Ghana Third Party Monitoring of the Implementation of the Benefit Sharing Plan for the Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme (GCFRP)

Summary Report

Draft V2

Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

ART-TREES	Architecture for REDD+ Transactions' (ART) The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard (TREES)
BSP	Benefit Sharing Plan
CCD	Climate Change Department
CDI	Côte D'Ivoire
CF	Carbon Fund
CHED	Cocoa Health and Extension Division
COCOBOD	Cocoa Management Board
CDPs	Community Development Projects
CF	Carbon Fund
CRMCs	Community Resource Management Committees
CSC	Climate Smart Cocoa
CSSVD	Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus Disease
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DAs	District Assemblies
ER	Emissions Reductions
ER-MR	Emissions Reduction Monitoring Reports
ERP	Emissions Reduction Programme
ERPA	Emissions Reduction Payment Agreement
EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
FBS	Farmer Business Schools
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FFM	Fund Flow Mechanism
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FGRM	Feedback and grievance redress mechanism
FSD	Forest Services Division
GCFRP	Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GoG	Government of Ghana
HIAs	Hotspot Intervention Areas
HICs	Hotspot Intervention Area Implementation Committees
HMBs	HIA Management Boards
ISR	Implementation Status and Results Reports
KI	Key Informants
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LEAF	Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance
M & E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MTDPs	Mid Term Development Plans
MTS	Modified *Taungya* System
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
NRS	National REDD+ Secretariat
OASL	Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PEA	Political Economy Approach

PE	Programme Entity
PMU	Project Management Unit
SFP	Support Focal Persons
RDA	REDD+ Dedicated Account
RDA SC	REDD+ Dedicated Account Steering Committee
REDD+	REDD stands for 'Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries. The '+' stands for additional forest-related activities that protect the climate, namely sustainable management of forests and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.
RMSC	Resource Monitoring Support Centre
TAs	Traditional Authorities
TORs	Terms of Reference
TPM	Third Party Monitoring
TUC	Timber Utilisation Contracts
UAP	Upfront Advance Payment
VCM	Voluntary Carbon Mechanism
WD	Wildlife Division

Introduction

Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) of the Implementation of the Benefit Sharing Plan[1] (BSP) for the Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme (GCFRP) was conducted in July – August 2024, with field work from 15th-27th July 2024, by independent consultants Ruth Malleson (team leader), Elizabeth Obeng, Jewel Andoh and Dan Mullins. The TPM was funded and supported by the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Facility Management Team, under the supervision of Asyl Undeland and Kristen Evans. The primary purpose of TPM for the BSP implementation is to support the World Bank's oversight functions by monitoring the implementation of benefit-sharing arrangements to identify key challenges and issues, lessons learned, and to develop recommendations for addressing the challenges. The preparation of the TPM for Ghana GCFRP and finalization of the report was supervised jointly with the World Bank Task Team, led by Madhavi Pillai. The TPM was generously supported and guided by the Ghana Program Entity, the National REDD+ Secretariat (NRS), led by Roselyn Fosuah Adjei.

This report presents a summary of the TPM approach, activities, key findings and suggested recommendations. More detailed information can be found in the full report. The findings, conclusions and recommendations are of the TPM team.

Methods

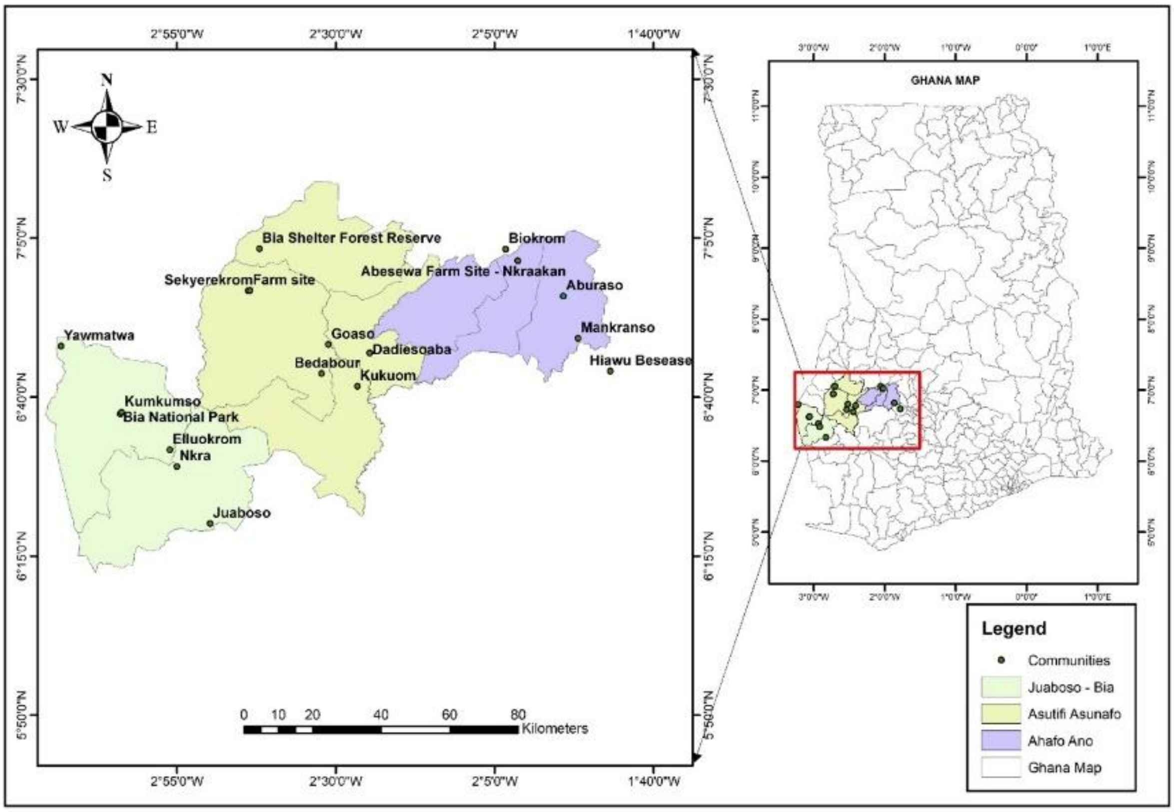
The TPM was conducted in line with the recommendations of the World Bank's Technical Note on Third Party Monitoring for Enission Reductions Programs. It was targeted and rapid, with an emphasis on generating learning by identifying good practices and key challenges and developing recommendations for addressing the challenges.

