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FROM THE GROUND UP  
CASE STUDY NO. 3

***Community Institutions  
in Resource  
Management:  
Agroforestry by  
Mobisquads in Ghana***

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## *Series Introduction*

In 1987, the Center for International Development and Environment of the World Resources Institute, in collaboration with African development institutions and Clark University's International Development and Social Change Program, initiated an ambitious program in Africa known as **FROM THE GROUND UP**. The program seeks to increase local, national, and international development assistance institutions' capacity to strengthen community management of natural resources in Africa. The guiding belief of **FROM THE GROUND UP** is that important insights can be gained by analyzing effective community-level efforts in natural resource management. In practical terms, the idea is to identify communities that are already pursuing ecologically sound self-development and analyzing the reasons for their success — local leadership, viable institutions, suitable technologies, etc.

**FROM THE GROUND UP** shares the results of its case studies and their policy implications with other communities, national policy makers, and the international development community. Publications, conferences, workshops, training programs, radio, and video are used to reach these audiences. Over the long term, these findings will promote decentralized, small-scale natural resource

management policies, influence the allocation of development resources to the grassroots, and foster self-reliance and sustainability within the communities.

WRI's **FROM THE GROUND UP** case study series is designed for professionals in the development community — governmental and nongovernmental development and environment planners and field workers, international and national development assistance officers, and concerned academics. The series is intended to inform policy making, stimulate discussion on environment and development, and assist in training programs for development officers.

The African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), based in Nairobi, and WRI are collaborating to publish the **FROM THE GROUND UP** series for distribution in Africa and elsewhere. ACTS is a nonpartisan, nonprofit institution established to conduct policy and practical research in technology innovation and natural resource management. ACTS promotes the view that technological change, natural resource management, and institutional innovation are crucial to sustainable development and should be at the core of all development efforts.

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In Goviefe-Agodome, Volta Region, a local self-development cooperative initiated by the government has successfully turned land that was considered infertile into productive farmland through various agroforestry practices. Some of the proceeds from the communally run farms are used for community development activities; the rest is divided equally among members. The cooperative has emerged as the village's most active community development institution capable of mobilizing labor and resources of both members and nonmembers.

Four elements contributed to the success of Goviefe-Agodome's community development efforts:

- With the support of local leaders and institutions, the actions are designed, implemented, and managed by a local organization acceptable to the community;

- The agroforestry efforts yield immediate financial and other benefits to the cooperative members and their households;
- The resource management activities are locally sustainable and involve practices and techniques familiar to the members; and
- The community has benefited from its accessibility to major urban areas and has received much assistance in its development activities.

The Goviefe-Agodome experience has implications for the government of Ghana and the development assistance community concerned with local-level natural resource management. Several policy and programming recommendations are presented in the last sections of this report regarding popular participation in community development and the government's ongoing decentralization effort.

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# I. Introduction

In the early 1900s, Ghana (then the Gold Coast) was a West African center for new political thinking and socioeconomic activities. On March 6, 1957, the "Black Star" of Africa became the first British dependency in sub-Saharan Africa to attain independence. Many hopes were vested in the new Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and his ideas combining African socialism and Pan-Africanism. But Nkrumahism did not flourish for long; in February 1966, Nkrumah was ousted in a *coup d'etat*. For the next 16 years, several short-lived regimes governed the country (Babatope 1984; Chazan 1983).

This political instability, coupled with government mismanagement of funds and several poor agricultural seasons, had a disastrous effect on Ghana's postindependence, cocoa-dependent economy. (Cocoa farming for export dominates Ghanaian agricultural activity and, since the preindependence period, has been the main determinant of economic growth.) Declining export earnings, increasing import spending, and regular budget deficits led to spiraling inflation and a large external debt. Combined with an overvalued currency and a reliance on energy imports, these factors contributed to an average annual decline of 0.2 percent in

real gross domestic product for 1970 – 80 and an average annual decline of 3 percent in real per capita income (World Bank 1989).

On December 31, 1981, Flight Lieutenant Jerry J. Rawlings came to power for the second time. Economic activity had come to a virtual standstill by then. The situation worsened in 1982 – 83, when neighboring Nigeria and Togo expelled more than 1 million Ghanaians and a severe drought and extensive bushfires occurred. In 1983, the government, with support from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, entered a period of "structural adjustment" aimed at restoring economic growth by curbing public expenditures and rehabilitating public/private export industries and local production enterprises. These measures have helped to reduce the inflation rate (projected at 8 percent in 1990) and, since 1984, maintain GDP growth at an annual rate near 5 percent (World Bank 1989).

But although Ghana's economy has begun to stabilize, some measures of the recovery program (for example, reduced price subsidies and decreased real wages) have *lowered* living standards in rural areas. About 70 percent of Ghana's population, estimated at 15 million (WRI 1990), live and



work in rural areas. Small-scale farming is a major source of food, jobs, income, and government revenue. Yet, the average rural income per capita is well below the urban average, water supplies are insufficient and unsafe, and the rural infrastructure (for instance, transport, communication, and electricity) is sparse and faulty.

Chairman Rawlings realizes both the importance of popular participation in community development and government's limited capacity to reach the large rural population. He has tried to implement democratic principles as they affect political decision-making; his stated aim is to decentralize power and ensure popular participation in the development process. To provide a vehicle for mass mobilization, the government called for the establishment of several village-based "revolutionary organs," including the 31st December Women's Movement and the village mobilization squad. These government-sponsored local groups and other more traditional institutions operate in communities throughout Ghana. Many are involved in activities that have improved local socioeconomic circumstances while maintaining the natural resource base. Numerous opportunities exist for the development assistance community and government to work with these groups on building new programs of self-help development.

A field investigation was undertaken in the village of Goviefe-Agodome, Volta Region, to examine the development initiatives of the local mobilization squad (hereafter mobisquad). Since 1986, the

Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad has been involved in such community development activities as the establishment of an agroforestry farm and a tree nursery. This study was performed to pinpoint the basic reasons for the success of these self-help sustainable development practices. This report is intended to help decision-makers in government and the development assistance community develop policies and programs for improved local-level resource management.

A team of two professionals from the Environmental Protection Council (EPC) (Ministry of Local Government) conducted the research with technical assistance from the Department of Community Development, the Ghana Education Service, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Forestry Department. A local research committee consisting of five local leaders representing five village institutions facilitated data collection by organizing village meetings and identifying key informants.

The 10-day fieldwork was conducted in April and May 1989. The research team collected data through informal household interviews, structured questionnaires, group discussions, and direct observation. Virtually every household and the leaders and several members of the most visible local institutions were interviewed. To collect additional information, the team made several subsequent visits to Goviefe-Agodome, which is easily reachable from the capital of Accra (160 kilometers away).

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## II. Goviefe-Agodome: Agroforestry by Mobisquad

**T**he mobisquad of Goviefe-Agodome and the context in which it works are described below.

### *Location and Ecology*

Goviefe-Agodome is situated in Hohoe District, Volta Region, on the main road linking Accra with Buem and Krachi Districts, major food-producing areas of the Volta Region. Ho, the Volta Region capital, is 56 kilometers to the southeast; Hohoe, the Hohoe District headquarters, is 70 kilometers north; and Kpeve, the nearest market town, is 2 kilometers south. (See *Figures 1 and 2.*)

Goviefe-Agodome is at the base of the Akwapim-Togo mountain range. Geologically, the area has rocks, essentially sandstone, with minor volcanic intrusions and ironstone concentrations underneath. The mineral-deficient sandstone weathers fairly easily to produce fine gravelly, red to reddish-brown soils to depths of 1 meter with high iron content. The soils are of low to medium agricultural potential.

