

PARLIAMENT OF GHANA LIBRARY
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
OSU - ACCRA

**IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE FOURTH
REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

**REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE ON THE
PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL**

ON THE

MANAGEMENT OF WETLANDS (RAMSAR SITES) IN GHANA

Thursday 8th July 2010

Acc No: 7567
Class No: CE/PAR/10

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The above Performance Audit Report was laid in the House on Wednesday 2nd December, 2009 in accordance with article 184 of the 1992 Constitution and the Standing Orders of the House.

This audit report was referred to the Public Accounts Committee in accordance with Standing Order 165 for examination and report.

To consider this report, the Committee met with the Chief Director of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, **Mr. Frank Sofo**, the Executive Director of the Forestry Commission, Nana Kofi Adu Nsiah the technical team from the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources and the Ghana Audit Service and report as follows:

2.0 REFERENCES

The Committee referred to the following relevant documents:-

1. The 1992 Constitution
2. The Standing Orders of the House
3. Wetland Management Regulation, LI 1659

3.0 BACKGROUND

Wetlands provide habitats suitable for the survival of countless species of plants and animals. However, wetlands in Ghana are under threat and urgent attention has to be given, if they are to be saved for posterity. Ghana was the 46th nation to ratify the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in 1988. With this, Ghana committed herself to ensuring and promoting sustainable and wise use of her wetlands. Wildlife Division (WD) of the Forestry Commission is mandated to oversee the management of wetlands.

WD has since 1988 made efforts to conserve wetlands in the country. In 1993, WD embarked on the Coastal Wetland Management Project (CWMP) and put in place measures to ensure the sustainability of the five Coastal Wetlands. The Wetland Management Regulation, LI 1659, was instituted during the CWMP. In addition, the

Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines developed a National Management Strategy to save wetlands from deteriorating.

The audit was conducted to find out how well Ghana's Wetlands were being managed by the Wildlife Division of the Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines.

4.0 PRESENTATION ON WETLANDS (RAMSAR SITES)

4.1 Ramsar Convention

In order to understand what Ramsar Sites (Wetlands) are about, the Committee invited **Prof. Yaa Ntimoa Baidu** of the University of Ghana, Legon, an expert in the field of Wetlands Management, who explained Ramsar Sites and its Convention to the Committee.

Prof. Yaa Ntimoa Baidu intimated to the Committee that there is an intergovernmental treaty known as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and wetland resources.

The Convention defines a wetland as an area of marsh, fen, peat land or water, natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt and includes areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters.

This Convention was concluded in the town of Ramsar, Iran on February 2, 1971, hence the name Ramsar Convention. Due to this, February 2 of every year is celebrated as World Wetlands Day.

Under the Ramsar Convention, Contracting Parties are obliged to:

- Designate suitable wetlands within its territory for inclusion in the list of Wetlands of International Importance.
- Designate at least one wetland to be included in the list when signing the convention.
- Consider its international responsibilities for the conservation, management and wise use of migratory stocks of waterfowl, both when designating entries for the list and when exercising its right to change entries in the list relating to wetlands within its territory.
- Formulate and implement their planning so as to promote the conservation of the wetlands included in the List.

- Promote the conservation of wetlands and waterfowl by establishing nature reserves on wetlands, whether they are included in the list or not.
- Encourage research and the exchange of data and publications regarding wetlands and their flora and fauna.
- Promote the training of personnel competent in the fields of wetlands research, management and wardening.

Ghana became a signatory to the Convention in 1988. It also designated the Owabi Wildlife Sanctuary as its first Ramsar site. In 1992, under the Ghana Coastal Wetlands Management Project, the country designated five Ramsar sites on the basis of their international importance for waterfowls namely Keta, Songor, Sakumo, Densu Delta and Muni Ramsar Sites.

Ghana is one of the first countries in Africa to develop a National Wetlands Strategy. She was also a Member and Chair of the Ramsar Convention's Scientific and technical review panel from 1993 to 1999.

