Fighting over forest: interactive governance of conflicts over forest and tree resources in Ghana’s high forest zone

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Introduction

Background to the research

Forest governance is high on Ghana’s development agenda. The government, together with international donors, civil society and the private sector, is undertaking several initiatives to strengthen the governance process. Examples are the Ghana Natural Resource and Environment Governance (NREG) Review, the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union to combat illegal logging and strengthen forest governance and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation plus (REDD+). Thanks to these initiatives the management and distribution of forest resources have become a major societal concern.

However, widespread conflicts over forest and tree resources and the absence of constructive conflict management mechanisms undermine these attempts to ensure good forest governance and sustainable forest management, as well as people’s livelihood sources (Ostrom 1999, Yasmi 2007). The latter may threaten food security and efforts to minimise poverty in forest fringe communities. According to the World Bank (2004: 1) forest resources contribute to the livelihoods of 90% of the 1.2 billion people living on less than one dollar a day. These people depend fully or partly on these resources to meet their daily needs for subsistence and cash income. Forest resources also play an important role in rural livelihoods in Ghana (Falconer 1992, Dadebo & Shinohara 1999, Blay et al. 2008, Marfo 2009 & 2010, Ros-Tonen et al. 2010, Appiah et al. 2010).

Illicit forest activities, especially illegal timber exploitation and chainsaw milling, as well as the excessive exploitation of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and the use of farming land in forest reserves due to population increase and the need for fertile soils for crop cultivation, play an important but not exclusive role in these conflicts. The underlying drivers are multiple and interdependent. They include vague policy directions, institutional failure, competition between different land uses, and poverty (Tyler 1999, Ostrom 1999, Marfo 2006). Other factors include tenure insecurity, greed, corruption and weak law enforcement (Contreras-Hermosilla 2001, Kaimowitz, 2003). These hamper forest governance processes and present challenges to both the state and non-state
actors. Forest governors therefore face difficult choices when it comes to creating an enabling governance environment for sustainable forest management and to ensuring an equitable distribution of resources for diverse actors.

The Forest and Wildlife Policy (FWP) of 1994 initially provided a glimmer of hope. It resulted in the concept of collaboration, with the anticipation of the involvement of all stakeholders at different levels of scale. It created hope that on-going decentralisation and co-management with local people could contribute to sustainable forest management and improvement in forest governance and livelihoods. True to this, the government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources and the Forestry Commission, as well as civil society and the donor community, have pursued several programmes aimed at promoting good forest governance and enhancing forest and tree-based livelihoods. Contrary to expectations, these programmes have not produced the desired impact due to some of the aforementioned problems.

According to the World Bank (2009), conflict management is a key building block of forest governance, but it has received little or no consideration in most of the ongoing governance initiatives in Ghana, except for the REDD+ process (FC 2010: 19 & 63). Understanding and finding means to deal with forest and tree livelihood conflicts became an important research area under the ‘Governance for sustainable forest-related livelihoods’ programme carried out as a joint effort by Tropenbos International (TBI) Ghana, the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) from 2008-2012. The overall objective of this programme is to generate insight into and formulate recommendations on governance arrangements that enhance forest-related livelihoods so as to contribute to sustainable forest management and poverty alleviation. The present PhD study, the focus of which is outlined below, is part of this programme.

The study area

The study was undertaken in the high forest zone of Ghana, an area of about 7.5 million hectares. It is a zone where most of Ghana’s forests are found and most conflict and illegalities occur with regard to the use and management of forest and tree resources. The zone is endowed with 204 forest reserves of which the Tano-Offin forest reserve and its environs in the Nkawie Forest District were selected as the study area (Figure 1.1). The Tano-Offin forest reserve has different management regimes, namely protection (the Globally Significant Biodiversity Area), a plantation regime (the modified taungya system) and a production regime, each of which was taken as a case in which governance arrangements, conflicts and conflict management were analysed. The intention was also to analyse conflicts in the off-reserve area, but there a scenario of cooperation prevailed rather than conflict. A mixed method approach was employed to triangulate quantitative data obtained from structured and semi-structured survey questionnaires with actor’s perceptions of conflict issues and dynamics. Qualitative data was obtained by using research methods like focus group discussions, community meetings and stakeholder workshops, structured and semi-structured interviews, field observations and document analysis (see Chapter 3 for a detailed description of the methodology).
Objective, research questions and propositions

The challenge of relevance in the context of this study is the absence or ineffectiveness of mechanisms to manage competing claims to forest and tree resources (i.e. to accommodate them and ensure cooperatives actions), which often results in conflict. Such conflicts, when not handled well, mostly impact negatively on the resources and the actors whose livelihood sources are affected. This study aims to provide insight into constructive conflict management pathways capable of minimising conflicts and contributing to the strengthening of the ongoing forest governance process in Ghana. The overall research question addressed in this study is ‘How can forest and tree livelihood conflicts in Ghana’s high forest zone be understood and constructively managed?’