The mean annual rainfall is 58 inches, divided into two distinct wet seasons from March to mid-July and September to November. The mean annual temperature is 79 – 80 degrees F (26 – 27 degrees C). The dry northeasterly harmattan winds blow from the Sahara for 6 – 8 weeks beginning in December. The region, subject to periodic droughts, experienced severe conditions most recently in 1976 – 77 and 1982 – 83.

No surface rivers or streams flow through or near Goviefe-Agodome. Local residents have had help finding water, however. In 1989, for example, a borehole was drilled in the neighboring community of Goviefe-Kwowu by World Vision International (a U.S. private voluntary organization) and was used as a source of water for both settlements. More important, an earthen dam constructed in 1985 with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) holds sufficient water to meet local needs.

The flatlands and foothills of Goviefe-Agodome are characterized by typical savannah grassland vegetation.

Figure 1.  
Map of Ghana

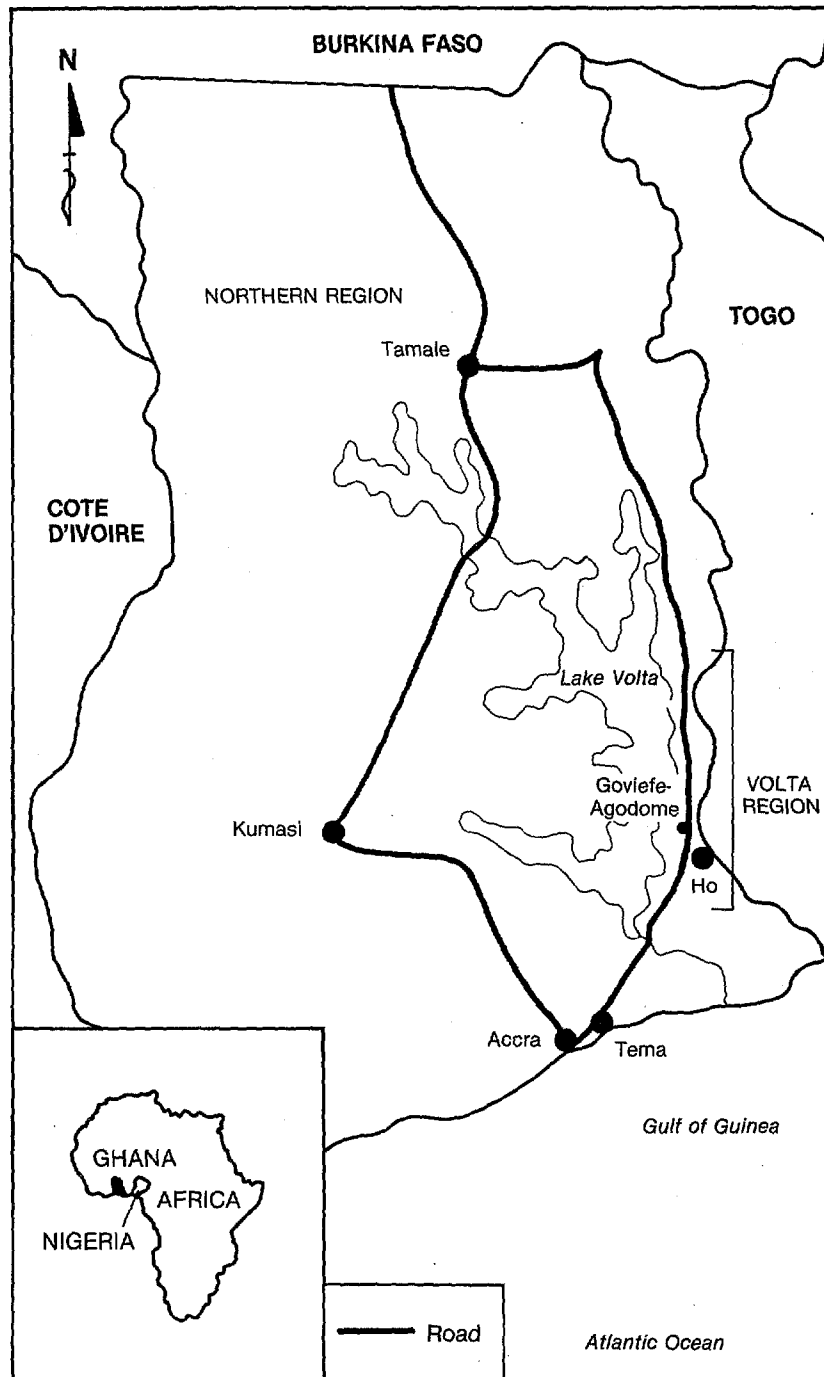
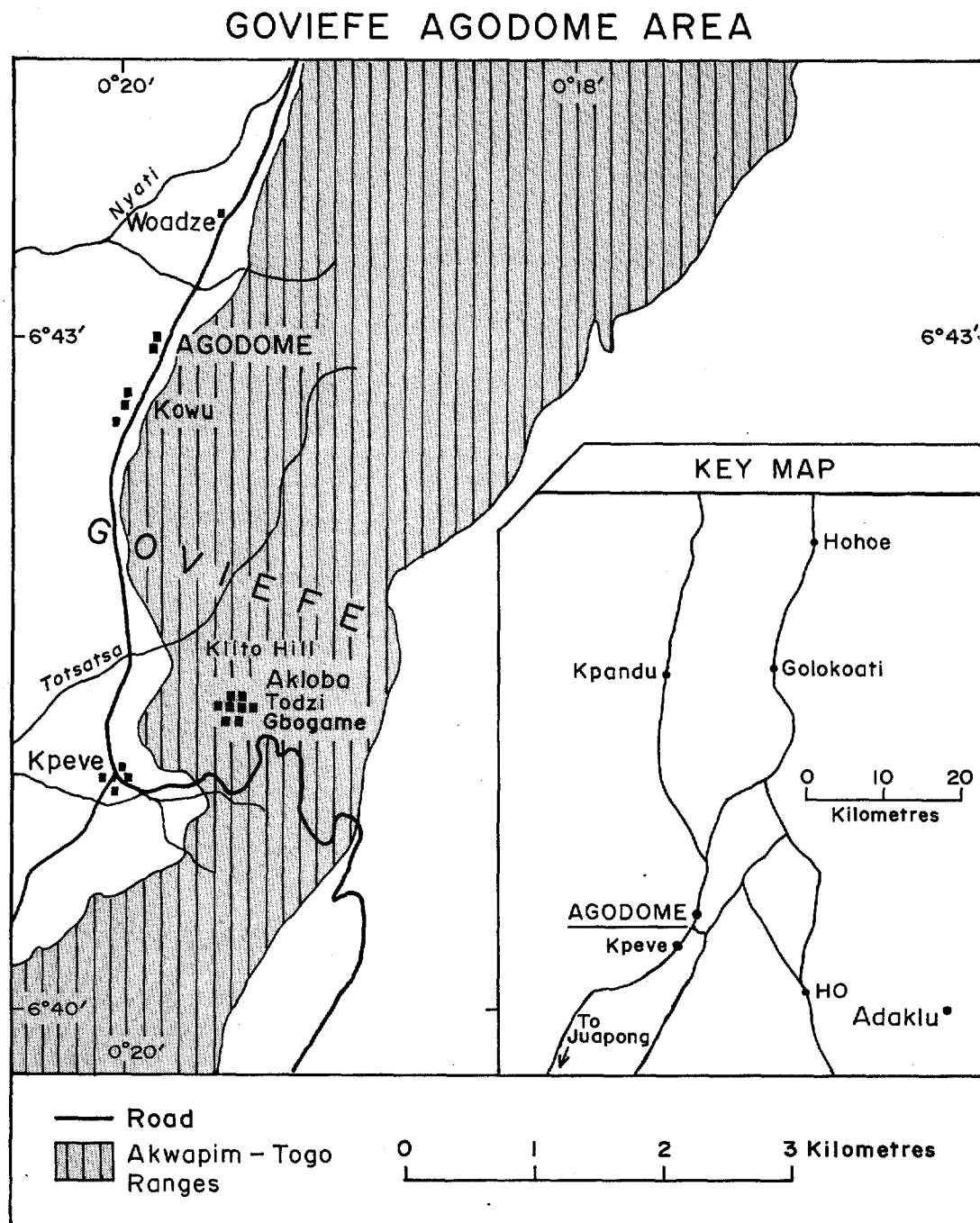


Figure 2.  
Goviefe-Agodome Area



Ground flora consists of grasses interspersed with short-branching, fire-resistant trees that survive the annual dry-season bushfires. Primary forests once covering the Goviefe-Agodome highlands have been converted over time to secondary forest and bush fallow cover by practitioners of shifting cultivation. Indigenous wildlife, such as patas monkeys, birds, and rodents live in the fallow bush; since these species can damage crops, they are often hunted and eaten.