The TPM Team collected qualitative and quantitative data from documents, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). At the central level, 18 KIIs were conducted with the National REDD+ Secretariat (NRS), members of the REDD+ Dedicated Account (RDA) Steering Committee (SC), other BSP stakeholders in the HIAs, including staff from MMDAs, cocoa companies, Traditional Authorities (TAs), Forest Services Division (FSD) and Cocoa Health and Extension Division (CHED) staff both in the HIAs and centrally.

For data collection at the landscape level, NRS's Project Management Unit (PMU) advised the TPM Team to visit at least three HIAs. The TPM Team selected Ahafo Ano in Ashanti Region, Asunafo Asutifi, Ahafo Region and Juaboso-Bia, in Western North Region (See Figure 1) to represent diversity along the following criteria: accessibility to public infrastructure and services; engagement with different private sector cocoa companies; emission reduction (ER) indicators (i.e. weighting in relation to BSP social performance and emission reduction indicators), including a spread from high to low; geographical location, including three different administrative regions and varying ecological zones, proximity to other HIAs and to the Côte D'Ivoire (CDI) border. Thirteen FGDs were carried out with randomly selected members of nine farmer cooperatives, three Hotspot Management Board (HMBs) and one traditional council in selected HIAs. In all, 219 stakeholders were engaged at the HIA level, comprising 139 men and 80 women.

[1] The "BSP" refers to the following document: Ghana Forestry Commission. 2020. Final Benefit Sharing Plan Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme. Climate Change Directorate/National REDD+ Secretariat, Forestry Commission.

Figure 1: Map showing the local communities and farm sites visited in the three HIAs (Ahafo Ano, Asutifi Asunafo, and Juaboso-Bia).



Key findings

Findings and recommendations from the TPM are organized thematically along the specific objectives of the TPM ToR: 1. Verify reporting; 2. Evaluate BSP Implementation; 3. Understand beneficiaries/stakeholders; 4. Assess benefit distribution; 5. Evaluate effectiveness of benefits. Following the findings is a synthesis of suggested recommendations.

Objective 1: Verify reporting

The TPM team reviewed key monitoring reports (ER-MRs, ISRs, Aide Memories) to verify findings from the reports, identify gaps and issues and how they are being addressed, including highlighting progress in relation to HIA governance structures, activities funded by the BSP, potential risks, information gaps and key issues for follow up.

Verification of the reporting confirmed the following:

- Overall, the team confirmed that NRS has made commendable efforts in completing the distribution of payments for the first ER payment to the majority of the beneficiaries according to the BSP.
- The Forestry Commission (FC), Cocoa Management Board (COCOBOD), Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and 27 traditional councils have received their share of payments. However, there are some gaps in details about the use of benefits by government agencies and traditional authorities.
- First payments to all of the HIAs except Atewa have been initiated. Payments to Atewa have yet to be paid because the HIA governance structure is still being established. The HIA Implementation Committee (HIC) members for Atewa have not yet been finalised.

- Farmers in five HIAs have successfully received ER benefits in the form of agricultural inputs.
- Proposals for 300 community development projects (CDPs) have been approved by the REDD+ Dedicated Account (RDA) steering committee (SC) in five out of six HIAs.
- Some delays have been experienced in the roll out of CDPs because of due diligence processes that were being followed as outlined in the Funds Flow Mechanism (FFM) of the BSP, the need to align with Mid-term Development Plans (MTDP), delays in procurement and needs assessment, as well as due to the need for discussions over the eligibility criteria.
- Additional governance structures are needed in Kakum HIA, as identified in May 2024, through reports to the RDA SC. Only one out of four districts have received agricultural inputs for farmer beneficiaries from the first ER payment as of June 2024. NRS will prioritise the establishment of governance structures for the remaining three districts and ensure that these districts receive ER payments for community projects.

There are a number of challenges in reporting, which is to be expected in the early stages of implementation. Key information gaps include information on how government agencies (Forestry Commission COCOBOD, MMDAs) are using their ER payments, details as to how the 2% of farmer benefits as operation costs to the HMBs are being used and how Traditional Authorities spend their 3%. Within each HIA, different actors monitor their own activities, but there is a lack of aggregated data in program reports and little coordination on data aggregation at the HIA or the central level. There is also no data that maps the geolocations of BSP interventions. Improving systematic monitoring, reporting, aggregation and analysis of BSP data through data collection templates and enhanced coordination at all levels (from HIAs to the central levels) would provide valuable information to inform future allocations, improve the effectiveness of the benefit distribution and catalyze adaptive management. Improving the overall quality of reporting is a priority recommendation.