The central argument in this thesis is that forest resource use and management are complex, dynamic and involve multiple actors at different level of scales and, consequently, are characterised by conflicts. Diversity, complexity, dynamics and scale are essential components of natural resource systems, which are addressed in interactive governance theory (Kooiman et al. 2005, 2008). The use of this theory, complemented with conflict analysis, is therefore considered as being appropriate for an understanding of the governability of the systems studied. Analysing the nature of conflicts and means of dealing with them in terms of governance interactions between the system-to-be-governed and the governing system helps to assess how and why governance sometimes falls short of desirable outcomes (Chuenpagdee & Jentoft 2009).

Kooiman et al. (2005) defined interactive governance as ‘the whole of public, as well as private, interactions taken to solve societal problems and create societal opportunities’ (Kooiman & Bavinck 2005: 17). It is a theory that facilitates an analytical under-
standing of system components before proposing interventions. In this thesis, this approach is complemented with the conflict analysis wheel (Mason & Rychard 2005), which is a tool that can be used to understand the nature and various dimensions of conflicts (i.e., context, issues, actors, causes, dynamics and conflict management options).

In order to find answers to the main research question, the study is divided into eight empirical studies with each study constituting a chapter. Sub-questions addressed in these chapters include:

1. What are the natural and socioeconomic characteristics of Ghana’s high forest zone and how do they interact? (Chapter 4)
2. What are the characteristics in terms of features, orders, modes and elements of the governing system that contribute to the governability of Ghana’s forest sector and how does it deal with forest and tree-related conflicts? (Chapter 5)
3. What are the perspectives of forest governors and experts in the forest sector regarding the nature of forest and tree-related livelihood conflicts and conflict management options in Ghana’s high forest zone? (Chapter 6)
4. What conflicts occur with regard to forest and tree resources and what conflict management strategies are employed under several governance regimes in the Tano-Offin forest reserve (Chapter 7 on a protected area, Chapter 8 on a plantation forest, Chapter 9 on a production forest) and what are their implications for forest governance?
5. What factors facilitated the cooperation between the local community and the timber operator in Tano-Offin off-reserve area? (Chapter 10)
6. What are the characteristics of forest offences and their judgments in law courts in Nkawie Forest District and the views of representatives of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary regarding institutional challenges and means to overcome them? (Chapter 11)