### *Land Use Changes*

Goviefe-Agodome is one of five traditional *Govie* settlements. The *Govie* people belong to the Ewe ethnic group, which traces its history from the ancient walled city of Notsie in Togo and, before that, from Ille Ife in Nigeria. In the late 18th century, small clans left Togo and wandered westward. The *Govie* people (led by Chief *Goe; vi* is children in Ewe) first settled at *Goefe (ae*fe is home) — near modern-day Adaklu, about 18 miles west of Ho — probably in the early 1800s. (See *Figure 2*.)

Skirmishes over land soon forced the *Govie* people to move from *Goefe*. Heading north, they settled in the Klito highlands of the Akwapim-Togo range; their settlement became the *Govie* capital of Goviefe-Todzi. As the community grew, two clans split off and established separate, adjacent settlements — Goviefe-Akloba and Goviefe-Gbogame.

In the 1870s or 1880s, Goviefe-Agodome became the third *Govie* group to splinter off from Goviefe-Todzi and the first to distance itself from the traditional *Govie* settlement.

The founders moved to the lowlands to open new farmland and to live near the road, which at that time was the most important route to the south. They settled under a *Borassus* palm, locally known as *Agor*, from which came the name Agodome, "the settlement under the *Agor* tree" (*dome* is under). The last group to establish a separate settlement was Goviefe-Kwowu, joining Goviefe-Agodome at the base of the Klito hills in the late 19th century. Goviefe-Agodome and Goviefe-Kwowu lands and settlements are adjacent, and the two communities share a primary school, day care center, and other facilities.

The political leadership of individual villages is connected to others of the same ethnic heritage. Each *Govie* community is headed by a village chief who is selected by a council of elders from the extended family of the village patriarch. The village chief reports to a paramount chief residing in the capital of Goviefe-Todzi. A regent, selected by the village chief, acts as deputy chief and rules in his absence. The council, which helps the chief decide local matters, is made up of the leaders of the village clans. The *Okyeami*, the spokesman for the village chief, regent, and council of elders, receives and delivers official messages between the public and the chieftaincy.

The queenmother is the traditional leader of women villagers. She also maintains a supporting regent, council of elders, and *Okyeami*. Another traditional custodian of peace, the *asafo* company, led by a man called an *asafoatse*, organizes all young village men into communal work parties.

Goviefe communities are growing. In May 1989, 517 people lived in Goviefe-Agodome, 263 men and 254 women. By

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mid-1990, the village grew to 615 people and the five *Govie* settlements neared 5,000. By all indications, the population of Goviefe-Agodome has been increasing since the late 1950s. It has grown more than 50 percent just since 1984.

Population growth is pressuring available land in the area. In Goviefe-Agodome most land is used primarily to support agricultural economic activity. Shifting cultivation is the most common agricultural practice. Most farms are located in the Klito highlands, and subsistence crops such as maize and cassava are grown on them. In the highlands, maize and vegetables (such as beans and okra) are planted at the beginning of the long rainy season in March – April and are harvested in July – August. Farmers plant the same crops in September and harvest in December – January. In the lowlands, cassava is added to the crops planted in March – April and harvested the following January or February. Communal agroforestry/cassava and cotton farms, providing the most important cash crops, are in the lowland areas; the few small palm oil plantations are there as well. The lowlands are also important for livestock grazing. (Most households own a few goats.)

Pressure on the natural resource base is evident in many ways. Since independence, farm holdings have been fragmented, fallow periods have been shortened and cropping periods extended, soil erosion and water runoff have increased, and crop yields have declined. Resource degradation has helped force a greater emphasis on cassava and

maize, which can tolerate the lower rainfall and poorer soils in the lowlands. Since there are fewer trees than before, such food crops as yams, cocoyams, and plantains, which are generally grown in forest, are no longer planted as often.

No villagers are landless even though the population is increasing; more people are simply sharing the same amount of land. Most farmland in the highlands is privately owned with customary title by individuals, households, or extended families. Although it is more common for men to hold land, many women own land in Goviefe. Communal land is located primarily in the flatlands and is rarely farmed. This stool land, as it is called, is held in trust by the village chieftaincy, including the village chief, queenmother, and their supporting regents and councils of elders.<sup>1</sup>

Not everyone farms. Most young men spend several years working outside Goviefe-Agodome on cocoa plantations in northern Volta Region or in Ghana's urban centers. Even the village chief lives and works in Tema (100 miles southeast). Married men often leave their families in Goviefe-Agodome and periodically send money home. Most return after a few years and resume farming; others wait until retirement to return.

## *Effective Resource Management*

In 1983, the relationship between Ghana and Nigeria deteriorated; more than 1

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1 In the south, a chief is enstooled — literally, given a royal stool — when assuming power; in the north, a chief enskinned with an animal skin.

million Ghanaians were expelled from Nigeria and Togo and returned to Ghana. This influx added pressure on an already weak economy, poor welfare system, and limited food supplies. The government tried to deploy the un/underemployed, including the returnees, in agricultural activities in their home villages. In 1984, it developed the National Mobilization Programme (NMP) to marshal human and local resources for revamping areas of the national economy that were badly hit by the natural and human-caused disasters of 1982 – 83 (NMP 1983, 1985). Throughout Ghana, the NMP organized volunteer citizens into development groups called mobilization squads, or mobisquads, to fight bushfires, replant cocoa and coffee farms, reestablish food crop farms, and the like.

In the process, the NMP set up a local system for catalyzing grassroots participation in solving local problems and carrying out self-help community improvement activities. When the immediate disasters, such as fires, were under control, mobisquad efforts were redirected into a national economic recovery program; they helped construct access roads, schools, and clinics. Some projects received government support, but most groups raised funds to support their local development efforts with income-generating activities, cash cropping, gari processing,<sup>2</sup> and fuelwood and charcoal production, for example.

In 1987, the government established a separate Ministry of Mobilization and Social Welfare to oversee the NMP, among its

other responsibilities. The ministry called for transformation of the mobisquads into agricultural cooperatives to help boost food production, improve the living conditions of squad members and other rural people, and help revive the cooperative movement. Today, village-level mobisquads composed of community residents and local leaders are active in many parts of Ghana.

Among the returning Ghanaians were a number of Goviefe-Agodome natives. Some returned home to farm; most owned or acquired land through their extended families. Many brought some financial resources, and some established small businesses outside the village.

These returnees' first years back in Goviefe-Agodome were a time of transition to village life; they lived on the money they brought with them while exploring their economic options. Six of the returnees organized a local mobisquad in 1983; between then and 1986, they solidified the group, recruited other villagers, and considered potential mobisquad activities. The founding members viewed this government-sponsored institution as a means of improving both their own and the community's socioeconomic well-being. With the political backing of the government, they worked to gain the approval and support of the village leadership and to recruit local leaders, including the queenmother, members of the council of elders, and the chairperson of the 31st December Women's Movement — which was designed to promote the social

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<sup>2</sup> Gari, a local staple, is made from shredded and fermented cassava.

