

Forest-related livelihoods in Ghana's High Forest Zone: The Modified Taungya System



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The Modified Taungya System (MTS) improves people's access to farmlands and offers them a 40% share of timber revenues. Serious concerns exist, however, about the long-term contribution to people's livelihoods. Intercropping is no longer an option when the trees overshadow the crops and the last plots of land are soon to be used up. It then takes time before the sale of the timber generates any income. Various challenges have to be overcome to ensure that the MTS continues to impact positively on people's livelihoods. This is the key message of this infosheet based on an MSc study carried out at the University of Amsterdam under the Tropenbos Ghana programme.

The Modified Taungya System in a nutshell

The MTS is an agroforestry system that was introduced in Ghana in 2002 in a bid to support both rural livelihoods and Ghana's deforestation problem. It is an adapted version of the old taungya system, which was suspended in 1984 partly due to a lack of farmers' support for it. Under the MTS, farmers receive land to grow food crops alongside the planted timber trees during the early years of plantation development. The legally binding arrangement stipulates that, when the timber is sold, the benefits must be shared between the Forestry Commission (40%), the farmers (40%), the traditional landowners (15%) and the forest-adjacent community (5%). The farmer is entitled to 100% of the benefits from the agricultural crops, mostly a mixture of cocoyam, plantain, maize, and vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, peppers and garden eggs.

Results

A survey and a participatory ranking exercise (PROFOR tool 4) were used in two villages (Chirayaso and Kunsu Dotiem) in the Tano-Offin Forest Reserve to determine the cash and non-cash contributions MTS crops make to the farmers' livelihoods. It emerged that both men and women are reliant on the MTS as a source of income. Once the women sign up the MTS scheme, they use the crops derived from it as their main source of sustenance and income. Men also rely on the products derived from MTS plots, but they derived the major proportion of their income

from land exclusively used for farming. Similar to women, products derived from natural forest and fallow lands were of minor importance (see results for Chirayaso in Figure 1).

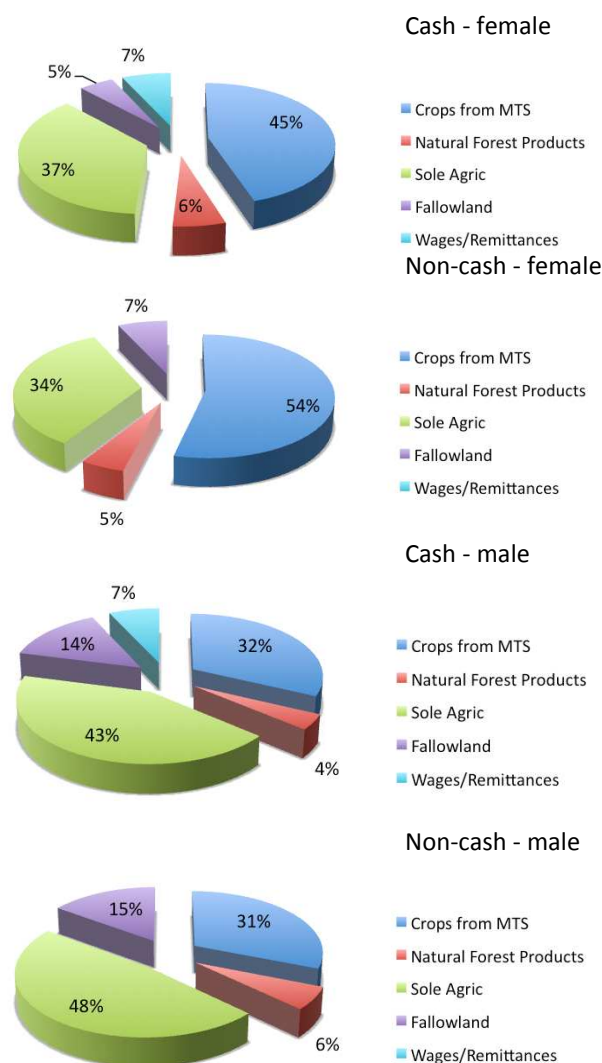


Fig. 1 Cash and non-cash components of women's and men's livelihoods in Chirayaso



Challenges

The study identified a number of challenges in the implementation of the MTS:

- Plots are inequitably distributed because Taungya leaders tend to take the largest, the closest and most fertile plots of land.
- Farmers are insecure about how the 40% revenue from the trees will be divided.
- There is a lot of uncertainty about how secure the arrangement is against the operations of illegal chainsaw loggers, fire, natural disasters, etc.
- Farmers have insufficient capital to buy equipment such as Wellington boots.

Policy recommendations

- It takes too long for the farmers to reap the financial benefits from the trees and see any returns from their efforts to maintain them. One of the options for solving this dilemma may be to release some of the money from the timber after perhaps 5 or 10 years. A second option is to tie alternative livelihoods into the

relationship whilst no crops can be grown, such as bee-keeping, grass-cutter farming, snail rearing and cultivating tree seedlings for sale. A third option is to harness the carbon credit potential of the MTS, with money from countries offsetting their carbon being reinvested in the MTS.

- In order to remove uncertainty and create incentives for the farmers to tend the trees, there is a need to speed up the signing of remaining agreements and to ensure that they are quickly legalised, as well as to make payments when they are due.
- A quick decision is needed vis-à-vis a more widespread possibility of growing the staple food cassava as one of the agricultural crops.
- More accessible insurance options for the farmers are essential.
- The way in which decisions are made with regard to whom and for what price the timber is to be sold needs to be reconsidered. The MTS farmers should be involved in this decision-making because the scheme will lead to a lot of timber sales at the same time.
- It is recommended that financial advice be given to farmers when they receive the timber lump sum so that the revenue can contribute sustainably to their livelihoods.
- All parties need additional clarification of and accessibility to the benefit-sharing arrangement.

