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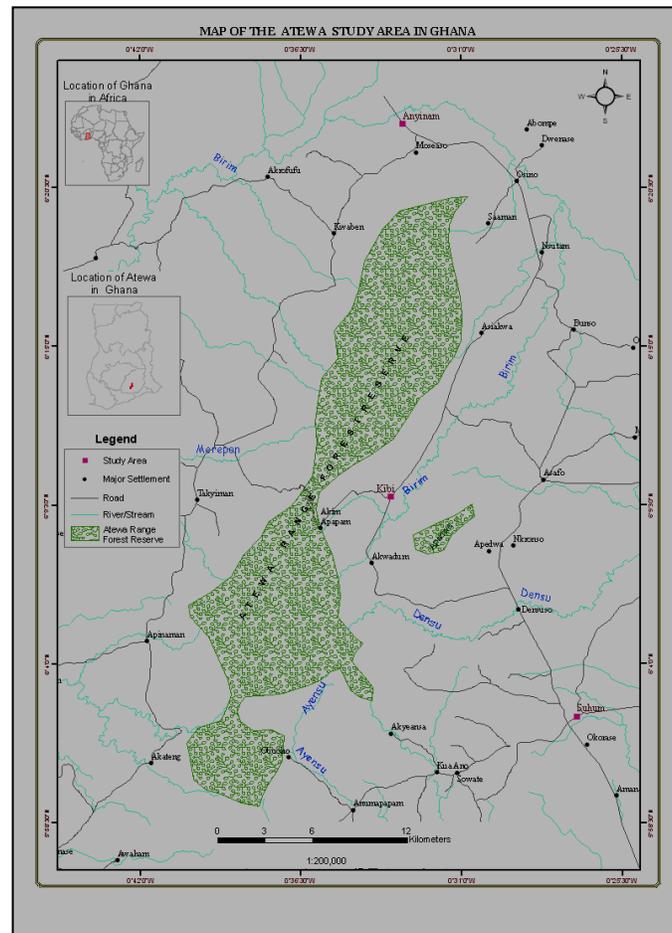
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Threats to Ghana's forest reserves: Perspectives on Atewa Range Forest Reserve

Forest plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of most African countries. In Ghana, forest accounts for about 6% of the country's GDP and 11% of export earnings with over 2.5 million people dependent on the it for provision of food, medicine, clothing, shelter, furniture, potable water supply sources and bushmeat (Forestry Department, 2001, Lebedys 2004). Whilst the role of the forest in local livelihood enhancement cannot be down played, it is also important to note the forest's ability to meet local needs predisposes it to serious threats. FRA (2011) reports that through human activities, around 130 million hectares of the world's forests were lost between the years 2000 and 2010, of which more than 40 million hectares were primary forests. Within the last century alone, Ghana's forest cover has reduced from 8.2 million ha to 1.7 million ha.

Protected areas are established as effective tools for achieving conservation goals. In Ghana, forest reserves were the first type of protected areas to be designated as a way of protecting forests and regulating the exploitation of forest resources. Later ecosystems hot spots including watershed areas, hill slopes and relic ecotomes were also designated for biodiversity protection among other functions. Presently, the total Ghana's land area under protection constitutes about 15% . Forest reserves cover 10% of protected areas whereas resource and wildlife reserves make up 5%. Unfortunately, most of the reserves have come under severe pressure emanating from anthropogenic forces (Ayivor *et al.*, 2011).

The Atewa Range Forest Reserve in the Eastern Region (see map), is the largest forest reserve in Ghana covering a total of 23,663 hectares.



Atewa RFR risks losing its butterflies and other rare species if degradation continues.



Major Concerns

Both legal and illegal small-scale gold mining operations are ongoing, causing massive destruction to the forest and water courses.

Watershed destruction with likely consequence of streams drying up during the dry seasons and devastating floods occurring during the rainy seasons.

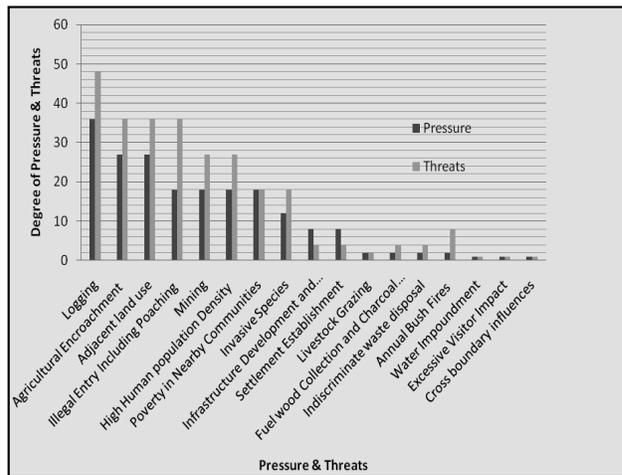
Government's intention to exploit bauxite from the reserve is misplaced and should be reconsidered.

Pressure and threats facing Atewa RFR (as summarized in the chart below) have the potential of further degrading the reserve if left unattended.



Small scale mining at Atewa RFR

Pressure and Threats Facing Atewa RFR



Source: Ayivor *et al.*, 2011.

Way Forward

Concerted effort from central and local governments is needed to control all illegal operations within forest reserves.

There is also the need to provide alternate source of livelihood to local communities living close to the reserve to reduce their dependence on it for economic needs.

Finally, there is need for combined efforts of FC, the security agencies, the judiciary and Nananom to save Atewa's future as a forest reserve.

In our stewardship of the environment, let us bear in mind that the rich and the powerful often cause the problems for the poor and the vulnerable to pay the price.

References and Further Reading

- 2011:** Ayivor, J S., Gordon, C., Adomako, J. K., Ntiamao-Baidu, Y., (2011). Challenges of managing forest reserves: case study of Atewa Range Forest Reserve, Ghana. *Nature and Fauna: Economic and Social Significance of Forests for African Sustainable Development*. FAO, Volume 25, Issue 2.
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