4.2 Criteria for selecting Wetlands as Ramsar Sites

She said there are a number of criteria used to select a wetland as a Ramsar site. They are classified into groups as follows:

a) GROUP A CRITERIA:

Criterion 1: Sites Containing Representative, Rare or Unique Wetlands Types

- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it contains a representative, rare or unique example of natural or near- natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeography region.

b) GROUP B CRITERIA:

Criterion 1:- Sites of International Importance for Conserving Biological Diversity

- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports Vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.
- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeography region.

- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

Criterion 2: Specific criteria based on waterbirds

- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.
- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1 % of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbirds.

Criterion 3: Specific criteria based on fish

- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.
- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and /or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.

Criterion 4: Specific criteria based on other taxa

- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individual in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.

4.3 Importance of wetlands

On the importance of wetlands to the country, Prof Baidu said wetlands are important for the ecosystem services. They ensure flood control, help in the recharging of groundwater water purification and prevention of storm.

Wetland sites preserve wetland values. They preserve lagoon fisheries and also act as good fish nurseries for several marine fish species. It also serves as home and feeding grounds to a number of animals including water-birds, turtles, and crocodiles.

Wetland sites are also used for recreational facilities and for educational purposes.

She informed the Committee that in Ghana it is the responsibility of the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission to maintain and preserve wetlands in Ghana.

4.4 Challenges facing Wetlands in Ghana

Prof Baidu intimated the Committee that wetland conservation in the country is plagued with a number of challenges. They include:

1. Inadequate funding
2. Lack of capacity of staff which include understaffing, poor training, poor remuneration etc
3. Limited awareness and appreciation of the Ghanaian public for wetland functions and values
4. Lack of coordination between relevant sector agencies
5. Poverty in communities living within and around the Ramsar sites

4.5 Threats to Ghana's Wetlands

She said the main threats to Ghana's wetlands are Habitat degradation, Pollution and Encroachments from human settlements.

5.0 SUMMARY OF AUDIT FINDINGS

The audit revealed a number of lapses in the management of Ramsar sites in the country. They include:

➤ poor communication at the various sites

There is insufficient collaboration between WD and communities at some Ramsar sites on agreement to close season periods. Close seasons allows for regeneration of species at the wetlands

- Inadequate signposts and billboards at Ramsar sites. Sign posts inform the general public about the Ramsar sites.
- Site Management Committees (SMC) were not functioning at the Ramsar sites. These committee involved members from WD, Opinion leaders and other stakeholders like Environment Protection Agency and are to help manage the sites.

➤ **poor Monitoring at the Ramsar sites**

- Wetland Unit of WD does not have the required staff needed for effective monitoring. The few staff on site lack the necessary equipment such as wellington boots, gloves, motor cycles, etc for effective monitoring.
- There were no monitoring schedules and reports at the sites visited.
- Insufficient community involvement in monitoring. The community members are used as joint task force for the monitoring. As at the time of the audit, none of the taskforce were on the site.

➤ **Absence of continuous community / public education at Ramsar sites**

- The Few educational activities undertaken were adhoc and unstructured
- Field officers were not trained to sustain regular and effective community education.

6.0 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 High Labour turnover

The Executive Director confirmed the issues raised the Auditor-General's Report and said that these were the challenges facing the Wildlife Division. He said the Division had a high labour turnover due to unattractive wages and salaries.

6.2 Insufficient Budgetary allocations

The Executive Director said the actual budgetary allocations released to the Commission are woefully inadequate to undertake any meaningful program of activities. He said the Commission's budgets are prepared and submitted to the Ministry but the budgetary ceilings and cuts reduce it considerably. In most cases, the Commission receives nothing for its investment activities.

6.3 Ownership of Wetlands

The Executive Director informed the Committee that most of the wetland are privately owned and Government has not paid compensation to the owners of wetlands. As a result, the owners still have access to the sites.

