



"I want to be an example to all of Ghana."
– Yameriga's Bantang Baan is "always talking about FMNR".

TALENSI FARMER MANAGED NATURAL REGENERATION (FMNR) PROJECT

MONITORING VISIT

JUNE 2011

Tony Rinaudo

Research and Development Advisor,
Natural Resources,
World Vision Australia

Introduction

I first visited Talensi in July 2009 when the Talensi FMNR project was kick-started with a workshop for stakeholders. These included men and women from the communities, religious leaders, chiefs and the paramount chief, representatives of the District Chief Executive Office, forestry and agriculture departments, the forestry research institute, staff from World Vision in Ghana and Australia, and the media.

When I returned in June 2011, what I saw and heard and what has been achieved in the short space of just two years convinced me more than ever of the importance and far reaching impacts of environmental restoration to achieving not only World Vision's child wellbeing goals, but also sustainable development and the wellbeing of whole communities.

The following report is mostly a compilation of quotes from government representatives, community members and World Vision staff and some of my own impressions and recommendations.

The physical impacts are impressive enough, but the big thing which strikes you when visiting is the unashamed happiness and pride people have in practising Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR).

"Everybody is so amazed that a burnt out, barren hill can be covered in a forest of trees, one to three metres tall, in just two years without planting a single tree. The communities are extremely thankful for all the benefits they are already experiencing because of this, ranging from edible wild fruits, leaves and tubers being abundantly available, firewood close at hand, fodder for livestock and the return of some wildlife. The major take home impression I have is the overwhelming community adoption of this method and how within the short space of two years a people who destroyed the forest are now forest guardians – preventing and stopping bushfire and wanton destruction of the forest and facilitating its rehabilitation. We are now considering how to consolidate the gains made in 10 communities in Talensi and how to expand them into the remaining regions of northern Ghana, including exploring ways of significantly diminishing the devastation caused by the charcoal industry. Following the pattern of other countries I predict that in just one to two years abundant fuel wood will be available and incomes will significantly increase from sustainable sales of wood and non timber forest products."

**– Tony Rinaudo in an email to
World Vision Australia, 26 June 2011**

Project profile

Project name	Talensi Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration Project
Project number	191035
Project location	Tongo, capital of Talensi/Nabdam District, Upper East Region of Ghana, West Africa
Project goal	To promote sound Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration practices in pilot communities in the Talensi Nabdam District.
Project outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased knowledge in management of natural resources in target communities• Increased agricultural production and income levels of peasant farmers in the Talensi/Nabdam District• Marginalised and degraded lands restored

Project start date: July 2009

At project commencement, community members reported that they had witnessed massive environmental changes in their lifetimes. These included:

- wildlife and bushland had disappeared;
- crop yields had declined along with soil fertility;
- insect pests had increased;
- climatic conditions had become more severe and more variable and fields fluctuated between being too wet or too dry for good crop growth;
- wind speeds had increased;
- bushfires were a perennial problem; and
- drinking water had become scarcer.



Deforested, overgrazed and eroded hillside typical of the Talensi region where there is no FMNR intervention.



Burnt hillside. Bushfires were a common dry season occurrence in 2009. Most people thought nothing could be done to prevent them – they seemed to be inevitable.



Just two years into the project, nine communities have protected 125 hectares of land from bushfire and begun practising FMNR. In that short time fodder and firewood have become available, wild fruits and wildlife have returned and people feel confident that they are not hopeless victims of climate change and desertification, but that they can do something to reverse the environmental degradation surrounding them and create a better future for themselves and their children.

Project achievements:

- 200 pilot FMNR farmers (100 men and 100 women) were trained and established in 10 communities (one village was dropped for being inactive).
- Total area of FMNR pilot plots with stumps and shrubs pruned and protected against bushfire was approximately 125 hectares.
- 109 fire-fighting volunteers trained with assistance from the Fire Services Department. Bushfire is a major problem in the region so the project trained fire volunteers and stewards in fire prevention and fighting. The volunteers have worked every week to sensitise communities on the dangers and consequences of bushfire.
- 20 pilot farmers went on a field trip to Burkina Faso to learn from their counterparts on re-greening initiatives. Meeting Yacouba Sawadogo, “the man who turned back the desert”, had a big impact on the group, particularly Bantang Baan, who aspires to be Ghana’s Sawadogo.
- On the district Farmers Day in 2011, the local government awarded Yameriga village first place for being the best “Environmentally Friendly” community. They were given a donkey cart, a plough and bicycles.

