

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Across West Africa, forest cover has been reduced to less than 30% of its potential extent (Bakarr 2001). The highly fragmented forest patches that remain continue to be degraded or completely lost at an alarming rate. Based on high levels of species endemism, coupled with intense and ongoing threats to their survival, the remaining West African forests have been designated as one of 34 global hotspots of biodiversity (Mittermeier et al. 2004).

Shifting agriculture had likely occurred in Ghana for centuries, but the rate of deforestation accelerated in the early 1900s (Thompson 1910) because of timber needed for newly mechanized gold mines, development of communications, and a rapidly expanding area of farmland, including cocoa (Hawthorne and Abu Juam 1995). In the 1920s and 1930s, foresters in Ghana demarcated and placed under management 280 forests for the purpose of ensuring the sustainable use of Ghana's forest resources and the preservation of forests with important roles as watersheds and windbreaks. Since this time, Ghana has lost roughly 80% of its forest habitat (Cleaver 1992) and about one-third of Ghana's forest is estimated to have disappeared in the 17 years between 1955 and 1972 (Hall 1987). Of the original forest zone covering 82,260 km², the area under forest in 1973 amounted to 20,530 km² including 16,790 km² within forest reserves distributed throughout the forest zone (Anon 1973). In 1988, forest cover in Ghana was estimated to be around 15,842 km² with the annual deforestation rate estimated at 220 km² (Sayer et al. 1992). Virtually all areas which still contain good quality forest today are located within the reserves designated under the supervision of the Forest Services Division of the Forestry Commission. Many of these forests have retained a significant integrity, in the sense that the boundary lines laid down seventy years ago are still respected and the boundary lines are regularly cleared and quite prominent.

The Ajenjua Bepo Forest Reserve (hereafter referred to as Ajenjua Bepo) and the Mamang River Forest Reserve (hereafter referred to as Mamang River) are located in the Birim North District of the Eastern Region of Ghana. The two reserves consist of moist semi-deciduous forest and were established in 1930 (Ajenjua Bepo) and 1938 (Mamang River). Ajenjua Bepo is a relatively small reserve covering an area of hilly topography of 5.69 km². Mamang River is relatively much larger and flatter, covering an area of 53 km².

Scope of Project

CI and Newmont Mining Corporation are engaged in a partnership at both a corporate level as well as in the field in areas of mutual interest to promote biodiversity conservation. As part of that collaboration, Conservation International Ghana (CIG) formed a partnership with Newmont Ghana Gold Limited (NGGL) to ensure that potential biodiversity issues and conservation opportunities at and around NGGL's operations in Ghana are evaluated and managed such that CIG and NGGL together make measurable contributions to the conservation of Ghana's natural heritage. One objective of this partnership was to better understand the biodiversity context around the Akyem project site¹ in order to incorporate biodiversity into the company's risk assessment and help inform the project's Environmental Impact Assessment.

¹ Akyem is Newmont's second project in Ghana, located approximately 80 miles (125 km) northwest of Accra. It is currently a development project awaiting approval for permitting from the government of Ghana before proceeding as an operational mine.