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welfare and economic well-being of women and children.

The mobisquad members elected to establish a communal farm because few other options were open to them and because farming was a sustainable and familiar activity. They set about looking for unused land, for the mobisquad had no resources to pay for land. Although the highlands are more fertile, little communal land remained and no one offered to let them use private land. Eventually, the village queenmother, a recruited member, offered the mobisquad free use of 100 acres (40.5 hectares) of nearly abandoned communal stool land in the savannah lowlands. The land is across the road from the settlement and is 200 meters away. Until the mobisquad began to profit from it, the parcel was considered wasteland; the soil is rocky and infertile, and bushfires sweep through the area every year.

In 1986, the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad, grown to 41 members, established a 4.8-hectare communal farm of cassava, maize, and cocoyam. The Forestry Department donated 3,000 tree seedlings — 1,000 teak and 2,000 leucaena — that were planted with the food crops to establish an intercropped agroforestry farm. (All nonfruit tree seedlings are given free by the government.) The sale of the crops plus fuelwood and charcoal (from clearing the farm) earned the mobisquad 750,000 cedis (US \$2,500).<sup>3</sup> Cassava is sold in the village, at the Kpeve market, or on the farm (buyers purchase a portion of the farm and harvest

the cassava themselves).<sup>4</sup> Maize and vegetables are sold primarily at the Kpeve market. The mobisquad divided most of the profits equally among its members and used 30,000 cedis to launch two community projects, an improved latrine and a clinic.

Leucaena trees were planted primarily to improve soil fertility for annual crop production. Leucaena is an early maturing leguminous softwood that adds nitrogen to the soil. It readily shoots up when cut and requires little care. In Goviefe-Agodome, planting leucaena is less costly and labor intensive than applying chemical fertilizers, constructing bench terraces, and other soil conservation practices. Leucaena on the agroforestry farm has increased agricultural output and allowed squad members to cultivate continuously.

Leucaena has other purposes as well. A 2- to 3-year-old tree can be lopped and the fuelwood used locally or sold; in 1989, the wood from such a tree sold for 400 – 500 cedis. The leaves supplement the diet of livestock, and the poles are used for building, bracing fruit-laden plantain trees, and framing check dams to plug gullies and check soil erosion.

Teak, a slow-maturing hardwood, is grown primarily as a cash crop; treated teak poles are used to hang power lines. The shortage of sufficiently large poles is acute; an untreated pole currently sells for more than 40,000 cedis in Accra. Teak requires 20 – 25 years to reach the size needed for

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<sup>3</sup> US \$1 = 300 cedis in 1986; \$1 = 333 cedis in November 1990.

<sup>4</sup> In 1989, the average produce from 1 hectare of cassava sold for about 10,000 cedis.

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power poles, but in the poor soils of Goviefe-Agodome, it may take 40 – 50.

In 1987, the mobisquad (now with 52 members) expanded its farm by 9.6 hectares to grow cassava, maize, pepper, and cowpeas, and added a 2-hectare monocropped cotton farm. Cotton is sold directly to buyers from the Juapong Textile Factory, about 60 kilometers from Goviefe-Agodome. (See Figure 2.) A tree nursery was established with assistance from a forestry extension officer, and approximately 5,000 teak and leucaena seedlings were nursed and transplanted on the enlarged farm. These efforts netted the mobisquad 1,225,000 cedis; the squad leveraged 360,560 cedis with financial and technical support from World Vision to complete the improved latrine project and spent 360,200 cedis for external technical assistance to train members in project management and youth mobilization. Members divided equally the remaining 504,240 cedis. In addition, the mobisquad opened a bank account and began offering its members small loans at reduced interest rates. At the time of this study, all loans had been repaid.

In 1988, the mobisquad expanded its membership to 61 and its farm by 12 hectares of cotton and 12 of food crops. Squad members nursed and transplanted another 5,000 tree seedlings on the agroforestry farm. The mobisquad realized 1,240,000 cedis, of which it used 600,000 cedis as share capital to become a registered

cooperative. Its coop status, awarded in October 1989, entitled the mobisquad to receive loans from the National Agricultural Development Bank and to sue and be sued.

The following year, the mobisquad planted another 5.2-hectare cotton farm, an 8-hectare cassava farm, and a 3.2-hectare pepper and cowpea farm. The cassava and vegetable farms were intercropped with 4,000 new tree seedlings to expand the agroforestry farm by another 11.2 hectares. The profits for 1989 totaled only 66,378 cedis because the rains were late and insufficient, adversely affecting crop production and cotton germination. More important, the members limited their cassava harvesting in anticipation of being awarded a gari processing facility.<sup>5</sup> They spent 25,850 cedis on community development projects, including construction of a shelter for the gari-processing equipment, and divided 40,528 cedis among themselves.

The Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad has achieved considerable success in its first four years of operation. It developed a 37.6-hectare agroforestry farm, planted 19.2 hectares of cotton, nursed approximately 14,000 tree seedlings, and transplanted about 17,000 seedlings. From these and related activities, the mobisquad netted more than 3.28 million cedis (US \$9,850.00 today), which they shared among themselves and used to help construct an improved latrine and clinic. Their success encouraged the mobisquad to identify and

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<sup>5</sup> Gari can be stored for longer periods of time than raw cassava can, it brings a higher market price (200 – 450 cedis per kilo, depending on the supply and time of year), and it can be sold to buyers coming to Goviefe-Agodome.

develop plans for other community development projects — a day care center and park, repairing the school roof, and desilting the community dam.

In 1989, the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad was the first group in Hohoe District to be awarded the cooperative certificate and the eighth in the Volta Region. That same year, the National Mobilization Program presented the mobisquad with a Certificate of Achievement for its being the most visibly successful group in the Volta Region. On June 5, 1990, Goviefe-Agodome was the site for the United Nations Environmental Programme World Environment Day celebrations. As part of the festivities, the national Environmental Protection Council presented the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad with gari-processing equipment valued at 1.6 million cedis.

The membership of the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad has grown from the original 6 in 1983 to 71 in 1990. Initially, men outnumbered women but more women are involved today. Every household/extended family is represented, but usually only one household member joins so that other family members can maintain the family farm.

An executive committee established in 1987 heads the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad. It is responsible for organizing weekly *durbars* (traditionally, community-wide meetings called by the chieftaincy for general discussions) for mobisquad members to discuss current affairs, establish work schedules, manage the financial records and bank account, help establish links with external assistance institutions, and work with the village

leadership to identify and plan community development work.

The committee includes a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and farm manager. Members hold annual elections, but terms are not restricted and several current leaders have served for several years. The current chairperson also leads the 31st December Women's Movement; the farm manager is a former extension officer for the Ministry of Agriculture. All positions are volunteer.

The mobisquad operates all year long. Members work one half-day each week (7 a.m. to 1 p.m.) except during peak labor demand periods — planting (March – April) and harvest periods (August – September) — when they may work 2 – 3 full days each week. The work of the mobisquad is divided along traditional gender divisions of labor. Men clear the land and women cook, collect water, and sell the crops; both men and women plant, weed, and harvest. To avoid conflicts with private farming activities, they plant communal farms early in the season. Members who do not show up for work are fined, although delinquency is uncommon. The fine for missing one day is usually two bottles of *akpeteshie*, a local gin, valued at 1,200 cedis. The gin is disbursed for refreshment on workdays; members pay villagers to prepare their food on full workdays.

