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Farming with the Forest: Agriculture and Conservation Synergy in Ghana's Western Wildlife Corridor

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Abstract

This study explores farmers' role in the conservation of the Western Wildlife Corridor and associated Community Resource Management Areas in Ghana. Through focus group discussions and key informant interviews, it was found that local communities possess a deep understanding of the corridor's ecological, economic, and cultural values. Farmers identified a wide range of ecosystem services, including provisioning (e.g., firewood, fruits, construction materials), regulating (e.g., climate regulation, water purification), cultural (e.g., traditional knowledge, spiritual value), and supporting services (e.g., soil fertility, pollination). This knowledge has positively influenced the widespread acceptance of community-based natural resource management programmes as conservation tools. Despite facing land-use pressures from commercial farming, grazing, logging, and mining, communities demonstrate a strong commitment to conserving the wildlife corridor, motivated by intrinsic, cultural, and heritage values of biodiversity. Farmers' tolerance of wildlife—despite crop raiding and livestock depredation—is underpinned by cultural beliefs, especially in communities where wildlife are totemic animals. However, delayed or absent compensation for wildlife-related losses remains a critical concern that threatens long-term community support for conservation efforts. Conservation initiatives such as the Modified Taungya System (MTS), green firebelts, and capacity-building under national projects have reinforced local participation. The study highlights that the success of community-based conservation projects stems from collaborative governance structures involving local farmers, forestry and wildlife authorities, and NGOs. However, sustaining these gains requires continued investment in conservation-compatible livelihoods and prompt compensation mechanisms. The findings suggest that integrated landscape management, when informed by local knowledge and supported by inclusive conservation policies, can harmonize agricultural production with biodiversity conservation. Future research is recommended to explore land tenure dynamics in the WWC, particularly regarding commercial land acquisition, to inform sustainable land use planning.

Key Words: Farmers, Agriculture, Conservation, Wild Corridors, Ghana