Objective 2: Evaluate BSP Implementation

The TPM assessed the principles, processes and institutional arrangements for implementation outlined in the BSP, with attention to stakeholder and beneficiary roles. Overall, in a relatively short time, the NRS organized a large number of collaborating organizations and supported the establishment of new institutions in large geographical areas -- including the RDA SC at the central level, and the HMBs and HICs at HIA level -- all of which seem to be working towards a common goal. There are, however, opportunities to improve communication and coordination with and between institutions and to strengthen them. The TPM focused on those institutions that have key roles in the distribution of benefits, with findings below.

HIA level governance structures

The BSP calls for the establishment of landscape level governance structures (HIA and sub-HIA levels), which are governed by a tiered structure at the community level with Community Resource Management Committees (CRMCs), HIA Management Boards (HMBs) and HIA Implementation Committees (HICs) (BSP 2020 p. 42). The HIA structure has been admirable in its success at decentralizing the responsibilities for the implementation of the BSP, with HIA residents taking responsibility and leading on important aspects of the work. The three HIAs visited had all the functional units established and operationalized with clear roles and responsibilities. They were observed to be operating with principles of democracy, transparency and inclusion, with specific leadership positions reserved for women as stipulated in the BSP. These HIA governance structures are currently recognized locally as well as outside the GCFRP. Through the implementation of the BSP, HIAs have enhanced opportunities of engaging with collaborating MMDAs, traditional authorities and other local government agencies within their jurisdictions, such as the fire service. For example, the district fire service at Asunafo North Municipal has benefited from a borehole CDP in Asunafo-Asutifi HIA.

In this initial phase, the HMBs have assumed a significant share of the day-to-day implementation. More support may be needed for the HMBs to fulfil their key roles of distributing farmer inputs to beneficiaries, which has been an immense task given the scale of the landscape and numbers of participants. HMB members, who are not paid salaries, have reported that while the 2% payment allocated to the cover administrative and distribution costs is helpful, they find that it is insufficient given the workload to support the large number of farmer groups across dispersed landscapes.

According to the BSP (p.42), HIA Implementation Committees (HICs) – composed of key stakeholders, including private sector companies, NGOs, government agencies and HMB board members – are to be formed to see to the day-to-day management of the activities within the landscape. However, overall the HICs have not yet assumed the central roles that were intended, with the weight of the work falling on the HMBs. In some HIAs, relatively few HIC consortia meetings have been convened, and some cocoa companies reportedly rarely attended HIC meetings. Clarity as to the role of the HICs, how they can better support the HMBs as well as guidelines for convening HIC meetings would enhance the effectiveness of these crucial bodies.

REDD+ Dedicated Account Steering Committee

The BSP specifies that the RDA will be managed by a steering committee (RDA SC), an independent, multi-stakeholder board of trustees of seven to nine members, made up of representatives from government, the National House of Chiefs, private sector cocoa companies, civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF). The RDA SC has been formed, meets regularly and invests substantial amount of time providing guidance and oversight as well as reviewing reports and community development project (CDP) proposals. While there has been significant capacity building for HIAs by the NRS on preparing CDP proposals for the RDA SC, there remains confusion among some beneficiaries as to the criteria as well as expectationsand requirements for submitting proposals to the RDA SC for view, which has led to uneven quality of proposals (lacking technical or budgetary details), resulting in delays in implementing CDPs. Further clarification of expectations for CDP proposals as well as a reviewing the criteria for the selection of projects could address these issues.

Objective 3: Understand beneficiaries and stakeholders

The TPM Team assessed engagement with stakeholders, information dissemination, outreach and capacity-building programs and whether BSP stakeholders (beneficiaries and administrators) clearly understand and agree with their roles and responsibilities in the BSP and if beneficiaries have received sufficient support to assist in the management and use of benefits distributed to them. The BSP is based upon the concept of community-based natural resource management, with benefits to be allocated to actors 1) who take verified actions to achieve emission reductions, 2) with legal rights (statutory or customary) to trees and forests, or 3) who have proved to be effective facilitators and are essential in facilitating emission reduction activities (BSP 2020, p 12). Local farmers, traditional authorities (TA) and communities are expected to benefit the most. The TPM team found that, in general, the roles and responsibilities of the HIA stakeholders (registered farmer cooperatives, TA, and communities) and government agencies at the districts (FSD, CHED, and MMDAs) are consistent with the BSP. There are, however, improvements to be made in terms of targeting and law enforcement, which are discussed below.

Outreach and capacity-building to beneficiaries

There has been substantial engagement with beneficiaries in the HIA landscape and considerable capacity building by key stakeholders (NGOs, COCOBOD and cocoa traders) operating in the landscape in relation to Climate Smart Cocoa (CSC) and on governance. The TPM team found that the Forest Service Division (FSD) and Cocoa Health and Extension Division (CHED) under the FC and COCOBOD, respectively, educate and train farmer cooperatives through radio talk shows and field demonstrations to build their capacity to adopt climate-smart cocoa farming practices in the HIAs. For instance, in the Juaboso Cocoa District, the District Cocoa Officer (DCO) highlighted the efforts to educate farmers on the significance of planting desirable shade and economic trees on cocoa farms. This education is primarily carried out by Cocoa Extension Agents (CEAs), who also distribute tree seedlings to farmers for planting on their land. However, challenges such as insufficient CEAs and logistical constraints, e.g., lack of vehicles, make it difficult to reach all the cocoa farmers in the districts.

