Strategies for promoting sustainable development in Africa through enhanced SDG 5 and SDG 15 implementation: The case of Ghana

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Forest are essential to promote environmental and economic wellbeing of many rural communities. However, in many African countries, rapid deforestation is leading to environmental degradation and loss of income from forestry products (Duguma et. al 2019). For example, between 1990 and 2000, Ghana lost an average of 135,000 hectares of forest per year and it is estimated that the annual deforestation rate for the country is 2% (FAO, 2010). On the other hand, Women are the key actors in Ghana’s agriculture, constituting over half the agricultural labour force and producing 70% of the country’s food stock (SEND Ghana, 2014). However, the contributions that women make is constrained by a range of interrelated cultural, social, economic and institutional aspects which limits their access to and control over forest resources.

In this study, an assessment of the policies and strategies that have been implemented in Ghana to simultaneously achieve SDG 5 (promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels) and SDG 15 (promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, decrease deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation) were undertaken. The methodology for the study included site visits, consultations with OXFAM-Ghana, review of academic literature, project reports and policy briefs. The results indicated that even though many women have highly specialized knowledge of trees and forests (biological diversity, sustainable management and use for various purposes, and conservation practices) the majority of forestry legislation in Ghana (National Land Policy of 1999, the Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP II), the National Action Plan on drought and desertification) do not enforce gender as an integral component. It was therefore concluded that Ghana can improve the livelihoods of women and improve the governance of its forests by enacting policies that mainstream the provision of extension services to women and mainstreaming gender dimensions in agriculture development and climate change management strategies.

Improving women’s access to forests and providing women with roles in the governance of forests can potentially reduce deforestation rates and improve the livelihoods of women and rural communities.