



# NGOs put research into practice

It is often said that Africa does not need more research and seminars on poverty alleviation but action to put into practice what has already been written and talked about.

But how can this best be achieved? The pathways from research to helping communities and individuals to improve their livelihoods are many and varied and can be difficult to take. They can become researchable issues in their own right if a great deal of trial and error is to be avoided.

NGOs are usually much better than researchers at connecting with people, especially the poor, and so they can play a very useful role when it comes to linking research with practice. In Ghana, a local NGO, the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), is building on long-term research into the peri urban areas that exist in the vicinity of the city of Kumasi for the benefit of poor communities who live and work there.

## In Kumasi

There is undoubted wealth in Kumasi, as there is in many towns and cities throughout Africa, and the result has been a relentless urban drift over the past 30 years and more. As cities grow outwards, the urban areas come into contact with their rural surroundings and an interface is created with distinct features that affect natural resources and the livelihoods of those who depend on them. This interface is not static, it is forever changing as livelihoods cease to be based only on rural activities and begin to incorporate opportunities from city-based income sources. Farmlands and forests are changed to supply urban markets with food and building land. The patterns of rural life are altered by the labour demands of the city and the pollution and wastes it creates.

Since 1997 researchers on several NRSP peri-urban interface projects have been examining ways of improving the livelihoods of Kumasi's peri-urban poor

who largely depend on natural resources. The initial focus was on information gathering, mapping using GIS and understanding the way in which the peri-urban areas functioned and the processes of change. The effects of urbanisation on the control of, and access to resources and on agriculture were examined as well as the potential for using organic wastes to improve soil fertility.

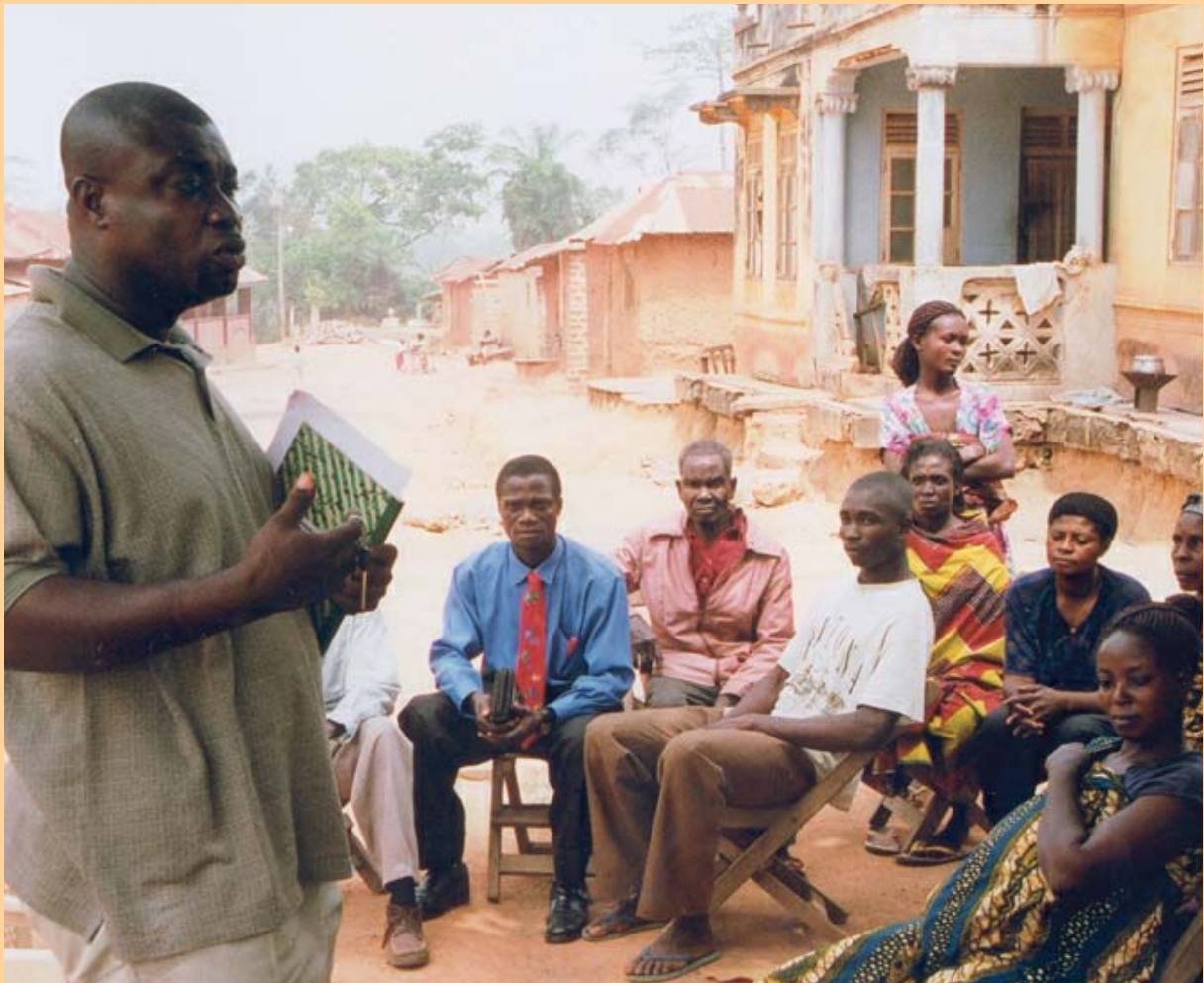
Building on the knowledge that this research had generated, CEDEP examined various natural resources based livelihood strategies accessible to the peri-urban poor. Support came from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and Royal Holloway, University of London. CEDEP was formed in 1983 by a group of young graduates who thought that it was time for Ghanaian graduates to join in the development of the nation. They focused their attention on supporting and building the capacity of marginalised and vulnerable groups in Kumasi.

