s/he will not return again. Even those who do so out of sheer ignorance are punished with blindness or deafness.'* Various stories narrated and believed by the people serve as traditional checks to curtail anyone from entering the gazette area to even pick any of the biodiversity resources in the reserve. One woman narrated a true life story of two hunters from Bekwai, a town in the Ashanti region of Ghana who entered the sacred grove to hunt. The chief hunter who narrated the ordeal they went through told the then traditional court, as told by the respondent, *'After running after a big grass cutter we spotted for two hours, we finally caught it alive when it was lying close to a certain tree. As soon as I laid my hand on it, the place suddenly turned into darkness. We heard strange noises and got really afraid. I left the grass cutter to go its way and the place returned to its normal day-time. We hurriedly ran out of the place. After his narration, when he was further interrogated, he couldn't speak again and the same happened to his colleague.'* Residents know these stories of how vengeful the gods and ancestors are and the swift and irrevocable punishments they give to those who enter the grove illegally. Parents and family heads narrate them to warn their wards and lineage members not to enter the place for any reason or whatsoever. This has maintained the place till date.

Moreover, huge fines in the form of money and scarce sacrificial items are paid by the culprit and their family to the traditional authorities so that the angered gods

and ancestors could be propitiated by the traditional priest. One of the elders told the researcher that *‘The culprit who faces the wrath of the ruling Asantehene, is asked to pay a huge monetary sum which sometimes require the selling of all the possessions of his entire family. He also purchases some sheep, schnapps, cowries, and other sacrificial items which are sometimes difficult to come by to be used for the sacrificial offering.’* Failure to do this would result in the successive death of family members in the lineage of the culprit. Thus, the family head and the elders in the culprit’s family do everything humanly possible to provide the items. Also, every family does well to intensify the cultural training of their members regarding the need to leave the sacred grove intact and free from any kind of abuse. In addition, no family within the Asante kingdom would want to be a recipient of the anger of the most powerful ruler Asantehene as was disclosed to the researcher by the elders in the focus group discussions. The findings agree with the views of Taringa (2006) and Hughes and Chadran (1998) who highlighted that spiritual and monetary sanctions have helped in monitoring most sacred groves.



Figure 1. Entrance to the Kwantakese/ Tene Abasa Ho Sacred Grove at Anyinam (Source: Photographed by the author).

### **Festival Commemoration (Opemso) Festival)**

The small town of Anyinam is famed because of the place being the birthplace of the first Asantehene. As a result, every year, the *Opemso* festival is commemorated by the people to remember the iconic event in the history of the people. During the festival observance, most of the practices and events are carried out in the sacred grove as well as some popular river bodies where the mother of the great king gained strength and favor to aid her safely deliver the rescuer of the Asante kingdom, Otumfuo Osei Tutu I. Thus, the river bodies as well as the Kwantakese sacred grove, where the sacrificial offerings are made every year, are protected from all kinds of abuse, keeping it away from any form of adulteration.

Particular indigenous flora species like the *Ahomakyem* which the first king's mother held in her hands on the eve of her birth pangs for strength play significant roles in the festival observance. Owing to this, the flora species is not to be abused or wantonly destroyed. Ensuring its sustainability and conservation is at the hearts of the members of the traditional council. One elder told the researcher, *'It will be a great disgrace to us as custodians of the traditions of our ancestors to commemorate the festival without the use of the Ahomakyem. Therefore, we have instituted various laws and taboos to regulate and maintain its sustainable use.'* Particular forests tracts and trees that are part of the festival celebration have been conserved and preserved as a result of the event.