The mobisquad has experimented with ways to raise income. They tried cocoyam production in 1986 but dropped it, reduced maize and vegetable production, increased cassava production and cotton cultivation (added in 1987), and in 1990 began processing gari. Recently, the mobisquad began organizing groups of 8 – 10 members

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for family-level activities, such as agricultural work, house construction, and palm-wine tapping. These groups work on members' private farms as directed by the owners, who pay a token fee, feed them, and offer them palm wine. The executive committee sets work schedules to ensure that members do not abuse their privileges in using this labor. Nonmembers can hire such a mobisquad group but must pay the going wages for hired agricultural labor. This work resembles traditional *nnoboa* self-help, which has not been organized in Goviefe-Agodome for many years.

Although most of the mobisquad's activities remain agricultural, the range of efforts has broadened for economic reasons. The recent shift toward nonagricultural activities is significant, and it may become more so as traditional shifting cultivation practices become less sustainable. The mobisquad's experiments with different economic activities may also help individuals and households consider alternative economic activities.

### *Limitations and Adaptations*

Local needs, problems, and untapped opportunities remain despite the many mobisquad successes. Several technical and institutional issues regarding the mobisquad agroforestry farm stand out. Teak and leucaena are not indigenous to Ghana, and the two species are not intercropped with each other in Goviefe-Agodome. Although the Forestry Department provided the original 3,000 seedlings, the mobisquad nursery has made no attempts to diversify or include indigenous tree species. As a result, the

farm is susceptible to the problems of any other exotic monocropped silviculture.

From an institutional perspective, the organizational capacity of the mobisquad to manage its increasing involvement in economic activities and responsibilities in community development initiatives is in doubt. Recognizing the situation, the mobisquad established an executive committee in 1987 to coordinate its activities and, in 1988, spent 360,200 cedis to train members in project management, youth mobilization, and related endeavors. The squad may need further training on institutional growth and administration in the future. In fact, the mobisquad executive committee could have benefited from training in accounting and financial record-keeping when it opened a bank account and offered members loans. With the addition of gari-processing to its income-generating activities, the mobisquad may need training in equipment maintenance and repair.

The benefits of the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad have been equitable, and they have reached every household in the village. But its successes and the attention it has received have created tensions between Goviefe-Agodome and nearby Goviefe-Kwowu. Goviefe-Agodome residents are calling for more modern community facilities that they do not intend to share. The borehole in Goviefe-Kwowu is no longer used by Goviefe-Agodome, and Goviefe-Agodome residents are requesting mobisquad assistance in building a new primary school and day care center. Tensions will likely rise until Goviefe-Kwowu and neighboring communities are equally organized and successful.

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Of particular concern are two points: few Goviefe-Agodome farmers, mobisquad members and nonmembers, are executing agroforestry or other resource management practices on their own farms, and few neighboring communities have developed viable mobisquads or involved their residents in sustainable community development efforts. Although the mobisquad members recognize the importance of trees in reducing soil erosion and water runoff and, in the case of

leucaena, improving soil fertility, many farmers in Goviefe-Agodome use unsound agricultural practices such as farming on steep slopes without adequate soil erosion controls. Recently, some Goviefe-Agodome farmers and a nearby community, Wadze, requested tree seedlings from the mobisquad nursery to plant on their private farms. Some training in intercropping and other resource management techniques would speed adoption of these practices on private farms.

### *III. Core Elements of Effective Resource Management*

**T**he findings of the Goviefe-Agodome study lead to several hypotheses regarding the basic reasons for successful self-help community development.

#### *Viable Local Institutions*

Historically, communal activities were common among rural populations throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In Ghana, as elsewhere, such actions have been on the decline since World War II. The colonial period brought the internal pacification of warring groups, the displacement of traditional institutions by government administrative units, the decline of the extended family, and increased involvement by villagers in the cash economy. The result is a lower capability and fewer opportunities for community-wide action (Goddard 1973; Koenig 1987; Weil 1986). National solidarity and mobilization have also been on the decline until the last few years; before today, the most recent expressions of these sentiments were during World War II toward the war effort and in the late-1950s toward achieving independence.

The *Govie* people joined forces to address common problems and matters of concern in the preindependence period. According to residents, local nationalism in Goviefe-Agodome was at its highest during the 1880s and 1890s, when unity was needed to defend the community and property against attacks by other groups. Although the *Govie* people have maintained their formal sociopolitical ties, they cooperate less frequently today than when Goviefe-Todzi was first established nearly two centuries ago.

In 1983, when the six returnees from Nigeria established the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad, no local groups engaged in significant community development efforts. The village leaders had difficulty mobilizing people; crises activated the little communal work done. Since 1986, the mobisquad has been the most visible and viable village-level organization in Goviefe-Agodome. The mobisquad has developed over time both by gaining local and external legitimacy as an institution and by taking on new challenges. It now participates in almost all community development efforts, including activities that have longer-term community benefits and only small financial profits for

individual members. In Goviefe-Agodome, as in many communities throughout Ghana, the mobisquad has enveloped the latest wave of community spirit and local nationalism.

The support and, in some cases, involvement of the local leaders was crucial to the establishment, legitimacy, and early achievements of the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad. As village leaders, they worked with the mobisquad executive committee and members to donate communal stool land for the agroforestry farm, facilitate weekly *durbars* for organizing mobisquad activities, encourage and praise squad efforts, involve nonmembers in mobisquad development efforts, and establish contacts with external development assistance agencies.

The Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad also receives the support of other local institutions — political, social, economic, and religious — both traditional and government sponsored. Mobisquad membership, including the executive committee, draws from these groups and many mobisquad efforts are conducted in collaboration with other local organizations. There are several reasons for the working relationships and collaborative efforts of the mobisquad, local leaders, and traditional institutions in Goviefe-Agodome. First of all, traditional institutions were weak and essentially dormant when the mobisquad was set up. The village chief lived full-time in Tema, the *asafo* group had not been involved in any significant community development work for several years, and villagers rarely called upon *nnoboa* self-help.

Second, local leaders and institutions, recognizing the increasing ineffectiveness of the traditional groups, realized that supporting the new government-sponsored institutions would meet community needs better than attempting to revitalize inactive traditional groups. They see the mobisquad as a means of filling an institutional void left vacant by the traditional groups. The other village-based institutions see the mobisquad as a vehicle for implementing proposals and actions that they can help identify and plan. For example, the 31st December Women's Movement worked with the mobisquad to design and construct a clinic and plan for a day care center. Supporting the mobisquad also gives the local leaders an opportunity to contribute to Rawlings' revolution.

The direct link between planning and action and between decisionmakers and workers within the mobisquad has facilitated the community development efforts. Mobisquad members participate directly in planning and implementing most efforts, although nonmember village leaders and other groups may also be involved. In contrast, the traditional *asafo* companies, for example, act primarily at the request and direction of other institutions, in particular the village chieftaincy. Further, the *asafo* companies include only young men and the chieftaincy, primarily elders, but mobisquad membership is a cross-section of the young and the elders, men and women, and other local institutions. It is significant that the leader of the 31st December Women's Movement is the head of the mobisquad executive committee and that no traditional leaders sit on the committee.

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## *Immediate and Significant Project Benefits*

By early 1990, the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad had 71 members, with at least one individual from every household/extended family. The six founding members initially recruited village leaders and farmers, but since the early promotional campaigns, the mobisquad has grown mostly because individuals recognize the significant *personal or household benefits* of membership. Although nonmembers often participate in and enjoy the benefits of the mobisquad community development efforts, individual benefits are much more likely to encourage nonmembers to join.

A significant percentage of the financial profits from the mobisquad communal farms and other activities are shared equally among the members each year. In 1986, only 4 percent (30,000 cedis) of the total profits was allocated to community development projects, and the remainder was shared — each member realized more than 17,500 cedis. (See Figure 3.) The 4 percent "tax" cost each member only 730 cedis. In the following two years, members shared approximately one-half the total profits; in 1987, each member received about 9,700 cedis, and in 1988 approximately 9,800 cedis each. While the contributions to the mobisquad and community have increased, individual members' profits remain high and they are without question a significant incentive to join the mobisquad. At the same time, the work load and other costs per member have declined (through the economy of scale) and noncapital benefits, such as access to loans and agriculture work groups, have increased.