The farmer cooperatives interviewed have, to some extent, adopted climate-smart cocoa farming practices, including planting and managing shade and economic trees on farms and farmlands, while avoiding encroachment in forest areas. Some communities and TAs also support forest management and conservation activities. For instance, some farmers participate in a modified *taungya* system[2] (MTS) supervised by the FSD.

However, the role of stakeholders in the HIA landscape in supporting forest law enforcement against illegal logging and other forest offences has not been as effective. The Municipal and District Assemblies are responsible for enacting and enforcing by-laws to support forest management and conservation activities in the HIA landscape. However, this is not done due to the high cost of gazetting the by-laws. For instance, according to the Coordinating Director of Asunafo North Municipal Assembly, it costs over GHS 29,000 to gazette the Assembly's by-laws, which they have not been able to afford. The District Chief Executive of the Bia West District also mentioned that the high cost of publishing the by-laws creates a barrier to enforcing laws to conserve the forests.

Engagement and information dissemination

The TPM team found widespread engagement and information dissemination about the GCFRP and BSP among all stakeholders in the HIAs visited. The farmer cooperatives, traditional authorities, and communities indicated that they are aware and well-informed about the programme. In Ahafo Ano and Asutifi Asunafo HIAs, the farmer cooperatives interviewed mentioned that Tropenbos Ghana, a non-governmental organization (NGO), educated, created awareness, and sensitized them on the GCFRP and BSP. At Hiawu Besease in the Ahafo Ano HIA, the farmers said that Tropenbos Ghana started engagement and consultation on the GCFRP with community members from 2017 to 2022. According to them, in 2022, a *durbar* (meeting) was held to inform the community about the GCFRP implementation. Also, there were regular program announcements through the community information center.

Throughout the interviews with HIA landscape stakeholders, none mentioned a lack of information or awareness of the GCFRP and the benefits thereof, implying how well the NGOs have extensively engaged and disseminated information about the programme to the various beneficiaries identified in the BSP. According to informants, REDD+ has raised awareness about the importance of planting trees, conserving forests, and the roles of stakeholders or beneficiaries in preventing illegal activities in the landscape, which can lead to deforestation and emission reversals. Despite these positive findings, it was observed that in some HIAs there was confusion over the overall objective of the GCFRP and the link between the benefits and ERs. While some farmers understand their roles and are actively contributing to generating expected ERs the planting of shade trees on farms, many farmers do not appear to link the program with the importance of reducing deforestation rates inside forest reserves.

[2] MTS is an agroforestry system where farmers are granted access to land in degraded forest reserves to cultivate crops alongside planted trees and share revenues derived from the extraction of mature trees.

Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism (FGRM)

A substantial amount of training has been carried out within HIAs on the BSP's FGRM. To date, few grievances are reported. This may be due to the fact that: i) the BSP's FGRM is aggregated by the FC's Forestry Services Division (FSD), but the mechanisms also sits within COCOBOD and the HMBs, so complaints are often handled by the same organization that people may be complaining about; ii) people being reluctant to complain about items that have been given to them; iii) the fact that most complaints are resolved informally through traditional community mechanisms and not reported through the national FGR system; and iv) according to the HIA stakeholders, conflict situations with illegal operators in the forest reserves have decreased in the landscape due to the implementation of REDD+. Another finding was that there are multiple grievance mechanisms operating at the HIA level (e.g. by NRS, COCOBOD, private sector) with limited coordination among them. Establishing independent offices for the FGRM in the ER program area would foster trust and confidence in using the system, thereby maximizing its usage. It is also recommended to implement an extensive education and awareness creation on the FGRM and a comprehensive communication plan that targets all stakeholders within the ER Program area to improve understanding and utilization of the system.

Objective 4: Assess Benefit Distribution

The TPM Team assessed how benefits have been distributed in accordance with the BSP, self-reporting and the FFM. In January 2023 a payment of US$3,562,280 was made to the REDD+ Dedicated Account (ER-MR 2024, p. 132). Table 1 provides an overview of how that payment was distributed.

Table 1 Planned monetary allocations (% and US$) compared to dates and amounts of actual distribution to institutions and HIAs*. Source: ER-MR, 29 February 2024, Table 21, page 137*

Beneficiary	**Planned Distribution Percentages**	**Carbon Payment by February 2024 (USD)**	**% of Total (Actual)**
Government	**27%**	**$ 354,291.31**	**17%**
Forestry Commission	85%	$ 180,336.70	9%
Ghana Cocoa Board	7.5%	$ 89,462.36	4%
MMDAs	7.5%	$ 84,492.25	4%
HIA Landscape	**69%**	**$ 1,669,816.70**	**82%**
Farmer Groups	58%	distributed from HIA Landscape funds	
Communities	39%	distributed from HIA Landscape funds	
Traditional Leaders	3%	distributed from HIA Landscape funds	
PMU	**4%**	**$142,491.20**	**4%**
Total (Actual)	**100%**	**$ 2,024,108.01**	**100%**

Benefits to government agencies

Benefits have largely been distributed to national government agencies in accordance with the BSP (see Table 2). Given that the initial payment was small, they have not been widely distributed within the agency and to the landscape level. For instance, the FC's share of ER payments were used for monitoring (20%) and the purchase of two vehicles (80%). The TPM team was told that discussions were still underway with the FC as to how future payments will be allocated. This means that, in some cases, local authorities have undertaken activities using funds from other sources already available to them. So, while these contribute to the broad goals of the GCFRP, they may not be attributed to the support of the BSP. In relation to COCOBOD's Cocoa Health and Extension Division (CHED), the TPM team was told that the trainings are implemented from the national level in coordination with the operational level CHED offices in the HIAs, however a separate budget for the amounts flowing from COCOBOD's central level to the HIA level could not be provided.