As part of the festival celebration, the entire community engages in a weeklong tree planting exercise to make the community green as the ancestors left it in their care. Also, massive sweeping and sanitation exercises are carried out in all the nooks and crannies of the community to maintain cleanliness. This is seen by the people as a display of respect to the ancestors and a sure means of gaining their approval as well as blessings. Most of the elderly respondents happily and quite excitingly told the researcher that *'All of us, even on our limping legs and feeble strength, participate in the tree planting and sanitation exercises because we know our forebears are coming to visit us, to bestow upon us a blessing and a seal of approval after our physical passing.'* Awuah-Nyamekye (2013) noted similar cleaning and sanitation exercises when the people of Brekum in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana were celebrating the *Yerepra Yare* (Sweeping diseases) festival. Thus, indirectly, the festival observance and its associated religious beliefs help in improving the state of the environment in the vicinity

### Deifying of Natural Resources

The people of Anyinam have a culture of deifying every natural resource in their vicinity. For instance, every river, mountain, big tree and others are associated with particular deities. This is borne out of their belief in animism and nature worship or reverence. They believe that every natural resource is inhabited by a spiritual being or deity who must be respected. This was largely seen in the focus group discussions among the elderly members who recounted histories that led to the naming of the five major river bodies in the town, namely *Supan, Akoko-nko-adwae, Kaakawere, Poto and Nunkufia*. They said *'Before our ancestors settled this area, they combed the entire jurisdiction for various river bodies so that they could propitiate to the deities that reside in them for their favour and support. Usually after the sacrificial propitiation with palm wine which was accepted by every deity, the deity revealed himself/herself to the people. S/he pledges his/her support to us only if we heed to his statues and taboos which s/he discloses to us. That is what happened we got to know the names of all the river deities in our town.'*

The purity of the river bodies is perpetually maintained by the people as the researcher noticed through direct observations. Bad practices like fishing with poisonous chemicals, defecating near the water bodies, bathing in the rivers as well as pouring of effluents from homes and small enterprises into river bodies

are not engaged in by community members. This is due to the fear that it would anger the spirit believed to reside in the river which may be catastrophic. One respondent mentioned that the punishments could be instant death, madness or blindness. Sometimes, the river deity can even decide to dry up its river so that the community would not enjoy its services any longer. Such was the case of a narration told by the Anyinam chief. He said *'A certain woman abused one of the taboos of a river deity by sending black coal pot to fetch water from the stream. The woman, though, was reported to the traditional court, was spared out of favouritism because of her relations with one of the members in the traditional court. After three days of going unpunished, the river surprisingly dried up. The woman also died some few weeks after the incident through some mysterious ailments.'* The incident, according to the respondent, continues to be a warning to the current traditional court not to bow down to anyone who abuses any of the cultural traditions of their forebears. The deifying of the river bodies has ensured the purity of the water that is drunk by the people and this accounts for the minimal recording of waterborne diseases in the area. If it was not for the deifying of their major river bodies, the outbreak and percentages of waterborne diseases affecting the people would have been high due to the absence of potable water from the water and sewerage companies. The deifying of rivers noted by the researcher resonate with the views of Boamah (2015) when he cited some rivers in Ghana like River Pra and Oda as revered by the people due to their powers, thus, helping in their sustenance.

There are some big Onyina (Ceiba) trees within the vicinity of Anyinam that are seen by the people as possessing spirits and as such they are not abused. Specific arrangements are made by the traditional council to sweep the surroundings of these deified trees to keep them always in a tidy condition. The researcher observed some eggs and other sacrificial offerings at the roots or base of the trees. The periodic sacrifices offered to these trees under the full glare of society members, including the youth have instilled fear in them not to cut them down. Thus, residents of Anyinam will not in any way, under any circumstance, wantonly destroy anything in nature due to the belief in animism and the deifying of natural resources. Ecologically, the positioning of those trees in strategic places in the township protects residents and their property from any potential storms. The greening of their environment has protected the people and their farms from bush fires and other negative implications of the environment.