Equally important, mobisquad activities netted significant profits after the first agricultural season. The maize, cassava, vegetables, fuelwood, and charcoal were immediately sold after harvest and the profits distributed to the members. The harvests on farms intercropped with leucaena are already larger than elsewhere; according to mobisquad members, yields from intercropped cassava are 30 – 40 percent greater than those of monocropped cassava. And after only two years, the farmers are harvesting fuelwood, building material, and fodder from the planted leucaena.

As mobisquad services to the membership have increased, significant noneconomic benefits that relate to personal/household needs for labor and other resources have emerged. Members have access to low-interest loans from the mobisquad bank account and to labor for agricultural, house-building, and other activities. Nonmembers can tap into these services, but only when their requests do not conflict with member needs, and then at market prices.

## *Local Knowledge of Resource Management Practices*

The principal income-generating activities of the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad involve practices and techniques familiar to its members. Mobisquad efforts emphasize farming, in particular, the production of staple food crops — cassava and maize — long cultivated by the *Govie* people. The knowledge and resources for their production are both known and locally available. The organization of this work —

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Figure 3.  
Goviefe-Agodome Mobisquad Cooperative — Membership and Production Figures

Year	Number of Members	Cotton Farm Size —New/Year	Agro Forestry Farm —New/Year	Income from Cotton Farm	Income from Agro Forestry Farm + Fuelwood Etc. ¢ 000	Total Income ¢ 000	Amount Spent on Members ¢ 000	Balance to Community ¢ 000
1986	41	—	4.8 ha	—	750	750	720	30
1987	52	2.0 ha	9.6	236	989	1,225	864	361
1988	61	12.0 ha	12.0 ha	498	742	1,240	600	640
1989	60	5.2 ha	11.2	29*	38**	67	41	26
1990	71	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

\* Adverse weather conditions affected early cotton germination

\*\* Cassava harvesting was limited in anticipation of installation of a processing facility



communal farms through mobisquad efforts — is new, but *nnoboa* self-help and informal agricultural work parties are traditional cultural arrangements.

Similarly, treeplanting and management are known, although less common. Farmers in Goviefe-Agodome have always planted and cared for tree crops, primarily fruit and nut trees, and have sometimes nurtured native trees, especially those providing fuelwood, medicines, and building materials. In addition, to encourage rapid regrowth during the fallow periods of their shifting cultivation system, farmers often leave certain trees standing on the farm and sometimes transplant seedlings to the fallow field or strategically position farms next to forestland to facilitate natural seed dispersal of forest vegetation.

The Germans, who occupied part of Ghana's Volta Region from the 1870s until World War I, were involved in rural treeplanting efforts. The British, who took over after World War I, encouraged treeplanting through major educational campaigns and some extension services. They planted many ornamental, shade, and fruit/nut trees in Goviefe-Agodome. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, planting cash crop tree farms peaked because world prices on coffee and cocoa were high. With the price decline in the early 1980s, droughts and bushfires in 1976 – 77 and 1982 – 83, degradation of the local resource base, and limited cash to purchase inputs, producing such cash crops became more difficult in Goviefe-Agodome.

Despite a long familiarity with trees, modern treeplanting efforts differ in species, maintenance, and use. Teak and leucaena have a long history in Ghana, but they are a

recent introduction in Goviefe-Agodome. One important aspect of the local treeplanting activities is the mobisquad nursery; which is needed to produce such a large number of seedlings. (The Forestry Department nursery in Hohoe is 70 kilometers away.) The nursery is successful, in part because the techniques are locally sustainable and are easily shared through farmer-to-farmer training. Many farmers were already familiar with basic nursery techniques; in the 1970s and 1980s some households had nurseries for private coffee/cocoa plantations, and women traditionally developed nurseries for their vegetable gardens. And in 1986, the Forestry Department trained mobisquad members in basic nursery techniques and since then, the mobisquad farm manager has been advising them.

### *Links to External Development Assistance*

Communities along important traffic routes have better access to major urban centers and receive a larger share of development assistance than more distant and isolated villages (Chambers 1983; Lipton 1977). In the late 1800s, the founders of Goviefe-Agodome moved from the highlands to the lowlands, in part to benefit from these urban biases and roadside advantages. The residents and the community in general still gain from this move.

The proximity and accessibility of Goviefe-Agodome to urban areas offer residents various socioeconomic opportunities. Most adults in Goviefe-Agodome have traveled to other

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*Figure 4.  
Agroforestry Farm (Peter Veit)*



parts of Ghana; most men have worked outside Goviefe-Agodome, some outside the country. Many villagers own radios, read local newspapers, and follow events in Ghana, Africa, and the world. From an educational perspective, Ghanaians in general enjoy a relatively high standard of health and education owing to significant state spending on welfare services in the 1960s and 1970s. In Goviefe-Agodome,

approximately 63 percent of the adult population is literate, 10 percent has completed secondary or technical/commercial school, and 34 percent has completed middle school. Only 19 percent stopped with primary school.

Most Goviefe-Agodome residents know individuals living elsewhere in Ghana and many have immediate family outside the

*Figure 5.  
Villagers Harvesting Cotton on Mobisquad Farm  
(Annie Corboy)*



village. Some residents have acquired skills or have links to development assistance organizations of potential benefit to the community. For example, the son of a local farmer, an agricultural extension officer stationed outside the Volta Region, frequently visits Goviefe-Agodome and offers advice and assistance on improved agricultural practices. The farm manager, an ex-agricultural extension officer, shares his knowledge of improved agricultural techniques, including agroforestry, and has maintained his contacts in the Ministry of Agriculture since his retirement.

A retired newspaper reporter now back home in Goviefe-Kwowu regularly promotes

Goviefe-Agodome's ongoing efforts. He occasionally contributes articles to local newspapers praising the work of the mobisquad, holds discussions with government and development assistance agencies, and writes letters of introduction to international organizations. (His visit to the EPC in April 1988 led to this case study.) Publicity about the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad has increased both the number of visits by government agencies and the development assistance community and the number of independently prepared features in the local media (Tengey 1988; Atsu 1989; *Peoples Daily Graphic* 1989).

The mobisquad executive committee has established contacts with external development assistance agencies, encouraging them to work in Goviefe-Agodome. The secretary is a member of the executive committee of the Volta Regional National Mobisquad Programme and has opportunities to promote Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad activities and network with public and private development assistance institutions. In 1990, the NMP awarded the Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad a bicycle and asked the organization to share its experiences and help establish and activate mobisquads in other communities. In addition, some neighboring villages have visited Goviefe-Agodome and a few have asked the mobisquad for assistance.

Of significance are the ornamental trees in the Goviefe-Agodome settlement that are visible from the road and the agroforestry farm and nursery that are within walking distance of the settlement. The planted trees contrast sharply with the surrounding savannah vegetation and draw the attention of government, private, and international

development assistance agencies. (See *Figures 4 and 5.*)

Goviefe-Agodome has benefited from its accessibility and visibility and the many contacts it has with outside organizations. Numerous development assistance agencies have supported it through technical advice, training, and resources, including funds. In 1985, USAID helped construct an earthen dam to improve local water supplies. In 1986, the Forestry Department advised the mobisquad on its agroforestry farm and provided free seedlings; in 1987, it provided training in basic nursery techniques. Also in 1987, the mobisquad worked with World Vision, a U.S. private voluntary organization, to construct an improved latrine. In 1988, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations gave the mobisquad 400,000 cedis to continue its agroforestry work. And in 1990, the EPC awarded it costly gari-processing equipment. The additional exposure Goviefe-Agodome received when selected as the site for World Environment Day and its achievement of cooperative status have led other development organizations to open discussions with the mobisquad.

