

### Forest governance in Ghana

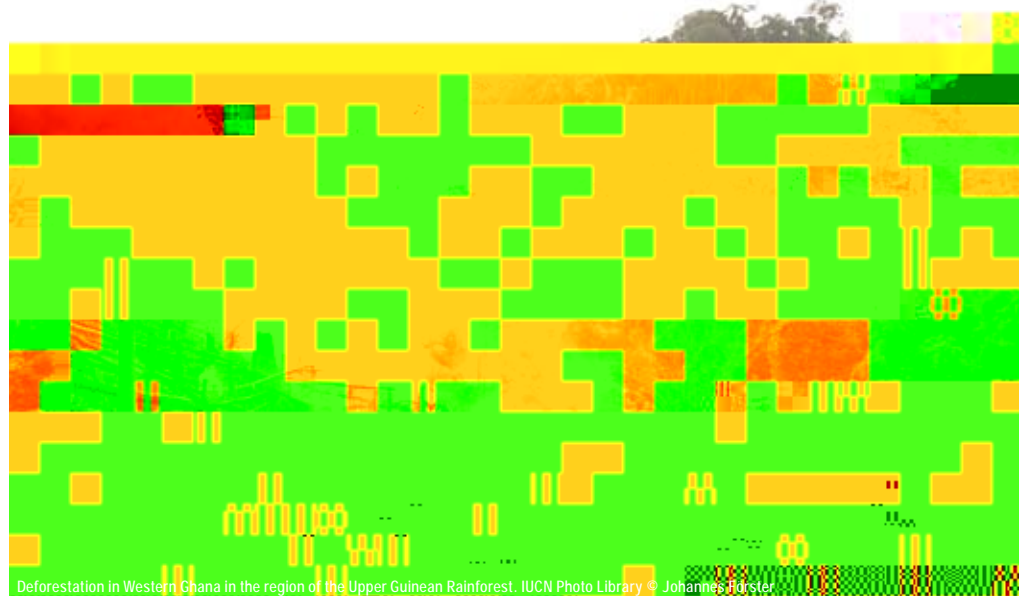
Ghana's forest sector is in the midst of an extended crisis. Weak institutions and a lack of regulatory control have created an environment in which illegal logging and deforestation are rampant. The loss of Ghana's forests is having profound ecological, social and economic consequences.

As the resource base shrinks, so local communities (the forest owners) are losing the forests on which they depend, without seeing any real benefits from forest exploitation. This is one cause behind widespread rural poverty. Similarly, the government of Ghana (the forest manager) is invariably failing to recover the rents from illegal forest activities, losing revenues it needs for national development. If governance reforms are not instituted soon, the remaining forests will no longer be able to supply the ecological, social or economic benefits on which Ghana has come to depend.

### Strengthening voices for better choices

In response to these forest governance challenges, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) launched Strengthening Voices for Better Choices (SVBC). This global project, financed by the European Union, aims to promote the development and implementation of improved forest governance arrangements that facilitate sustainable and equitable forest conservation and management. Ghana, one of six SVBC project countries, is pursuing this goal at both national and community levels.

Nationally, SVBC aims to increase awareness and capacity to implement forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT)



Deforestation in Western Ghana in the region of the Upper Guinean Rainforest. IUCN Photo Library © Johannes Förster

measures stemming from regional and international initiatives. SVBC is contributing in particular to the development of a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) between the European Union and Ghana to prevent illegal Ghanaian timber entering European markets.

At the community level, SVBC is working to strengthen the forest governance capacity of community forest committees, the intermediaries between communities, the forest industry and government. Specifically, SVBC is helping to increase transparency in forest management, improve official responsibility and promote the development of legal forest products.

Besides supporting the VPA process and community forest committees, SVBC

is also building the capacity of stakeholders in government, industry and civil society to participate in and implement forest governance reforms more effectively.

SVBC is partnering with a wide range of Ghanaian and international organizations to realize these goals. It is working closely with the Forestry Commission of the Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines on the consultative processes and communications aspects of the VPA negotiations. In civil society its main partners include Forest Watch Ghana, Tropenbos Ghana, Friends of the Earth Ghana and the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana. SVBC is also maintaining close links with other organisations and projects promoting sustainable forest management in