### **Maintenance of Place and Historical Identity**

The community earned its name as a result of the abundance of the Onyina (Ceiba) trees in the area. Thus, to maintain the place and historical identity, the traditional authorities and the elderly members in the society, they have put forth stringent measures in the form of taboos and by-laws to curtail the wanton destruction of the Ceiba species in the environment. The chief of Anyinam disclosed the sustainability strategy adopted by the traditional council. He said *'We have adopted the nursing of the seedlings of the indigenous plants, especially, Onyina which is our historic and place identity flora species.'* This nursing of seedlings coupled with

tree planting exercises has aided in sustaining the *Onyina* trees in the area. The elders in particular, were so passionate about maintaining the place and historical identity through the maintenance and abundance of the *Onyina* trees. One of the elders asked a rhetorical question in the focus group discussion that *'How will our ancestors feel in the spiritual world when we destroy all the Onyina trees in our environment that earned this settlement they tirelessly built?'* This response indicates the association of the place identity of Anyinam with the pleasing of the ancestors. The great fear of the elders regarding the punishment they will face after their physical passing is very prevalent in Anyinam. This was seen in a narration shared by the elders. They told the researcher, while sounding quite serious as was seen in their facial expressions and the tone of their voice that *'If we don't ensure that the cultural traditions handed down to us by the forebears are meticulously followed and implemented, we will not be welcomed favorably into the metaphysical world. We will not even be offered a seat as guests in the metaphysical world!'* Therefore, they strive very hard to maintain the abundance of the *Onyina* flora species in the environment.

### Cultural Education of The Youth

The traditional council in Anyinam has instituted weekly meetings with the community where sections of the meeting are used for cultural education of the youth concerning the cultural practices, taboos and other relevant areas on culture. These meetings are convened at the forecourt of the Chief's palace during evenings as well as on taboo days thus, Tuesdays when no one is supposed to go to work whether farming or hunting. Family heads (Abusuapanyin) and the elders in the society use narrations such as myths, folklores and proverbs to instruct the youth on their cultural heritage, moral chastity and the need to ensure strict obedience to the laws and taboos in the community. The chief linguist highlighted the essence of this cultural education as *'instilling reverential fear in the youth concerning the ancestors and spirits while bolstering their respect for the elders and the traditional council.'* Therefore, the youth when reprimanded on issues heed to the advice of the elders. They value the orders of the elders and the traditional council. This has brought unity and understanding amongst all the factions of the community. More importantly, it has helped the youth in amassing knowledge on the culture of the people. As a result, they humbly follow the precepts laid down by the ancestors.

However, the members of the traditional council were worried that due to the formal education received by some youth in the vicinity, they do not sometimes partake of the cultural training since some of them are living in boarding schools. When the researcher inquired from them other avenues that could be tapped to carry out the cultural training, the majority of the elders interviewed suggested that *'The schools must intensify cultural training by employing cultural experts (Nananom) who are the elders in the various communities as resource persons in schools to help the youth in grasping the knowledge of our cultural traditions and practices.'* This was seen as imperative for the youth whose perceptive powers are seen as dulled by Western culture and entertainment mostly featured on Television programs and in formal educational institutions. Their suggestion concurs with Ormsby (2013), Awuah-Nyamekye (2013) and Gadzekpo (2013) that the curriculum in schools must be



designed to factorize cultural education including reverence for the ancestors and observance of traditional institutions like taboo systems.

### Institution of Taboo Systems

Taboos remain the main tools for prohibiting any inhumane practices toward the environment and its resources in Anyinam. Some of the taboos are associated with the deified resources in nature as well as other acts that are believed to invoke the curses of the ancestors. These taboos were seen as helping in the promotion of environmental schemes that protected the environment and its resources. The people of Anyinam hold a taboo that frowns on any form of disrespect towards the elderly in the community. One of the youths interviewed by the researcher said that *‘The elders are sitting in the seat of the ancestors and must always be respected and listened to. Failure would incur the wrath of the gods and ancestors.’* Therefore, any youth who does not listen to the elders and exhibit any kind of rude behaviour towards them is punished. As a result of this taboo, the elders have high respect and authority. Their words, advice, instruction and orders are seen as the words of the gods and ancestors. The youth highly comports themselves very well and listen to the elders. Thus, when environmental programs are drawn by the traditional council in liaison with the elders in the community, the youth cooperates effectively. This indicates that when respect for the elders in various communities is heightened, they could be used as potential mediums for giving instructions regarding environmental schemes in every society.