Lessons learnt

The project team showed a lot of wisdom in their approach to FMNR promotion. They laid a firm foundation by concentrating on the traditional chiefs and land custodians and convincing them first. Once they had them on board, they knew they

would have the whole community. Ensuring good governance and improving on traditional governance structures for environmental intervention has also been a strong feature of this project.

Project approach

From the outset, project staff set out to lay a solid foundation to build an FMNR movement on. Their primary focus was not to have a large area reforested (initially at least), but to identify, understand and employ the key drivers of change to win wide-scale acceptance of FMNR. Their plan included investing time in awareness creation and promotion of FMNR through radio and local visits.

First a meeting was held with the chiefs, elders and land custodians to discuss the concept. The chiefs and elders have the power to stop other activities and focus on FMNR and to this end have been very supportive. Then a second meeting was held, but with the whole community. A slide presentation was shown on desertification and restoration through FMNR in the Republic of Niger.

Once the community stated that they wanted to be involved, the project team conducted behaviour change training. This was followed by a third meeting through which FMNR committee and team members were selected by the community members and commissioned.

Each community selected 20 members (10 male and 10 female). Team members were then trained in FMNR and in how to lead the rest of the community in doing the work. The work itself was done with local tools (sickle, machete, knife) supplied by each community. In parallel with FMNR activities, World Vision Ghana linked participating communities to a savings scheme which they could join.

Land-use guidelines were prepared with a collaborating NGO and community based by-laws were jointly devised which enable communities to manage the forest themselves with the support of the District Assembly. The nine communities engaged in project activities are practising FMNR primarily on communal land, though some individuals have begun it on their own farmland.

This approach has been successful. The project is now trying to give more attention to promoting FMNR on farmland. Each community is managing around 20 hectares of communal land under FMNR and others, outside of the nine target communities, have started simply after seeing it for themselves.

The project team also works closely with the District Chief Executive Office and government services. They have close collaboration with the Forestry Research Institute, which is documenting changes as the forests regrow, such as growth rates and changes in biodiversity. The project has linked farmers with agricultural extension and research services. Collaborating partners include the Natural Disaster Management Organization, local NGOs, the Ministry of Food

and Agriculture, the District Assembly and Ghana Education Service (World Vision supports environmental lessons in schools).

From the outset women have been seen as full partners and participants in this project and children have been included, particularly through school programs. There has also been a very strong and successful emphasis on fire prevention and control through awareness building and training and equipping volunteer fire fighters. Two out of four communities that received community fire stewardship training conducted by the National Fire Service were able to prevent all fires during last year's dry season. Materials used included wet jute sacks, water, wet leaves and sand, and fire breaks were cleared as an extra precaution.



Village volunteer fire fighters were trained by a Talensi fire brigade staff member. Volunteers are given uniforms.



Volunteer fire fighters practise putting out a fire.

Comments from World Vision Ghana staff

"We realised that community structures were needed. This is a key to the success of the Talensi FMNR project – we went to the leaders and won them first. Sometimes we worked until midnight in the communities at the start. Sometimes we start at 7.30am for the sake of FMNR. We see this as a pacesetter project. In the past we spent a lot of money tree planting. But it's a question of sustainability and FMNR gives long-term results. We use Tony's PowerPoint show to sensitise people and show them the impact of tree destruction and desertification on people's lives. The community owns the project and World Vision Ghana is simply trying to help them realise their dreams."

"This environment has been destroyed by human beings and observing FMNR, I believe human beings can restore it."

"We need to use Talensi ADP (Area Development Program) as a resource to spread FMNR to other areas."

"This project has improved our relationship with government, chiefs and community. People come and greet us just because we are the ones promoting this FMNR. The Chiefs, Paramount

Chief, District Chief Executive, even the Northern Region Government Minister are happy and are supportive of this project. Our own World Vision National Office greatly appreciates this project. This year they even brought the World Vision Ghana Advisory Board members all the way to Talensi from Accra to see this project."