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## IV. Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study have implications for public policy-makers in Ghana and decision-makers in the development assistance community regarding natural resource management and community development.

### *Decentralization and Natural Resource Management*

The literature recognizing the importance of popular participation in the development process and the capacity of grassroots leaders and institutions to help plan, implement, and manage community development efforts is voluminous (Chambers 1983; Chambers, Pacey, and Thrupp 1989; Korten 1980; Korten and Klauss 1984; Paul 1987). Many analysts have noted that local involvement in development planning, especially that of a village-based institution, often leads to ownership of design and participation in implementation and management (Agarwal and Narain 1989; Cernea 1987; Chambers 1988; Esman and Uphoff 1984; Freeman 1989; Leonard and Marshall 1982; Thomas-Slayter, Ford, and Kabutha 1991; Thompson 1991; Uphoff 1986, 1988).

Popular participation can be achieved through the effective devolution of central authority for development purposes. The stated purpose of Chairman Rawlings' December 31, 1981 revolution was "to place power in the hands of the people and to ensure their genuine participation in the decision making process" (Government of Ghana 1982). "When people get involved in the local government, it is then that they will be enthused to take keen interest in the national political and administrative system" (Idrisu 1987, p. 12). Rawlings has worked to democratize political decision-making, decentralize power, ensure popular participation in the development process, and revive traditional communal spirit and self-help at the local level. In many cases, government policies are backed by specific legislation, an institutional infrastructure that reaches the community level, and programs to engender local involvement in the planning and implementation of development programs.

With the release of *District Political Authority and Modalities for District Level Election* in 1987 (Government of Ghana) and the signing of the Local Government Law, PNDCL 207, in 1988 (Government of Ghana 1988), the number of districts was increased from 65 to 110 and district

assemblies (DAs) were established as the lowest level of *public administration and political authority*. DAs are "responsible for the development, improvement and management of human settlements and the environment in the District" (PNDCL 207, Section 6-3-e), and they have the legal authority to create and enforce by-laws to ensure that these responsibilities are met. The people elect two-thirds of the assembly, one member from each electoral area in the district; the central government appoints the rest. District assembly elections were held in 1988 - 89.

This devolution of authority has influenced natural resource management in Ghana and has important implications for its future. In March 1988, the government directed the EPC to review current policies related to resource management and to propose a national strategy for addressing key environmental problems, opportunities, and options. This work, as part of the national Economic Recovery Program, evolved into the preparation of a National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) to "define a set of policy actions, related investments, and institutional strengthening activities to make Ghana's development strategy more environmentally sustainable" (EPC 1989a).

The council has worked to ensure popular participation in the preparation, review, and implementation of the NEAP and identification of activities with local needs. Ghanaian experts familiar with the rural realities have been involved in every facet of the process. District-level officers, traditional chiefs, national and international nongovernmental organizations, and local grassroots groups have contributed to the preparation and

evaluation of draft NEAP documents (EPC 1989b).

In part as a result of this participation, provisions in the national environmental policy ensure public participation in environmental decision-making and action and create public awareness of the environment, its relationship to socioeconomic development, and the necessity for rational resource use. In addition, a process has been identified through which broad national policies and programs on the environment are to be translated into action at the district and local levels. District assemblies are to provide information on local resource needs for national, district, and local action; prepare district land use and development plans; and enact and enforce appropriate procedures and by-laws essential for safeguarding the resource base. To coordinate district environmental matters, each district assembly is being encouraged to establish a district environmental management committee, and to provide assistance in the planning and implementation of district programs, the NEAP calls for each village to organize a community environmental committee (EPC 1989a). Few if any communities, including Goviefe-Agodome, have yet developed such a committee.

## *Recommendations*

Following are several specific ideas and recommendations for policy-makers and development officers concerned with community natural resource management.

## *Village-level Planning and Action*

In the past 20 years, particularly during the past five years, the people of Goviefe-Agodome have planned community development efforts, contributed labor and local resources toward implementing and managing these initiatives, and attracted external assistance when needed. The findings from Goviefe-Agodome support the conclusions of other research efforts — that the community is an appropriate development unit and that village leaders and local institutions have important roles and responsibilities in grassroots development.

Goviefe-Agodome is fortunate to have local leaders and institutions with the commitment and skills to organize villagers, develop local consensus on priority problems and options, and manage community development efforts. People in other rural communities share similar interests and aspirations, but relatively few have the leadership and organizational abilities needed to succeed in such significant initiatives. *In the short term, such communities would benefit from technical assistance to catalyze this process; in the long term, village leaders could be trained in appropriate organizational skills and management techniques.*

District assemblies were established to "provide an institutional framework for the supervision and direction of local issues on development" (Iddrisu 1987, p. 12). They are responsible for the overall development of their districts — to formulate strategies and programs for effective mobilization and utilization of the human, physical, financial, and other resources in the districts; promote

and support productive activities and social services development; and remove obstacles and constraints to development initiatives.

The district development, planning, and budgeting units (DPBUs) of the district assemblies, including planning officers, budget officers, and community development officers, are responsible for drawing up the district development plans. It is too early to evaluate the DPBUs' effectiveness in ensuring local participation in preparing district development plans that address local problems and opportunities and in developing actions that are socioeconomically and ecologically sustainable. Although problems have already been identified and more are sure to surface, at least three aspects of the decentralization program in Ghana suggest that it will not experience problems encountered in other African countries (see Chambers 1985; Maro 1990; World Bank and Instituto Italo-Africano 1989).

First, Ghana's lowest level of political authority has the potential to reach the community or village cluster level. The districts are small in geographic and population terms, averaging less than 2,200 square kilometers and 140,000 people each. In contrast, Kenya's 43 districts — also the lowest level of political power — average nearly 15,000 square kilometers and 600,000 people each (Government of Kenya 1983; Chambers 1985; Thomas-Slayter, Ford, and Kabutha 1991). The smaller size of Ghana's districts suggests that district development plans are more likely to address the community-specific priority needs and opportunities of their constituencies.

Second, the decentralization effort in Ghana includes the fusion of twenty-two line ministries, departments, and other public agencies, including many concerned with resource management, under the single authority of the district assemblies. A primary purpose of placing the staff under a single administrative unit is to foster a multidisciplinary and integrated approach to local development.

Third, at EPC's recommendation, many district assemblies established district environmental management committees (in addition to anti-bushfire subcommittees and other environmentally related groups) to advise on local resource management issues and ensure the environmental soundness of district development plans and programs. Kenya's decentralization effort included the creation of posts at the district level for environmental officers with similar responsibilities. These officers have emerged as among the most influential individuals in local resource management and community development. They also integrate and coordinate the actions of the decentralized technical extension staff—the district development committees (Thomas-Slayter, Ford, and Kabutha 1991).

*Commitments to decentralization and popular participation by the government of Ghana require appropriate grassroots institutions capable of motivating and catalyzing the people to take responsibility in community development and local resource management. Effective DPBU teams will have the sensitivity to interact effectively with villagers, the skills to solicit real needs and sustainable opportunities, and the expertise to integrate local priority needs into implementable district-level development plans. These units could also*

*act as facilitators to help communities and village clusters prepare subdistrict development plans on which the district development plan could be based. In turn, district plans could incorporate measures and resources for providing the technical and financial assistance necessary to implement the village-level plans.*

Several methodologies have been developed and field-tested for helping planners and communities work together to prepare such site-specific action plans (Davis-Case 1989; Kumar 1989; Molnar 1989; National Environment Secretariat et al. 1990; Raintree 1987; Scoones and McCracken 1989). Most recognize the importance of both indigenous knowledge and outside technical expertise. Many include specific tools for promoting constructive dialogue and soliciting local opinions and for overcoming problems, such as those associated with sampling errors, interviewer biases, and power disparities within and among villagers.