Table 1.1 further specifies the research questions addressed in each chapter.
Table 1.1  Research questions addressed in the various chapters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Sub-question addressed</th>
<th>Sub-questions</th>
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| 4       | What are the natural and socio-economic characteristics of Ghana’s high forest zone and how do they interact? | 1. What is the nature of Ghana’s high forest zone in terms of diversity, complexity and dynamics?  
2. What forest users prevail and how do they interact with the natural system? |
| 5       | What are the characteristics in terms of features, orders, modes and elements of the governing system that contribute to the governbility of Ghana’s forest sector and how does it deal with forest and tree-related conflicts? | 1. What is the historical context of the Ghanaian forest governing system in terms of its policies, legislations and conflicts?  
2. What features prevail in the forest governance process (in terms of diversity, scale, complexity and dynamics)?  
3. What is the quality of the three governance orders (principles, institutional arrangements and day-to-day management of conflicts) in the forest governing system?  
4. How responsive is Ghana forest governance in terms of the governance modes (hierarchical, co-governance and self-governance)?  
5. What is the fit of governance elements (in terms of forest actors’ images, instruments and actions) with conflict management and how do actors assess the potential to strengthen forest conflict management in the governance process? |
| 6       | What are the perspectives of forest governors and experts in the forest sector regarding the nature of forest and tree-based livelihood conflicts and conflict management options in Ghana’s high forest zone? | 1. What are respondents’ images regarding forest and tree-based livelihood options and associated conflicts?  
2. What are respondents’ perceptions regarding the instruments available to manage these conflicts?  
3. What actions do forest governors and experts propose to improve conflict management? |
| 7       | What conflicts occur with regard to forest and tree resources and what conflict management strategies are employed in the Globally Significant Biodiversity Area in the Tano-Offin forest reserve and what are their implications for ongoing trends in forest governance such as the VPA or REDD+? | 1. What are the characteristics of the Tano-Offin GSBA as a system-to-be governed in terms of the natural and socio-economic sub-systems and the interactions between the two?  
2. What governing systems operate within the Tano-Offin GSBA?  
3. What are the perceptions of the inhabitants of Kyekyewere regarding the nature of forest and tree-related livelihood conflicts in Tano-Offin GSBA?  
4. What do the findings mean for ongoing trends in forest governance such as the VPA and REDD+ processes? |
| 8       | What conflicts occur with regard to forest and tree resources and what conflict management strategies are employed in relation to the modified taungya system in a plantation forest in the Tano-Offin forest reserve and what are their implications for the co-management scheme? | 1. What are the characteristics of the plantation forest (i.e. MTS scheme) in the Tano-Offin forest reserve as a system-to-be-governed, particularly with regard to the interaction of local communities with the natural system in their efforts to secure their livelihoods?  
2. What are the characteristics of the governing system (i.e. institutional arrangements) that steers the plantation regime?  
3. What are the perspectives of the inhabitants of the communities at the forest plantation fringe regarding the nature of forest and tree-related conflicts in the plantation regime?  
4. What conflict outcomes arise and what are their effects on the governance arrangements? |
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<th>9</th>
<th>What conflicts occur with regard to forest and tree resources and what conflict management strategies are employed in a production forest in the Tano-Offin forest reserve and what are their implications for law enforcement?</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What are the characteristics of the production forest in the Tano-Offin forest reserve as a system-to-be governed, particularly with regard to the interaction of local communities with the natural system in their efforts to secure their livelihoods?</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>What governing system (i.e. institutions and policy instruments) function in the production regime?</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>What are the perspectives of the inhabitants of the communities at the production forest fringe regarding the nature of forest and tree-related conflicts in the production regime?</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>What are the implications of the findings for law enforcement under VPA?</td>
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<th>What factors facilitated the cooperation between the local community and the timber operator in Tano-Offin off-reserve area?</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>What are the characteristics of the Tano-Offin off-reserve area as a system-to-be-governed in terms of the natural and socio-economic sub-systems and the interaction between the two?</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>What governing systems (i.e. challenges and opportunities, access to farming lands, customary and statutory arrangements) operate within the Tano-Offin off-reserve area?</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>What are the perceptions of the inhabitants and the timber operator on why crop damage compensation and SRA conflicts are minimal or absent?</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>What are the views of government officials with regard to crop damage compensation and recommended actions for improvement?</td>
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<th>What are the characteristics of forest offences and their judgments in law courts in Nkawie Forest District and the views of representatives of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary regarding institutional challenges and means to overcome them?</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What are the characteristics of the Nkawie Forest District reserves as a system-to-be-governed?</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>What governing system (i.e. institutions and legislative framework) with regard to law enforcement is available in the forest district?</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>What governance interactions arise from the system-to-be-governed and the governing system and what are their outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>How do officials of the Forestry Commission, the Ghana Police Services and the judiciary perceive their institutional roles in dealing with forest offences?</td>
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These questions are supported by four propositions that contribute to identifying relevant information and serve as a reference point for generalising the results.

1. Forest resource use and management are complex, dynamic and involve multiple users at different levels of scales and are consequently characterised by conflicts. A clear understanding of these users’ perceptions of their common and conflicting interests at different levels of scales will contribute substantially to our understanding of the nature of conflicts and their underlying factors as well as the prevailing management mechanisms.

2. Ineffective conflict management and absence of appropriate conflict management systems in the forestry sector are the main causes of the widespread conflicts and the resultant rapid deforestation rate. If constructive conflict management strategies and systems of relevance to natural resource management (taking account of the multiple interest groups) are institutionalised in policy and programmes, they will go a long way towards strengthening forest governance arrangements and improve livelihoods, especially those of the rural poor.

3. The interactive governance approach provides an analytical and normative means of understanding the governability of the different forest management regimes (i.e. protection, plantation, production and off-reserve areas).

4. The interactive governance approach complemented with conflict analysis generates a picture of forest actors’ images (that guide conflicts and conflict management), instruments (that link images to actions) and actions (that put the instruments into effect) in relation to conflict under various forest regimes.

Justification

A review of sources available on forest research in Ghana reveals that research on forest-related livelihood conflicts is still scarce. Within the context of the TBI-Ghana programme, a PhD study was carried out on forest conflicts (Marfo 2006), but this focused on actor-response processes, power relationships and actor empowerment, and not so much on livelihood-related conflicts. This study looks beyond the forestry (i.e. timber) sector proper to include the perspectives of other stakeholders from NGOs, the international community, academia, the private sector and local communities to obtain a deeper understanding of the societal problem at hand and identify opportunities. Going beyond the timber sector allows the full range of forest-related livelihood activities to be covered around which conflicts occur in the high forest zone and the full range of forest management regimes, namely protection, plantation, production and off-reserve areas. This study further analysis both the statutory and customary structures that govern the various management regimes. The theoretical debates in which this study is embedded include political ecology as the overarching theoretical perspective and three strands of literature to which it is linked: those on forest-based livelihoods, conflict and conflict management theories and interactive governance theory (see Chapter 2). The interactive governance theory coined by Kooiman and colleagues has hitherto been applied exclusively to fisheries. Bringing this concept to forestry is feasible because of the similarities of system inherent characteristics (i.e. diversity, complexity, dynamics and scale) which influence both the forest system-to-be-governed (including the natural and the human sub-systems) and the governing system.
Thesis outline

