

Sustainable charcoal value chains support dryland restoration in Ghana

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Charcoal production at Babatokuma, Kintampo, northern Ghana. Photo: Daniel Abu

In Ghana, charcoal provides 64% of domestic energy requirements, and is a major source of income in northern and transitional zones. Taxes and levies on charcoal trading are also important sources of revenue for traditional authorities (including local chiefs), local government and the Forestry Commission. But the industry remains informal and unregulated, and with a lack of coherent policies, charcoal production remains a key driver of dryland degradation and deforestation. The Nationally Agreed Mitigation Actions (NAMAS) and the Renewable Energy Act 2011 (Act 832) stipulate a district-based permit system for wholesalers, and a revenue-sharing regime. However, these initiatives do not insist on the need to restore land cleared for charcoal production, nor do they require the establishment of wood lots and native trees for future harvesting.

To assess how restoration and wood lots might operate in practice, 200 ha of degraded dry forest in Bono East Region, northern Ghana, is being restored through enrichment planting, natural regeneration and agroforestry in five communities. Communities were consulted at the outset, and they decided which native trees to plant when restoring natural forest areas, and which fast-growing trees to plant in wood lots. In parallel, the project works with communities, land-owners and charcoal producer associations to prepare management plans and monitoring systems, and to implement

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sustainable restoration. Charcoal producers are also being trained in using improved kilns to increase the wood-to-charcoal conversion efficiency. Together, these efforts are beginning to have an impact on community attitudes, as people now see how they can benefit from dry forest landscapes, and how they can help to restore them, rather than degrade them.

New policies related to charcoal production and trade are needed to help to protect dry forests from further overexploitation, and to encourage the development of sustainable value chains. This must be accompanied by support to, and promotion of, dialogue among communities, land-owners, smallholders, CSOs, producer associations, and others further down the charcoal value chain. Furthermore, this must be aided by appropriate financing mechanisms, introducing incentives, engaging the private sector, and building partnerships that attract investors, while promoting gender equality, youth involvement and ensuring broad inclusiveness.

Developing effective policies at the national and regional levels requires the participation of all stakeholders, to not only reduce the environmental impact of charcoal production, but also promote dryland restoration at the same time.



Weighing charcoal to be sold in the local market. Photo: Tropenbos Ghana