

**FROM
A VISION
TO ACTION:
UN Partners
Okyeman
Environment
Foundation
to Save the
Environment,
Create Jobs
and Protect
Lives**



**UNITED
NATIONS
GHANA**



“Our forebearers never went to school to learn about photosynthesis, but in their belief laid a deeper philosophical understanding of the need to respect and defend nature. Therefore, for them, trees have a function for our livelihood, the sacredness of the water must be preserved and the air we breathe, and animals ought to be protected.”

These are the remarks of the King of the Royal Ofori Panin Palace of the Akyem Kingdom of Ghana, His Majesty, Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II. His message is the sum of the views of the people of Akyem. It is also an expression of his passion for the environment and wisdom about protecting and preserving nature.

Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II made these observations when a delegation of United Nations, led by the Resident Coordinator for Ghana, Mr. Charles Abani, paid a courtesy call on him at his palace on Thursday, 19 August 2021.

The delegation, accompanied by the Special Advisor of the President of the Republic of Ghana on Sustainable Development, Dr. Eugene Owusu, was at the palace to announce the inception of a joint programme on the environment to the King. In a passionate message on the environment, Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II reiterated the power and knowledge of local people and traditional leaders to drive their own agenda on the environment.

He advised that “unless we come to understand that for sustainable development to be effective, the process and ownership, should be left with the local people.”

Located in the Eastern region, south of Ghana is the Akyem Abuakwa Kingdom. The Akyems are predominantly farmers and are recognized to be very prominent in all aspects of Ghanaian life.

In terms of vegetation, the Eastern region is home to some of Ghana’s treasured forest reserves. Notably amongst them is the Atewa Forest, which is internationally recognized as one of the highest priority ecosystems in West Africa due to its high species diversity. Also located in that region is the Bonsu EcoPark (The Arboretum), a 40-acre land size with



over 600 species of plants used for various medicinal purposes.

Unfortunately, over the past decade, the Akyem Abuakwa area has experienced high levels of land degradation attributable to socio-economic activities such as illegal timber logging, mining, expansion in agricultural land use and bad agricultural practices. These activities have contributed, to some extent, the loss of forest areas in the Eastern Region, leading to the destruction of farmlands which are the main sources of community livelihoods, and the contamination of water sources, which serve most people in the community. Further linked to the negative environmental impact is its ripple effect on the health, nutrition and education outcomes of the region. Determined to ensure future generations can carry on the practice of their forebearers to respect and protect nature and the environment, Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II, established the Okyeman Environment Foundation (OEF). As the name depicts, the OEF seeks to strengthen local ownership and leadership on protecting and preserving the environment.

The Joint programme, **“Fostering Reforestation, Environmental Sustainability and Tourism in the Okyeman Area (FOREST Okyeman): Accelerating the SDGs through a multi-stakeholder, community-based approach to sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing”**, will build on existing initiatives of the OEF in the region focusing on environment, health and education with a strong livelihood and empowerment component. It will be jointly implemented



UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Charles Abani (R) and WHO Country Rep. Mr. Francis Kasolo (L.) at the King's palace



(From L-R) Dr. Kasolo; Mr. Abani; Dr. Eugene Owusu; Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II; Nana Adutwumaa Dokua, Queen Mother of Agyem Abuakwa; Mr. Fiacra MaAsey, UNICEF Deputy Res. Rep. & Ms. Jelena Raktic, UNDP Dep. Res. Rep.

by five UN agencies, namely UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNEP and UN Volunteer, together with the OEF. Supported by the UN Human Security Trust Fund with a grant of 1 million dollars, the implementing UN agencies will co-fund the programme with additional 1.3 million dollars. It is expected to benefit 1.3 million people particularly women and youth. The Resident Coordinator announced that three million trees would be planted under the environmental component. The programme will also explore and establish community-based alternative livelihood interventions for the people of the area. Mr. Abani assured the people of the UN's commitment to work with the "OEF, traditional authorities, government and the private sector to safeguard the environment, maximize the tourism potential of the region and ensure good health and education outcome for the people", adding that "we are accountable to the next generation".

The courtesy call by the UN delegation also occasioned an opportunity to visit a community impacted by illegal mining, where the activities of miners pose severe threat to the farmlands and waterbodies of the inhabitants. "Everything we try to plant is destroyed by these people," says Osabarima Okogyeman, Chief of Apapam and Commander of the Task Force in charge of driving away the illegal miners in the area. The Task Force has been working since September 2020. However, according to the Commander, they are unable to sustain the gains made from their work because the number of illegal miners outnumbers the members of



Some members of the delegation observing the impact of illegal mining on the environment.



Osabarima Okogyeman

the Task Force, making it difficult to have full control of the area.

With the livelihood interventions, under the joint programme, it is expected that the youth of the area will find alternative livelihood to illegal mining. "Sustained alternative livelihood will keep these illegal miners away from these dangerous practices," says Mr. Kofi Gyimah Amoako-Gyimah, the Program Manager of the OEF.

The delegation later visited Bonsu Ecopark to experience how,

through a well-calculated effort by the community, at the instance of Osagyefuo Amoatia Ofori Panin II, to preserve the area, the park has become an eco-friendly spot of attraction. The park currently holds some 800 plant species, 40 percent of which are exotic. These species include a 204-year-old oak tree, acclaimed as the oldest in West Africa. In 2020, Dr. Owusu led the then UN Resident Coordinator to meet with the King to deliberate on strengthening UN partnership with the Akyem Kingdom in preserving the environment and achieving the

SDGs. The result of this visit is the successful acquisition of the 3-year UN Human Security Trust Fund grant. "I am pleased to have been able to translate the vision we had at the time into an actionable programme", Dr. Owusu noted.

PHOTOS BELOW:

Top Left: Tour Guide with 'monkey pot' produced from a tree found at the Ecopark in Bonsu.

Top Right: A myrrh fruit found at the Ecopark

Bottom Left: UN Resident Coordinator, Charles Abani and WHO Country Rep. Dr. Kasolo

Bottom Right: The path into the Bonsu EcoPark