Table 2: Payments made to government agencies. *Source: ER-MR, 29 February 2024, Table 21, page 137; details of dates of transfer and amounts in Ghana Cedis taken from 4th RDA committee minutes*

Beneficiary	Date of Transfer	Carbon Payment (USD)	% of Total
MMDAs	20/7/23	$ 84,492.25	4%
Forestry Commission	20/7/23	$ 180,336.70	9%
Ghana Cocoa Board	20/7/23	$ 89,462.36	4%
Total		***$354,291.31***	**100%**

Benefits to HIA landscape stakeholders
The majority of the funds allocated to HIA landscape stakeholders have been transferred as described in the BSP (See Tables 1 and 3). A significant amount of effort has been put into the process by HMBs, HICs and others to distribute inputs (especially farm tools, equipment and tree seedlings) to farmer cooperatives and farmer groups and to design and implement CDPs (mainly boreholes). Distributing the great numbers of different types of agricultural inputs (cutlasses, sprayers) to hundreds of community organizations and thousands of farmers required significant logistics and was not an easy task, and much of the time and effort put into the process of distributing farmer inputs as well as designing and managing CDPs is on an unpaid basis, which is remarkable. Farmers interviewed have been largely happy with the activities and support they received. Furthermore, trainings have reached many beneficiaries: according to COCOBOD, prior to the BSP, budget support to conduct Climate Smart Cocoa (CSC) and Farmer Business School (FBS) trainings nationwide had been limited, but now with the support of the benefits from the BSP, COCOBOD has been able to organize such trainings in the HIAs, which farmers have found very helpful.

Table 3: Breakdown of Payments to be made to HIA Landscapes*. Source: ER-MR, 29 February 2024, Table 21, page 138 and Ghana Emission Reductions Program for the Cocoa Forest Mosaic Landscape (P160339) Implementation Support Mission, May 2 – 9, 2024, Aide-Mémoire, pp. 2-3) and RDA Board Meeting Minutes 9th February 2023 (for community projects and TAs); 4th RDA Minutes for Farmer groups in Ghana Cedis.*

Beneficiary HIA	Carbon Payment Received (USD) for farmer groups	Carbon Payment Received (USD) Community Projects	Carbon Payment Received (USD) Traditional Authorities	Totals (USD)
Ahafo Ano	$ 245,561.28	$165,118.79	$12,701.45	$423,381.52
Asunafo Asutifi	$ 442,010.30	$297,213.83	$22,862.60	$762,086.73
Atewa (not yet released)	$98,224.51	$66,047.52	$5,080.58	$169,352.61
Juabeso	$343,785.79	$231,166.31	$17,782.02	$592,734.12
Kakum	$ 343,785.79	$ 231,166.31	$17,782.02	$592,734.12
Sefwi Wiawso	$ 294,673.54	$198,142.55	$15,241.73	$508,057.82

Total	**$ 1,669,816**	**$1,188,855.30**	**$91,450.41**	**$3,048,346.92**

Distribution of benefits to farmers

At the time of the TPM, not all farmer cooperatives had received benefits. The non-monetary benefit for agricultural inputs accounts for 58% of the 69% allocation of carbon payments to HIAs. Given the large number of farmers involved in the BSP, the HMBs indicated that the 58% received as farmer benefits was inadequate to procure cutlasses, spraying machines, wellington boots, etc., for all the farmers in the HIA. For example, in Juaboso-Bia HIA, the HMBs could distribute only two knapsack sprayers to each of the farmer cooperatives for use by hundreds of farmers, leading to wear and tear of the machines. According to the farmers, some of the machines are malfunctioning due to the huge demands on their use.

Many CDPs are somewhat delayed but in the process of being completed. Some respondents noted that a considerable amount of time has gone into identifying CDPs relevant to specific communities, however they were told that they could not implement these projects but had to choose from the basket of pre-determined options (including boreholes, school desks and chairs etc.) and ensure that projects align with the MMDA's development plans so that such projects contribute to sustainability beyond the BSP. Table 4 provides a sample of the types of benefits distributed to the three HIAs visited.