Other taboos directly linked to the maintenance of the environment and its resources noted by the researcher included *‘Do not defecate, urinate or bath in the water bodies’*, *‘Do not enter the Kwantakese sacred grove and/or pick any resource from it, not even dead wood’*, *‘Do not pour any effluent of food or any other thing into streams and water bodies’*, *‘Do not cut down any deified tree’*, *‘Do not leave your livestock or any animal to wander aimlessly in the environment’*, *‘Do not leave the gutters in front of your house choked or unattended to’*, *‘Do not absent yourself from any communal labour and societal meetings without permission from the traditional council’*, *‘Observe all taboo days- every Tuesday and some Sundays on their calendar’*, *‘Farmers must leave ten yards forest vegetation around water bodies’* and *‘Menstruated women should not fetch from any river.’*

Failure to heed to these taboos is believed to attract spiritual penalties from the deities and ancestors. The traditional council has also established monetary fines and payment of sacrificial items for the breach of any of the afore-stated taboos. For instance, Ten Ghana Cedis is paid to the traditional council by any culprit who fails to partake in communal labour without prior excuse. In addition, a work in the society such as the de-silting of choked gutters and sweeping of sections of the society is given as extra punishment. In situations where the culprit has been severely punished by the gods and ancestors, sacrificial items must be paid in addition to reverse the curses. The penalty imposed by the traditional authorities varies greatly depending on the taboo that is breached by the culprit. Other forms of penalty include public mockery or ridicule at society gatherings on Sundays where the culprit is disgraced before society members. Members of the society hoot at the person and the disgrace that ensues labels the member of the society



thereafter. All these sanctions cleverly put together by the proactive traditional council of Anyinam helps in ensuring the full participation of community members in environmental development schemes.

The taboo system as noted by Adom et al. (2016) and confirmed by the findings of the study has indeed helped in the conservation of biodiversity. Diawuo and Issifu's (2015) assertion is true in relation to the findings of the study that the taboo systems served as traditional checks and balances regulating the use of the environment and its resources.

### **The Relevance of Community Participation and Social Inclusion in Anyinam and Environmental Development**

The traditional authorities of Anyinam have implemented various strategies of ensuring full community participation and social inclusion in their environmental development programs. These include regular communal labour, assigning of environmental cleaning tasks among gender, age and social groups, intensive monitoring via communal register and communal forums.

#### **Regular and Mandatory Communal Labour**

Communal labours are organized on every taboo day thus, Tuesdays. Weedy areas in the Anyinam vicinity are cleared collectively by all the members in the community. It is compulsory for every member of the society to partake in the cleaning and sanitation exercises. Choked gutters are also removed and rubbish-filled spots are thoroughly swept. On Monday evenings, drums are beaten from the traditional court to announce to residents the upcoming mandatory communal labour. The collective efforts put in by every member of the society, whether old or young helps in making the environmental development program a success. However, stubborn residents who refuse to participate in the communal labours organized by the traditional council are fined. Ten Ghana Cedis is the penalty sum agreed by consensus with the community for culprits to pay. The strict monitoring and sanctioning measures implemented by the traditional council also accounts for the triumph of the environmental programs in the society.

#### **3.3.2 Assigning of Environmental Cleaning Tasks among Gender, Age and Groups**

The traditional authorities through various committees assign specific and clearly demarcated areas for residents to work in the environmental projects in the society. The heinous cleaning, planting or sanitation tasks are divided according to gender, age and groups. For instance, the elderly women between the age range of seventy years and eighty years act as supervisors of the environmental projects for women, supervising the young women who sweep at various sections of the Anyinam vicinity. On the other hand, the young men who engage in pruning and tree planting exercises are also supervised by the elderly men in the society. The

children also search through all the nooks and crannies of the community picking all forms of debris and refuse. They are led by the leader of the Anyinam youth association. The elders of the traditional council, whose primary role is supervisory and monitoring also engage in the environmental tasks as their individual strengths would allow. This inspires the youth and gears them on to work tirelessly till the environmental task initiated is completed.