This thesis is presented in twelve chapters. Chapters 1-3 present the introduction to the research, the theoretical strands underpinning the study and the methods used to conduct the study. The empirical chapters begin with Chapters 4 and 5 that analyse the context of the study, presenting the high forest zone, its sub-systems and forest users (i.e. local communities, timber operators etc.) as the ‘system-to-be-governed’ and the institutions, instruments and mechanisms that govern the system-to-be-governed as the ‘governing system’. Chapters 6-11 present the analysis of the case studies conducted in the high forest zone, more specifically the Tano-Offin forest reserve management regimes and off-reserve area in the Nkawie Forest District. All the empirical chapters are part of an overall research design (outlined in Chapter 3) and follow the same format (introduction, methodology, results, discussion and, sometimes, recommendations) so that each of them can be read as a study in its own right. The core of each chapter is as follows.

Chapter 1 briefly introduces the study. It presents the reader with general background information, a brief introduction to the study area, and the problem statement, objectives, research questions, propositions and justification for the study. It further presents the outline of the thesis.

Chapter 2 describes the theoretical debates in which this study is embedded. It encompasses four strands of literature: political ecology, literature on forest-based livelihoods, conflict and conflict management theories and interactive governance theory. The interactive governance theory was coined by Kooiman and colleagues and hitherto applied exclusively to fisheries. This theory focuses on interactions between the governing system and the system-to-be-governed, with the latter comprising both the natural and socioeconomic system and the interactions between them referred to as the governance interactions. In this study, interactive governance theory, complemented with the conflict wheel as an analytical tool developed by Mason & Rychard (2005), forms the basis of the conceptual framework that guides the data analysis.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and the methods that guided data collection and analysis. It highlights the rationale for selecting a case study approach and justifies the selection of the study areas, units of analysis and respondents. It also examines the research methods and addresses issues of validity and reliability as well as techniques used for data analysis.

Chapter 4 is the first of the empirical chapters and describes Ghana’s high forest zone and key forest resource users as the system-to-be-governed. Using interactive governance theory this chapter explores the characteristics of the natural and socioeconomic characteristics of the high forest zone, as well as how the natural and socioeconomic sub-systems interact.

Chapter 5 aims to contribute to the governance debate by applying interactive governance theory to assess the status of Ghana’s forest governing system and the governability limitations it faces with regard to dealing with forest and tree-related conflicts. It also explores the opportunities that the interactive governance approach holds for the forest sector of Ghana to manage forest-related conflicts from a normative perspective.
Chapter 6 analyses conflicts for the full range of forest and tree-based livelihood components from the perspectives of forest governors and experts. It does so by employing a scaled methodology that promotes a shared problem definition and ownership of recommendations on much-needed changes in forest governance among those who have to implement them.

Chapter 7 addresses the livelihood implications for inhabitants situated in the middle of a protected forest regime (Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas (GSBAs) and the associated conflicts that arise from this location. The chapter discusses the implications of these conflicts for ongoing forest governance initiatives such as the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the EU to combat illegal logging and enhance forest governance.

Chapter 8 analyses the co-management context of the modified taungya system (MTS) in the plantation regime and the arising conflict issues from the perspectives of members of local communities. It ascertains whether the MTS functions as a process from which lessons can be learned for further governance improvement or whether it is a fixed-state system meant to serve the interests of the Forestry Commission to secure timber supplies for the future.

Chapter 9 examines conflict incidences in the production forest regime in Ghana’s high forest zone and the implications of the findings for law enforcement under the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). It analyses the interaction between the production regime (the system-to-be-governed) and the governing system (the institutional and legislative frameworks) with respect to conflicts related to forest resources, operational conflicts with timber utilisation contracts (TUC) holders, and land-use conflicts.

Chapter 10 reports on the off-reserve case where a scenario of cooperation between local people and a timber contractor contrasts the frequently cited conflict scenario. This achievement is based on the construction of social capital such as networking, shared responsibility, and the provision of incentives and creation of social ties and trust by the timber contractor, which was reciprocated by the local people.

Chapter 11 provides insights that may support the national objective to strengthen law enforcement by analysing forest offences and their judgments in law courts in Nkawie Forest District and the views of representatives of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary regarding institutional challenges and means to overcome them.

Chapter 12 brings together the various issues raised in the chapters whilst reflecting on the thesis statement and questions. It does so by providing answers to the research questions and identifying the theoretical and policy implications of the study. It also presents suggestions for future research.