Table 4 Benefits Distributed to Beneficiaries within HIAs*. Details supplied by HMBs visited. In some cases data does not align with ER MR data where noted.*

HIA	**Beneficiaries**	**Benefit Type**	**Benefits Distributed**	**Dates**
Ahafo Ano		Cash	US$311,516.55	29/06/2023
	HMB	2% of farmers' benefit	US$3431.54	
	Registered farmer cooperatives	Input packages	40,200 cutlasses 30,000 tree seedlings (the 5th RDA board meeting minutes the number of tree seedling recorded as being distributed was 31,434	Procured: 22/08/2023 Distributed: 12/09/2023
	Communities	Community development projects	8 mechanized boreholes 10 hand pumps 1,680 dual desks 600 teachers' chairs	
	Traditional Authorities	Cash	US$12,701.45 (aligned with ER MR reporting data)	26/02/2024
Asunafo Asutifi		Cash	US$784,452.32 (does not align with ER MR data)	3/07/2023
	HMB	2% of farmers' benefit	US$6217.28	
	Registered farmer cooperatives	Input packages	70,000 cutlasses 75,000 seedlings (in 5th RDA board meeting it was reported that 40,140 tree seedlings were procured) 810 wellington boots (pairs)	Procured: 18/08/2023 Distributed: 01/09/2023

	Communities	Community development projects	29 mechanized boreholes 19 manual boreholes	
	Traditional Authorities	Cash	US$22,862.60 (aligns with ER MR reporting data)	26/02/2024
Juaboso-Bia		Cash	US$574,950.79 (does not align with ER MR data)	20/7/2023
	HMB	2% of farmers' benefit	US$4804.15	
	Registered farmer cooperatives	Input packages	22,902 cutlasses 7,280 wellington boots 300 mist blowers 200 knapsack sprayers	Procured: 9/10/2023 Distributed: 2/11/2023
	Communities	Community development projects	35 mechanized boreholes	
	Traditional Authorities	Cash	US$17,782.02 (aligns with ER MR data)	

Source: HMBs, 2024.

Targeting and selection

Currently benefits are not necessarily distributed only to farmer groups and communities who have taken verified actions to achieve ERs (i.e. to farmers and or communities for which there is evidence established of their actions that reduce ERs). Performance indicators to trigger "disbursement" for farmers registered in groups in HIA are provided on page 21, Table 5 of the BSP and include: Number of farmers demonstrating adoption of CSC practises and number of new farms in forest reserves. Suggested forms of verification (i.e. for establishing whether these actions have been carried out) for these indicators could be: i) monitoring (i.e. visiting farmers' farms regularly to see whether they have adopted and continue to use specific CSC practices (e.g. planting and maintaining shade trees) and ii) regular monitoring of relevant forest reserves to collect evidence on whether new farms are being established, as well as monitoring the expansion of existing admitted farms and *taungya* farms in forest reserves. Thus, this implies that the farmers who should be targeted by the BSP are those that live nearest to forest reserves who are carrying out verified activities that reduce deforestation and forest degradation.

The HIAs are large and not all areas within a single HIA have the same deforestation trends. Within HIAs, the number of communities and farmers is far larger than can be accommodated with BSP funds; however, there do not appear to be clear criteria for selection. For effective impact, the recommendation going forward is to more effectively target benefits to farmers living in communities within HIAs who are carrying out verified actions that are reducing deforestation and reducing carbon emissions, through the adoption of CSC practices, as laid out in the BSP.

Information on benefit distributions

Information on benefit distributions was requested separately from each participating organisation within the HIA landscapes (especially HMBs, FSDs and CHEDS) as well as centrally (NGOs and private sector partners). However, data on distributions within HIAs to farmer cooperatives and CDPs was difficult to acquire and analyse, and there were discrepancies among data sources (see Table 4). To date there is not a functioning central monitoring system to collect and aggregate data on what types of benefits have been distributed to particular beneficiaries in each location. Developing a centralised digitised monitoring and mapping system would make it possible track progress, undertake adaptive management and plan the second round of BSP distributions. Developing a digital map showing the locations of beneficiary farmer groups and communities would also be a valuable tool to better target areas with good performance in reducing deforestation.

Non-carbon benefits

The primary non-carbon benefit anticipated under the BSP is increased cocoa yields. The assumption is that sustained increases in cocoa yields[3], through the use of CSC practices, will be the most important non-carbon benefit for farmers in the HIAs, secure engagement in the program and generate success over the long term (BSP 2020 page 23). There have been documented cases of increased cocoa yields in some HIAs, however in others there have been significant declines in yields due to Cocoa Swollen Shoot Virus and climate change. While these yield increases cannot be attributed directly to the benefits distributed by the ER program, because the relevant goods and services were only distributed during the past year or so, they could be attributed in part to investments made during the Readiness Phase and private sector engagement in the GCFRP.

Objective 5: Evaluate Effectiveness of Benefits

The TPM Team evaluated whether the benefit-sharing distributions continue to be relevant to the ER Program objectives and if there are risks that may affect the sustainability of BSP effectiveness.

Effectiveness at addressing forest change

A key assumption of the BSP (page 15) is that HIA stakeholders will change their behavior which will, in turn, reduce deforestation and forest degradation. Part of this change of behavior centers on farmers' adoption of CSC practices, including agreeing to shaded cocoa production, which aims to increase cocoa yields and farm incomes as well as the introduction of forest protection measures. Given the limited data reporting on carbon and non-carbon performance indicators, it was challenging to evaluate the effectiveness of benefits contributing to ERs in the HIAs. While the TPM team observed that CSC practices have been adopted, efforts to ensure rigorous law enforcement and protect neighboring forest reserves are less evident. Evidence on forest change provided by satellite imagery in the GCFRP area shows that forest reserves continue to be encroached and deforested. Evidence from remote sensing indicates that deforestation rates are still high and increasing in specific HIAs. For example, Juaboso Bia HIA had an estimated deforestation rate of 37.56 ha/pa for the baseline period (2005-2014) but has an estimated deforestation rate of 93.89 ha/per the half year of 2019)[4]. However, in other HIAs for which recent data is available (i.e. Asunafo Asutifi) there is estimated reduced deforestation, from 186.39 ha/pa for the baseline period (2005-2014) and 93.19 ha/per half year of 2019). This does not necessarily mean that interventions meant to intensify cocoa farming have led to forest encroachment, but it does indicate that efforts to protect forests inside forest reserves have not been efficient or effective across all HIAs.

