

The Influence of Urbanization on the Size and Species Composition of Some Selected Sacred Groves in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out in eight selected sacred groves in Lower Manya Krobo Municipality (6°10'-6°50' N 0°30' - 0°00' W) to investigate the influence of urbanization on their sizes and species composition. The study involved two broad methods for data collection: Focus Group Discussion and Deliberate Floral Sampling. The results indicated that: (i) the sacred groves in the Lower Manya Krobo] Municipality were established for ancestral and spiritual worship as well as to conserve medicinal plants and other lesser known/lesser use staple carbohydrates in order to preserve the culture of the Krobos; (ii) since the establishment these groves, they have been managed and preserved solely by traditional custodians using their traditional ecological knowledge based on taboos and superstitions supported by the members of the communities fringing the selected groves; (iii) the groves are prohibited and one needs to obtain formal permission from the custodians in order to have access to them and that any illegal entry attracts a penalty such as sheep, drinks and money; (iv) the custodians of the groves have special knowledge in grovel management and in the organization of cultural activities associated with their groves; (v) generally there was no physical protection of the groves such as fencing, creation of fire belts or education or awareness creation in the communities fringing the sacred groves; (vi) the system of selection of next of kin to manage the grove is either by birthright or spiritual; (vii) the groves appeared to be more biodiversity-rich with native species just as the formal/orthodox managed forest reserve; (viii) 129 plant species belonging to 45 families were encountered and the Leguminosae had the highest representation whereas the least represented families were Marantaceae, I Myristicaceae, Sapotaceae, Smilacaceae, Ulmaceae, Urticaceae and Carassulaceae families. Some plant species occurred in one out of the eight sacred groves including the Shai-Hills Resource Reserve. For example *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*, *Desmodium* sp, *Dioscorea* sp, *Dichapetalum toxicarium*, *Plumeria acutifolia*, *Smilax kraussiana*, *Thonningii sanguine* and *Turrea* were present in *Aklermer* grove only; whereasi *Afzelia africana*, *Diospyros*

barteri, Nauclea diderchii, Polisota hirsuta, Tragia sp, and Zanthoxylum xanthoxyloides were present in *Klo-yomi or Klo-wemi* grove only and so on; (ix) the beliefs in taboos and superstitions that protect the groves appear to be still relevant but modernity is having a great influence on it; (x) almost all the groves are faced with management challenges such as biomass extraction, refuse dumping, bushfire, encroachment and chieftaincy dispute; (xi) the pattern of influence' of urbanization on the groves is a matter of proximity and accessibility similar to the, general land use pattern in the study area. To effectively maintain these groves in the Lower Manya Krobo Municipality to sustain the culture of the Krobos and to conserve biodiversity, it would be prudent for, the state to give sacred grove conservation a formal legal backing which must also be supported by the Municipal Assembly and other relevant stakeholders.

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