Also, every first Sunday of the month, the Anyinam society engages in a general cleaning exercise where every household is supposed to tidy their homes and surroundings. On that day, the various social groups attend to the communal work together with their household duties. For instance, a young woman who belongs to the vibrant food sellers association told the researcher *'I wake up early morning around 4 am together with my family on that first Sunday of the month. We work very hard in keeping our homes clean. While the men weed the compound, I work with the other women to sweep, clean and scrub the floors of the various buildings in our household. After that, I join the women in my association to sweep the entire Anyinam community.'* The youth association, the landlords association, and other social groups also have their various tasks that they perform to maintain environmental cleanliness in the Anyinam community. It is an interesting event and the collective effort and team spirit makes every resident to participate voluntarily. This resonates with the view of Breuer (2002) that community participation revamps the resolve of every society member to the work. The researcher observed on one Sunday that only a few members of the society did not engage in the environmental programs due to ill health. The event was like a communal fanfare due to the full participation of community members.

#### **Intensive Monitoring Via Communal Register**

Traditional authorities have a communal register that contains the names of all the members of the society. The list that is constantly upgraded to include new members of the society that are born is used to monitor those who turn out for the community environmental schemes organized. The chief linguist, together with some elders in the society monitors the environmental tasks being undertaken and marks the names of all the participants. When the researcher asked the monitoring team those whom they mark present, they unanimously replied *'We do not just mark present, the names of residents, we see at the scene of the environmental cleansing work, but rather those who are seen actually participating in the work.'* Thus, everyone present at the scene is not expected by the traditional council to just be at the work scene but to participate in the work. The communal register contains the house numbers of all the houses in the community with the names of members in each house. Those who were marked absent were fined a penalty fee of ten Ghana Cedis each together with other sacrificial items. The intensive monitoring via the communal register aids in ensuring full community participation in all the environmental schemes in Anyinam.



Figure 2. Some Elders of Anyinam ready for the monitoring of the environmental program on a taboo day (Source: Photographed by the author).

### Communal Forums

Regular communal meetings and forums are organized by the Anyinam chief and traditional authorities with society members where various issues on development especially environmental issues are deliberated. These meetings are held before decisions regarding the society are made and implemented. Every decision is reached at a consensus with every member of the society participating in the discussion, expressing his/her concerns with greatest freedom with no form of coercion. All factions of the society, age, gender, or status in the community is allowed to share their views and opinions. The views are carefully weighed, deliberated and voted on by the entire community. The agreed decisions are then implemented. This ensures social inclusion and community participation. As a result, the consensus decision's implementation is smooth and every member of the society works toward making them work.

The researcher asked why the traditional council does not imposed their views and decisions on the people. One of the elders in the traditional court told the researcher two popular maxims in the Ghanaian community that have the same philosophical interpretation, *'Ti koro nko agyina'* (One head does not go into counsel) and *'Nyansa nni baakofo tirim'* (Wisdom is not in the preserve of one person). They added that every individual has his/her own unique viewpoint which may be very important for social progression and development. Speaking from a spiritual perspective, the chief told the researcher that *'The ancestors can speak through anyone. They can issue their directions and guidance through everyone, even a child. That is why we don't dissuade views of even children in our communal forums.'* Thus, the cul-

ture of the Anyinam community ensures social inclusion and full community participation. The findings authenticates Njunwa (2010) and Breuer (2002) assertions that the bottom-up approach and all inclusiveness of society members in decision making processes results in more sustainable and better decisions.