"I'm flabbergasted by what I see – both the physical change and the high level of community engagement. If we ran with this it would change our environment."

"We the staff and the people of Talensi will forever be grateful for this initiative."

"Wildlife has started to return. The community showed a World Vision staff member a python which had taken up residence in their FMNR forest. They knew where to find it, were not scared of it and in fact were proud to have it living in their forest. In another regenerating forest, wild guinea fowl, which have become rare in the district, were seen. Apiculture is being promoted in the new forests with the installation of beehives from which villagers can harvest honey."

Support from the Ghana Government

"This project is just a toddler. We want it firmly established. We want to extend it to other areas in our district. For my part, I have promised that any community that is bushfire-free for three years will be eligible for a development scheme of their choice – be it school, water supply, electricity or clinic."

– Ms Vivian Anafo, District Chief Executive, Talensi

The District Chief Executive delayed her departure to another city to see me and to personally thank World Vision Australia for this project and to ask that an extension be seriously considered.

A number of elected Assembly men are FMNR committee members and they take reports directly to the local government level. One of them said, "selected youth have been trained in how to prevent and put out fires. Our goal is that the whole community be fire-free".

Stephen E. Akpalu, from the Ghana Forest Research Institute, commented: "At school we were taught that environmental change happens very slowly and that this change is hard to perceive. My experience with FMNR tells me that we need to rewrite the textbooks. After just one rainy season we looked at the sites: counted the species involved, measured growth (height, diameter at soil level etc) and we are amazed



District Chief Executive for Talensi, Ms Vivian Anafo, has been a very strong supporter of the project from its inception.

by the changes we see and measure. After just six months of monitoring we recorded an 8-15 percent increase in species present and an 8-70 percent increase in the height of species recorded.¹ We have noted also that attitudes have changed and this will sustain this project into the future. After six months fruits formed which hadn't been seen for a long time. There is also a big change in attitude to fire. Today, communities are very keen to prevent and stop fires."

Feedback from communities and village chiefs



“The arrival of FMNR in my village has enabled me to fulfil the meaning of my ceremonial name, which is ‘Tintuug Lebbe Tii’, meaning ‘the small shrub becomes a tree.’”
– Chief Biliya-mnamaltenga, Tongo Beo village



“Since we have stopped bushfires, there has been a return of edible tubers. These are sweet and full of moisture but they had disappeared.”



“A wide range of non-timber forest products can now be found after almost becoming locally extinct. Talensi region has a rich diversity of edible and medicinal plants. Children are eating wild fruits and selling some (*Annona* species are used for soup) and they buy text books with the proceeds. The children used to walk long distances in order to collect this fruit and this was a big concern to parents. Now the fruit can be found close to home.”



“Grasses have also returned and so now there is fodder for our livestock. The animals used to have to walk so far and risk being stolen. Now there is plenty of grass nearby and they do not wander. Also, it used to be that if we took our animals to the market, they were so skinny that buyers didn't even want to look at them. Now, they bring good prices.”

“Individuals are going house to house telling others about not burning and the value of FMNR. They asked World Vision to make sure that the neighbouring communities were invited to the FMNR Open Day so that they will also hear the message and stop burning. One day a fire broke out and the chief saw it from his bath. His only thought was to save the trees so he ran to the fire wrapped in his towel to put it out. Seeing their chief doing this the whole community was compelled to run to his aid. After just 1-2 years we are already seeing differences. Bare spaces are hard to find. Attitudes have changed, especially towards fire. Today the community members are very keen to prevent and stop fire. We envisage that within just a few years we'll have a forest and all its benefits.”

“They used to tell us to plant trees. They would bring them out; we would plant them and the trees would die. These (shoots) are coming themselves! It's cooler already and the winds are not as strong and the soil remains moist for longer. Now if you want to cut a tree you have to ask permission and explain what you want the wood for. We have 200 hectares for restoration and so far we've pruned one third of this area. We've started doing it on our own farms too. We are already beginning to see changes such as improved crop growth.”

– FMNR group leader



“This gift of FMNR is from the Almighty God and therefore anywhere you visit you bring life and joy. World Vision you have won the election.”