### *Local Institutions*

The Goviefe-Agodome experience suggests that an active and well-organized village-based institution is essential to community development and resource management. In recent years, the local mobisquad has emerged as the principal vehicle for socioeconomic development in Goviefe-Agodome. It organizes village meetings to determine local priorities, identify viable options to address its problems and opportunities, develop an action plan and schedule, and mobilize members and nonmembers. The implication of these findings is that

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*development assistance agencies should consider collaborating with viable local institutions.*

A recent survey of village-based institutions involved in local development and resource management recorded many Ghanaian communities with viable groups (Dorm-Adzobu and Veit 1990). The mobisquad is often the most viable local development institution in many communities, but, for example, in Kegle, Lawra District, the Parent-Teacher Association has mobilized local resources to build a junior secondary school. In Awutu-Obrakyere community, Senya-Awutu Effutu District, Wonsom, a volunteer organization, has helped construct two improved latrines, a day care center, a junior secondary school, a gari- and palm oil-processing plant, a cattle ranch, a corn mill, and a clinic. The 31st December Women's Movement in Dodze, a village on the Ghana-Togo border, has improved the well-being of the women through producing and selling cassava and pepper, and the June 4 Movement has effectively halted international smuggling and developed a 25 acre (10 hectare) maize farm to help fund construction of a latrine (Government of Ghana 1989).

Since coming to power in 1981, Rawlings' government has developed several revolutionary organs (for example, Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs),<sup>6</sup> 31st December Women's Movements, and mobisquads) that

reach the local level and involve the establishment of appropriate community institutions. These government-initiated institutions are superimposed on traditional organizations (such as the chieftaincy and *asafo* companies) as well as on such externally-sponsored groups as the town development councils established by the British colonialists and special interest groups organized by churches, schools, and clubs. In addition, the government and the international community are proposing several new village-based institutions. For example, PNDCL 207 authorizes the district assemblies to establish submetropolitan district councils, town/area councils, or unit committees to assist in administering the area and to prepare and implement district development plans (Government of Ghana 1988); as stated above, the National Environmental Action Plan calls for the creation of community environmental committees to help implement the plan at the local level (EPC 1989a).

Even though few villages include all groups, the plethora of local organizations creates complex organizational arrangements. Some villages have recruitment and membership problems. Conflicts have arisen among the leadership of institutions, especially in smaller communities, about how to share members and allocate time for activities. Local leaders and villagers do not have either the time or resources to participate in all local institutions and activities. Deciding which groups to join may be a sensitive issue,

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<sup>6</sup> CDRs, the basic units of local democracy, are responsible for creating and fostering public awareness and vigilance, promoting the aims of the revolution, defending the nation and ensuring peace, and maintaining discipline, decency, and accountability.

especially for local leaders, given their political influence within and outside their communities. Involvement may lend credibility to a local group; not joining could signal disapproval.

The Goviefe-Agodome mobisquad is effective, in part because local leaders and other village institutions support it. This support contrasts starkly with the lack of cooperation and sometimes the conflict that characterize the relationships between other institutions and leaders and within and between villages and the district. Tension has been reported among village chiefs, CDRs, and the newly elected district assembly members (Government of Ghana 1989). The traditional leaders have not always pledged their support of the government-initiated institutions, refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the district assemblies and sometimes exercising their power of sanction to restrict local involvement. Some assembly members have tried to destool or deskin chiefs by physically removing them from their stools or skins. Others have purchased their own *gong-gong* (the chief's traditional instrument for calling his people) to rival that of the chief and to reach the people directly. Some have even attempted to dissolve legally constituted revolutionary organs such as the CDRs.

The Ministry of Local Government encourages district assemblies to team up with chiefs and revolutionary organs, but many traditional leaders are threatened by government institutions that they view as competition for power. The stated responsibilities of the CDRs, the 31st December Women's Movement, and mobisquads, in particular, overlap the roles of the village chief, queenmother, and *asaf*

company, respectively. In addition, government leaders tend to be younger, more active, and better educated than traditional leaders. Although some government statements have addressed the roles and responsibilities of the institutions, including suggestions for harmonizing relations, between the CDRs and Assembly members, in particular, additional *guidelines on institutional relationships and responsibilities would further reduce the tension and confusion.*

The Goviefe-Agodome study indicates that *government support can strengthen a local institution.* With the encouragement and assistance of the government, the new village-level institution gains national legitimacy and in many communities, undermines and replaces counterpart traditional groups. Most public support of village organizations is for government-initiated institutions. Although viable village organizations vary widely, government-initiated and -sponsored institutions — here, the mobisquads — are the most active village groups in Ghana (Dorm-Adzobu and Veit 1990). Recognizing the difficulty of establishing new viable local institutions (or revitalizing dormant groups), the National Mobilization Program encourages government, private, and international organizations to work through the mobisquads to gain local participation and achieve sustainable community development. Considering the variability of active local groups, this study suggests that *the development assistance community should work with the most viable existing village groups involved in community development.*

The viable local organization may not have an institutional history with or

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experience in the proposed community development activities. The Goviefe-Agodome experience suggests that viable institutions build on early successes; they are frequently interested in and capable of broadening their range of activities. Through experimentation and learning, the mobisquad has gradually expanded its role and involvement in community development activities. Members are receptive to training and advice on modern agroforestry practices, basic nursery techniques, and other new methods. *The leaders and members of viable institutions in other communities interested in expanding their range of expertise would benefit from focused training and technical assistance in new practices that respond to their priority needs and opportunities.*

In many sub-Saharan African nations, government-sponsored institutions are casualties of passing political regimes; when a new government comes to power, it sets up new local institutions to replace those of the previous political power. Development

assistance agencies seeking long-term collaboration with partner village institutions then face a dilemma. In Ghana, like most former colonies, national political and administrative structures were created before a local government system was imposed; local government was not nurtured to evolve from existing local or traditional political and administrative structures or from the imposed centralized system. Current government policy recognizes the value of traditional rulers but emphasizes working with, rather than strengthening, these leaders and institutions. *Continuity could be ensured if new government powers continued support of local institutions established or endorsed by the previous government or if these new powers legitimized and strengthened local institutions that transcend political regimes (such as the town development committees, and the village chieftaincy).* Such direct support would simplify local institutional arrangements and reduce the likelihood of competition and conflict among organizations.

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## V. Conclusions

**T**hroughout sub-Saharan Africa, governments and development assistance agencies are recognizing the importance of popular participation in the development process. Local involvement in the design, implementation, and management of community development often leads to successful and sustainable efforts. As the development assistance community comes to understand what popular participation means and how best to achieve it, the fundamental role and involvement of local leadership and village-based institutions in community development will become clear.

Historical records and anthropological studies provide insights into the traditional roles of indigenous institutions. This study identifies some prerequisites and potentials of viable externally initiated and sponsored village institutions. Government's political backing can significantly strengthen a local institution by legitimizing the group and its activities. Coupled with the support of local leaders and other village institutions, such groups can mobilize the labor and resources of members and nonmembers toward community development initiatives that meet priority needs and opportunities.

The roles and responsibilities of governments concerned with developing a favorable political, economic, and social climate for rural communities to duplicate Goviefe-Agodome's organizational and leadership successes are clear. For governments involved in decentralizing administrative and political authority, the lowest level of political power must have both the mandate and the capability to motivate and help its people and institutions to take greater responsibility in their own development. Such an approach requires skills and techniques to interact with villagers and identify local needs and constraints and the mandate to help rural people carry out activities that address their priority needs. It also requires continuity and consistency in the support of grassroots institutions. Ghana's newly elected 110 district assemblies have the potential to reach the communities and village clusters and to involve them in district-level development and environmental decision-making. Other nations in sub-Saharan Africa with similar objectives are closely monitoring the outcomes of Ghana's decentralization efforts.

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