Effectiveness at addressing deforestation drivers

Key deforestation drivers inside forest reserves include illegal activities (illegal logging, farming, and mining) and wildfires. Much of the illegal logging is not necessarily being carried out by forest fringe

---

[3] The estimated economic value of doubling yields from 400kg per ha. to 800 kg per ha. across and estimated target population of 23,457 cocoa farmers per HIA over the seven year ERPA period is just over $50 million, equivalent to the total carbon benefits from the programme. Across sic HIAs, the estimated value is worth more than $305 million. The value of doubling yields is based on the current producer price of $1.69/kg and the assumption that farmers will be reached incrementally and the value of yield increases will compound annually (BSP 2020 page 23).

[4] Data from NRS Spreadsheet: Updated HIA data with performance analysis. Note that information is not available for Ahafo Ano, Kakum, Sefwi Wiawso and Atewa East due to cloud cover.

communities but by timber contractors issued with temporary felling licenses and by TUC holders[5]. It is unlikely that CSC practices alone will address these drivers. Furthermore, it has been reported in articles and by some key informants that there are plans to degazette at least some of the high conservation value forest reserves in the HIAs to allow mining and logging concessions within the forest reserves.[6] If this happens, the resulting deforestation would undermine many of the good efforts being made in the GCFRP and lead to increased deforestation and forest degradation. Therefore, for the BSP to be effective, going forward it is recommended that CSC practices are implemented alongside substantial efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, particularly within forest reserves.

Other risks

Other risks to sustainability include the relatively large sums of money that will be managed at the HIA level by HMBs, who have limited accounting and due diligence skills. Furthermore, there has to date been limited attention to progress on policy and legal frameworks, such as increasing tree tenure security on farms.

Key recommendations

Overall, significant progress has been made in a relatively short period of time to establish the institutions and processes to implement the BSP and distribute the first payment to beneficiaries. There are specific opportunities to improve implementation and the overall effectiveness of future distributions. Below is a synthesis of key recommendations from the TPM.

<u>Suggested Recommendations: Enhancing impact and improving the targeting of benefits</u>

To make benefits more impactful and targeted across the large landscape, the following recommendations are suggested:

- **Sensitize beneficiaries constantly on the reasons the input packages are being distributed.** There is a need for continuous education and sensitization of the HIA stakeholders to be mindful of the objectives and importance of the program to ensure permanence of the ERs. For instance, stickers with "REDD+" (the name most commonly used by landscape-level stakeholders to refer to the GCFRP) could be put on inputs to improve awareness and visibility of the program among beneficiaries.
- **Target investments within HIAs at more granular levels.** REDD+ GIS specialists from RMSC have indicated that it is feasible to identify areas of greater or lesser deforestation rates within sub-HIAs and to therefore target at a more granular level. However, this may be costly and
- **Improve verification of ER actions by landscape stakeholders.** Observations indicate that farmer inputs are not allocated to specific farmers based on verified actions to achieve emission reductions (performance), instead farmers were provided inputs because they belonged to specific cooperatives or farmer groups. There is currently no system in place to monitor whether farmers are carrying out verified actions to achieve emission reductions. Verification described in the BSP includes i) monitoring (i.e. visiting a sample of farmers' farms regularly to see whether they have adopted and continue to use specific CSC practices (e.g. planting and maintaining shade trees) and ii) regular monitoring of relevant forest reserves to collect evidence on whether new farms are being established within the

[5] Ankomah, F., Kyereh, B. Ansong, M., Asante, W. 2020. Forest Management Regimes and Drivers of Forest Cover Loss in Forest Reserves in the High Forest Zone of Ghana. International Journal of Forest Research. Volume 2020.

[6] http://www.tropenbosghana.org/news/press+statement:+degazetting+forest+reserves,+a+bane+on+green+ghana+agenda+

boundaries of the forest reserves, as well as monitoring the expansion of existing admitted farms and *taungya* farms in relevant forest reserves.

- **Develop criteria which uses a gender mainstreaming and inclusive approach** to more intentionally target communities, farmer groups and non-organized farmers as well as women and migrant farmers and farmers belonging to ethnic minorities for inclusion.
- **Stipulate sub-allocations from institutions to local budgets.** In preparation for the second payment and larger flows of funds, guidance and followup is needed to ensure that the funds are being distributed effectively to the landscape level actors, e.g. from HMB to Sub-HIA Executive Committees, from FC to FSD, from COCOBOD to CHED, and from Paramount to sub-chiefs.