– Naba Yamdaan Zimbil Longmoare, Chief of Yameriga

On 21 June, World Vision Ghana’s Talensi ADP staff hosted an FMNR Open Day. The purpose of the Open Day was for local communities to come together and celebrate the introduction of FMNR and the benefits it had already brought them. It was also held in order to spread the news about FMNR to neighbouring communities, district governments, and through the media to Ghana as a whole. Prominent

government officials including the Honorary Regional Minister; the paramount chief, village chiefs, heads of government departments (education, agriculture and forestry), researchers from the Bolga Forestry Research Institute, and community members were invited. The event received excellent radio, newspaper, internet and TV coverage.



“My people are praising me because of you. They are very happy. After the FMNR Open Day, people from nearby villages stayed on dancing until midnight. Today you see lots of fruits around. Children have food! One day a fire broke out from another district. The whole village turned out with buckets of water – even me, an old chief climbed the steep hill and helped put out the fire.”

– Naba Yamdaan Zimbil Longmoare, Chief of Yameriga



“Many years ago when I was a child there was this idea of tree planting. But many of the trees died. We were looking for alternatives. How could we stop desertification like this? When we heard about FMNR we embraced it. The difference between tree planting and FMNR is the planted ones usually die. If we continue FMNR the environment will be reclaimed and it will be good for our people. We are willing to release even 100 hectares for this project, even 5,000 hectares. So far we have prepared 35 hectares of forest. The people have deeply embraced this project because they know they will benefit. Even people of diverse interests want this project to succeed. The larger forest area is being monitored by World Vision. (This work is so important) I will personally monitor all the other smaller FMNR plots.”

– Chief of Balungu community

“We women were walking for four hours for firewood – now it is within sight of the village – a mere 15 minute walk. Our group is also direct sowing seeds of valued species such as Shea Butter in gaps between the regenerating trees.”

Recommendations

- Consolidate FMNR work in Talensi. The project so far has only touched nine communities out of 98 and so much needs to be done to ensure universal uptake of FMNR in the district.
- In order for FMNR to spread throughout the region, Talensi ADP should facilitate exchanges between ADPs. This would involve bringing farmers from other ADPs to visit communities in Talensi, and sending skilled FMNR community members and staff to train communities in other areas. There are 13 ADPs in northern Ghana where deforestation and its impacts are very evident, and there is rapid deforestation occurring in the south as well. There are 34 ADPs in total in Ghana where there is a high likelihood that FMNR could be practised.
- Approach the Australian Government (AusAID) post in Accra to be a preferred partner in the promotion of FMNR.
- Encourage FMNR adoption on farms, ie. in addition to FMNR on communal land.
- Work towards holding a 2013 regional FMNR conference for World Vision offices in other African countries.
- Reach out to charcoal makers. Any progress made in FMNR adoption will be nullified if charcoal production isn't curtailed. Charcoal is an industry of poverty. Those who make it are poor and the inheritance they leave for their children is poverty. Charcoal gives a meal for today, but when it has destroyed the forest, there is only hunger for tomorrow. World Vision Ghana should investigate opportunities for implementing community-based forest management projects. Activities would include sustainable forest management, fire prevention and fire fighting, FMNR, value adding to non-timber forest products (honey, wild fruits, traditional medicines etc), wildlife tourism and livestock production. By promoting the sustainable removal of branches instead of complete tree removal, greater sustainability of the charcoal industry can be ensured while making significant improvements to the environment. With the use of improved kilns, charcoal production itself can be made much more efficient, greatly reducing the amount of wood used for each kilo of charcoal produced.

For further information contact:

Tony Rinaudo

R & D Advisor
Natural Resources, Food, Climate,
Energy & Natural Resources Team
World Vision Australia

1 Vision Drive, East Burwood,
Victoria, Australia 3151

Email tony.rinaudo@worldvision.com.au

Peter Abugah

FMNR Project Manager
Talensi ADP

P. O. Box 531, Bolgatanga
Ghana, West Africa

E-mail: peter_abugah@wvi.org

Norbert Akolbila

Programme Manager
Talensi ADP

P. O. Box 531, Bolgatanga
Ghana, West Africa

E-mail: norbert_akolbila@wvi.org