### **Challenges Faced by the Traditional Authorities in the Discharge of Their Powers and ensuring the Promulgation of Cultural Practices, Community Participation and Social Inclusion in Environmental Development Schemes**

Despite the vibrant nature of the traditional council of Anyinam, they have various challenges and anticipate other obstacles that can disturb the discharge of their authority and might affect the smooth implementation of the cultural traditions, social inclusion and full community participation in environmental development projects and programs.

The traditional authorities mentioned the abuse of freedom of speech and human rights that is seen more in the urban centres, gradually entering the rural areas due to the influx of formal education and its uncensored liberties. These, according to the elderly respondents, have made most of the youth in various educational institutions disrespectful and act rudely to the elderly in the society. As a result, they no more listen to the elders. Some elite in the society feel that the cultural traditions are mere superstitions and borne out of sheer ignorance. This makes their implementation very difficult in some societies though they are very stringent with their practices. When the researcher asked what can be the remedy to such a situation, one elder said *'Formal education is important but it should not be tailored to demean cultural traditions and other good heritage of societies. Students must be taught to respect culture, honour the elderly in the societies since this is the key to development.'*

The views and concerns expressed by the elders in Anyinam are not misplaced. Indeed, education must be used to promote the accepted values and culture in the society as Adom et al. (2016) argued. Thus, formal education must not be used as bait in eroding the rich cultural traditions of Ghanaians that ensured the promotion of social inclusion and community participation and more importantly, the respect of elders and authority. Essentially, education should be used to accentuate the rich philosophical values in these cultural practices to promote its relevance in society and national development.

Another great challenge hinted by the traditional authorities and the elders is the advent of Christianity. With the establishment of a Christian church in the town, followers look mean on the cultural traditions and practices. They view it as superstitious and idolatrous buttressing the views of some scholars like Boamah (2015) and Adom (2016d). Many culprits of the taboos in the Anyinam community, according to the traditional authorities, are all Christian followers. Thus, one elderly respondent opined that *'If it is only for the Christians, the environmental projects that have been heightened by the cultural traditions would have been left unattended to, leaving the environment into cold hands to destroy.'* This comment, to the researcher is

not true in the case of all Christians as noted in another response by some elders who were Christian converts and from the observations made by the researcher. The elderly Christian converts rebutted the earlier comment that Christians and the Christian faith in general did not campaign for environmental cleanliness. They said '*Christianity does not promote environmental destruction since the Christians share the belief that they would be equally judged by God based on how they treated the environment and its resources,*' as it was argued by some elders who were Christian converts. The chief linguist then instructed the elders who were Christian converts to tell their followers to 'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to Him'. As it was noticed by the researcher, some Christians in Anyinam were very instrumental in the environmental projects and honored the taboo days and taboos. The stubborn Christians must be advised not to abuse any of the cultural traditions and practices since they play quintessential roles in protecting the environment. They must understand the creation principle that they must treat the earth and its resources with respect as Brulle (2000) opined.

Moreover, the waning of the powers of the traditional council is a potential threat to the traditional authorities of Anyinam. They narrated an instance when a woman who is not from the town abused one of the taboos in the town. She was summoned before the traditional court, but refused to heed the call. Her husband who is a civil servant in one of the urban centres disrespectfully told the traditional court to take them to court. The members in the community paraded their house and they left the community. Thus, the general waning of the powers of the traditional authorities is a potential threat to the traditional council of Anyinam. They suggested that '*the legislation of the land must grant authoritative powers to the traditional authorities so that their verdict will be final as it was sometimes past.*' The elders believed that this would prevent any court action by displeased members in the society who abuse the powers of the traditional council. However, since some traditional authorities are corrupt and give room for bribery, the government after granting them the legislation to dispatch their powers authoritatively must put in place a monitoring agency to oversee their verdicts.

### Conclusion

The tenet of the research was to investigate into how the cultural traditions, social inclusion and full participation of local people play significant roles in the ultimate success of environmental schemes. A phenomenological study enhanced by focus group discussions, in-depth personal interviews and direct observations of purposively sampled respondents in the Anyinam town located in the Ashanti region of Ghana was used to illuminate the essence of promoting the cultural traditions of local communities while ensuring the full participation and social inclusion of all members of the society in environmental development schemes and programs.