Suggested Recommendations: Strengthening capacity and collaboration

- **Further strengthen HMBs' institutional capacity to manage funds.** With future payments anticipated to be larger sums, there will be a need for additional capacity for HMBs to efficiently and transparently manage these funds. The support of qualified accountants, financial advisers and administrators to assist HIAs with farmer input and community development project proposals will be crucial as well as providing guidance on how the HMBs are to use the 2% payment to maximize the impact of the support. Furthermore increasing the 2% allocation to HMBs could support these additional administrative costs.
- **Further develop the landscape level institutions.** There could be additional focus on strengthening the sub-HIAs and the CREMAs to extend these local management structures even closer to rural communities, improve communication to the communities, and to better distribute the workload in the HIAs.
- **Enhance coordination among key government stakeholders.** At the central level, effectiveness among key government actors -- including NRS, other departments of the Forestry Commission and COCOBOD -- would be enhanced with closer coordination in planning and implementation and more collaborative approaches to monitoring and information-sharing.
- **Strengthen communication among HIA level entities as well as between HIA level entities and NRS.** At the HIA level, communication and coordination could be strengthened between HMBs and Community Resource Management Committees (CRMCs) as well as among HICs' consortium members (NGOs, private sector) and NRS to ensure better coordination and to better distribute the workload of benefit sharing implementation.
- **Strengthen and streamline the proposal process for the CDPs.** Additional capacity building, enhanced communication and revised criteria could further streamline the CDP approval process and speed up implementation of CDPs to ensure that they are fit for purpose.
- **Encourage learning and adaptation at all levels**. It is suggested to hold workshops/consultations that focus on lessons-learned and strategies going? forward at the HIC level and then at higher levels to reflect on topics such as 1) how to do benefit sharing more efficiently and 2) specific criteria for selecting beneficiaries (e.g. targeting farmers who are actually practicing CSC /agriculture) and CDPs.
- **Strengthen FGRM and make it independent**. Extensive education and awareness creation on the FGRM and comprehensive communication plans that targets all stakeholders within the ER Program area is needed to improve understanding and utilization of the system. Establishing independent offices for the FGRM in the ER program area will foster trust and confidence in using the system, thereby maximizing its usage.

Suggested Recommendations: Addressing policy, implementation and enforcement

- **Gazette bylaws to strengthen enforcement of forest laws, especially within forest reserves.** The Municipal and District Assemblies are responsible for enacting and enforcing by-laws to support forest management and conservation activities in the HIA landscape. However, this is not done due to the high cost of gazetting the by-laws. Support is needed to facilitate this process.

- **Clarify protocol for communication among stakeholders.** While there has been significant training for HMBs and other stakeholders regarding roles and responsibilities, there is still a need to clarify how stakeholders -- HICs, HMBs, private sector -- are expected to engage with each other and call meetings to support the various activities that support benefit sharing. It is recommended that there is continued support for enhancing and strengthening these institutional roles so that they are clearly understood and agreed upon by all key stakeholders.
- **Include forest communities in monitoring.** There are opportunities to introduce and build on existing interventions in relevant forest fringe communities so that they can play an active role in monitoring forest change. Examples include the Community Natural Resource Monitoring Platform / Real-Time Forest Alerts.
- **Lobby for better alignment among national policies to address deforestation.** This includes lobbying key actors to implement tree tenure policy. It would also include linking the tree registration system and support roll-out tied to tree planting. Other key issues include mining, which is now allowed in Forest Reserves, and the degazettement of forest reserves which is exacerbating deforestation and increasing carbon dioxide emissions.

Suggested Recommendations: Strengthening Monitoring and Reporting

Overall, it is suggested that monitoring and reporting instruments could be substantially improved to generate more relevant data and information that would usefully contribute to improving adaptive management and lesson learning for the BSP and other similar programmes going forward. Specific issues to address include the following:

- **Support systematic monitoring, reporting, aggregation and analysis of BSP data at all levels** (from HIAs to central levels), with data disaggregated by HIA, sub-HIA and gender, as well as maps with geolocations of BSP interventions. This could be achieved by providing formats for routine data collection, defining a systematic process of consolidation of data and of reports, and formulating a process for comparing and contrasting information to draw lessons and to guide subsequent plans and activities. Designing common data collection templates for use across the entire initiative, would enable NRS to easily receive, consolidate, analyse and report on the BSP implementation.
- **Collect data to allow assessment of costs and effectiveness.** While some data on the performance of interventions is captured in the ERMR, it would be useful to have more data on performance of interventions, value for money, cost effectiveness and costs of delivery/transaction costs.
- **Improve information sharing and aggregation with NGOS, private sector and COCOBOD in order to assess attribution.** Trying to determine if the changes that have happened would have happened anyway and the degree to which an observed change can be attributed to a given programme or intervention -- can be difficult to determine but is a challenge which needs to be acknowledged and addressed in reporting. For example, training costs are covered by multiple organisations with diverse funding, from NGOs and private sector; however, reporting on activities, private sector investments and financial contributions is inconsistent and unverified.

- **Integrate tables and figures to aggregate information from the annexes into the main body of reports**. These could synthesize the details of dates, amounts received or who received payments and sources of the information used as well as follow up information on specific activities and developments in order to make the information more accessible and improve understanding of benefit sharing progress.
- **Ensure RDA SC receives, reviews and approved required reports.** Per page 52 of the BSP, it is suggested that no further BSP funds should be allocated until the RDA SC receives, reviews and approve reports (as indicated in the BSP) from each of the government beneficiaries (FC, COCOBOD, MMDAs that include reporting on: i) indicators and explanation for un-met indicators; ii) request for funds; iii) description of action plan for use of Carbon Fund (CF) payments for each beneficiary group; iv) description of challenges, lessons learned and recommendations providing accounts of how are received, reviewed and approved from government agencies and HIA level beneficiaries.