He explained that, Government does not pay compensation for the management of wetlands. However, there is an arrangement with the stakeholders on how to manage the sites in order to preserve the sites. The stakeholders comprise the land owners, the

chiefs, District Assemblies etc. He conceded that these arrangements are not working the way they were intended.

6.4 Encroachment on wetlands

The Executive Director informed the Committee that some of the stakeholders have sold portions of these lands to prospective developers. One of such site is the Sakumono Wetlands.

On the impasse surrounding the encroachment of the Sakumono wetland, the Chief Executive of Tema Municipal Assembly (TMA) informed the Committee that he was aware that the Tema Development Corporation (TDC) has not sold any land to any developer, and that the TDC remain the owners of lands in and around Tema, including the Sakumono Ramsar wetlands and its environs.

As a result of this, TMA and TDC are about to undertake a major demolition exercise to protect the Sakumo Wetland.

6.5 Recommendations

To improve on the management of wetlands (Ramsar sites), the Committee recommends the following:

- WD should collaborate with local communities to agree on close seasons for the various sites. These periods should be communicated to the Minister, who should in turn declare the close seasons and publish the dates. (Ref LI 1659; Wetland Management (Ramsar Sites) Regulation, 1999).
- Provide billboards at all Ramsar sites. The billboards should indicate the existence of the sites and prohibited activities.
- Make functional the Site Management Committees (SMCs) at the various Ramsar sites. WD should set up Local Management Committee (LMCs) as practiced by Ghana Wildlife Society at the Amanzuri Wetlands.
- Ensure that the staff required for monitoring of sites are at post and, or the available staff are adequately equipped for effective monitoring.
- Develop and implement a monitoring / reporting system to aid quick feedback and decision making.
- Communities in and around the wetlands (Ramsar sites) must be involved in monitoring. WD could facilitate this role by re-establishing task force

teams, which once existed during the Coastal Wetland Management Project (CWMP) from 1993 to 1999.

- Build the capacity of field staff to educate the communities on the values of wetlands
- Expand educational programmes beyond the World Wetland day celebrations
- Develop strategies to source funds from NGOs and other organizations friendly to the environment, to enable WD have a continuous educational programme.
- Liaise with the District Assemblies and the communities involved to ensure that wetlands are protected. Steps must be taken to ensure that all unauthorized structures are removed from the sites.
- Liaise with the District Assemblies and the communities to take steps to desilt these sites and preserve them.
- Renegotiate and sign arrangement agreements with the relevant stakeholders to compel them to implement the tenets of the agreement in order to protect these sites.
- All Aspect of the negotiation should involved the community.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The Committee noted that wetlands play an essential part in the regulation of river flow, they filter pollutants and fertilizers, and they are spawning zones for some species of fish (pike in particular). They also provide a habitat for plants, insects, batrachians and birds.

Due to their importance, there is the need to ensure that these wetlands are well protected.

The Committee demands that the Wildlife Division should expand and undertake educational programmes to create the required awareness among Ghanaians about the importance of wetlands.

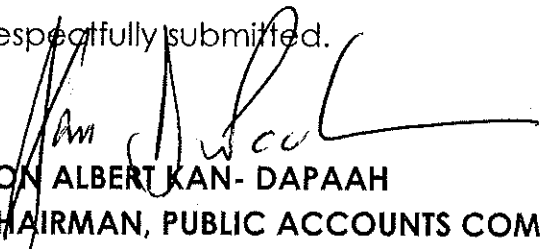
The Committee further wishes to appeal to the Minister for Finance to make funds available to the WD to enable it protect the wetlands.

The Committee would like to indicate that WD should submit a status report on the implementations to the Committee on the Auditor-General's Report and copy the

Auditor –General for verification and report within three months on the adoption of this report.

In conclusion, the Committee recommends to the House to adopt this report on the Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General on the Management of wetlands in Ghana.

Respectfully submitted.



**HON ALBERT KAN- DAPAAH
CHAIRMAN, PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**



**MR. ASANTE AMOAKO-ATTA
CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Thursday 8th July 2010