The cultural traditions that were seen to be beneficial in environmental development programs were the institution of sacred grove, the commemoration of the Opemso festival, maintenance of place and historic identity, deifying of natural resources, cultural education of the youth and the institution of taboo systems.

The *Kwantakese* sacred grove specifically demarcated and treated as sacred has aided in housing rich, rare, and endangered species of biodiversity. The Opemso festival observance that utilizes particular natural resources in its observance as well as its environmentally beneficial activities has enhanced the environment and its resources in Anyinam. To assist in maintaining their place and historic identity, the people of Anyinam have ensured the conservation and sustainable use of the *Onyina* (*Ceiba*) plant species helping in greening the entire vicinity, rewarding residents of good air, prevention of storms and other forms of natural disasters. Moreover, the deifying of water bodies and other natural resources has prevented residents from wantonly destroying them for fear of being punished by the vindictive spirits and deities believed to be inherent in the natural resources. Also, the cultural education of the youth on taboo days and on evenings has nurtured the values of conservation, sustainability, sanitation and maintenance of environmental cleanliness in the hearts of the young ones and children. Thus, these youth are more likely and committed to ensuring the upkeep and pursuance of environmental friendly practices. In addition, the institution of the taboo systems where stringent laws and orders with severe spiritual and physical sanctions have helped in curtailing any unbridled behavior or practice from the people of Anyinam that can abuse and/or wantonly destroy the environment.

On the other hand, the traditional authorities and elders in the Anyinam town who spearhead the environmental development schemes ensure full participation and social inclusion of every member of the community through regular and mandatory communal labours, assigning of environmental tasks among gender, age and social groups, intensive monitoring via communal registers and communal forums. The communal labours, which is all-inclusive and compulsory for every member of the society promotes full community participation. Also, the specific division of environmental activities among the sexes, age and social groups further harness community participation and social inclusion. The use of communal registers and solicitation of opinions of every member of the society ensures fair social inclusion and full community participation.

The classic example of the people of Anyinam succinctly illustrates the immense benefits of promoting cultural traditions, full participation and social inclusion of local people in environmental development schemes. Developmental planners, policy makers and environmentalists must not sideline local people and their cultural traditions in the schemes that they draw for the development of the environment. They must carefully incorporate the rich and environmentally friendly cultural traditions as well as the time-tested and experience of local people in the policies and strategies formulated for the conservation and sustainable use of the environment and its resources. To accentuate the roles of local people and their cultural traditions in environmental schemes, these recommendations have been put forward by the researcher:

1. Local communities must be active participants in every development project for the environment from its planning to implementation stages. They must be seen as having viable experiential knowledge that can contribute to environmental sustainability and conservation.



2. The traditional systems put in place by local communities such as the use of communal registers, institution of communal labour, cultural education of the youth and communal forums must be used efficiently as platforms by conservationists working in local communities to solicit for the views of local people in environmental projects. They must also be used in relaying to the local communities, modern scientific environmental strategies that play quintessential roles in addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

3. Cultural education of the youth must be enhanced through the school curriculum, Television and radio programs and in books. This would inculcate the respect for nature's resources that is constantly featured in the pages of the cultural traditions of local people.

4. The cultural traditions such as taboo systems, deifying of natural resources, festival commemorations, folklores, myths and proverbs of the local communities must be rigorously looked into by environmental policy developers. These cultural traditions are powerful strategies for the promotion of environmental sustainability and conservation as have been illustrated with the case of the people of Anyinam in Ghana.

5. Various governments must heighten the powers of the traditional authorities in local communities for them to continue to discharge their powers in sanctioning culprits of environmental degradation. This would lessen the task imposed on civil courts, reduce the long period for the judgment of abusers of the environment and speedily arrest any form of environmental unfriendly practices at the local levels even without the government direct intervention.

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