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## The process

CEDEP's approach was to select twelve peri-urban communities and to use a participatory process for action planning. Participants included not just the poor in the communities but also experienced local skilled workers such as mushroom producers, beekeepers and grass-cutter (a large rodent) breeders who were ready to share their experiences. Local elders, traditional rulers, local government officials and also MPs were invited and encouraged to attend. Facilitation of interaction between these various stakeholders was recognised as very important particularly for considering land tenure.

CEDEP recognised that activities facilitated by outsiders who did not know the area well could create problems with language, culture and difference in status and trust,



all of which could adversely affect the project. They also realised that their staff would not be available at all times. But recruiting local staff could also cause problems. Would they be volunteers or would they be put on the project's pay roll? What would be the implications of this in the community and was it sustainable?

### Community Level Facilitators (CLFs)

This issue was resolved with what turned out to be one of the most important and successful elements in the planning and implementation process. The communities agreed to elect and work through Community Level Facilitators (CLFs). These were men and women who would provide the link between the community and CEDEP. It was not necessary for them to have technical skills but they had to be literate and they also needed the trust of the community. Training was provided on facilitation and the methods of mobilising their communities. The salary problem was overcome by the payment of travel expenses and compensation for income foregone when on community business. Many

of the CLFs were among the first in each village to implement the new livelihood plans. This was a positive development. It helped to demonstrate viable enterprises by involving the most enthusiastic and also served to secure longer-term enthusiasm from the CLFs since they were obtaining tangible benefits themselves.

In sum, this was a neat solution to a thorny problem. Some of the most heated debates in the early meetings and during CLF training sessions revolved around payment. Most CLFs, like their neighbours, rely on daily labour or farming, so that each day spent on other tasks represents lost income or food production. Moreover, some CLFs demanded payment of regular retainers. However, this would have created resentment and charges of favouritism or bias from neighbours. Similarly, long-term payments as a precondition for CLF activity would have undermined the objective of appropriateness and sustainability, and would have perpetuated dependence on outside donor funding.



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## Strategies

Three strategies emerged from the meetings.

The first strategy was developed to help the landless poor. It assumed that very little land and capital was needed, that waste or unutilised resources would be used and benefits would be quickly realised. Breeding grass-cutters, for example, fits into this strategy as does mushroom production and soap making.

Some communities still have land available to them and so the second strategy focused on farm-based livelihoods, such as the production of maize and cassava.

The third strategy looked beyond land-based activities to ways of supplying products for the huge urban markets close by. The plan was to take relatively low-value products obtained from the first two strategies and add value to them by processing or packaging, thus bringing more income into the community. But it was recognised that there are limits to promoting natural resources based strategies in a rapidly expanding urban area and so it was also important to consider any related income generating activities. Examples included bakery, shoemaking, batik production, cloth weaving and brass work.

## The next steps

Work has now moved from planning to implementation. Researchers will monitor this to see how well the strategies work out and to distil insights on good practice, regarding what works and what does not work in enabling people to improve their livelihoods in circumstances influenced by urban-rural flows of goods and services and pressures of urbanisation.

## The result

The project demonstrates how natural resources research at the peri-urban interface can provide a firm foundation on which community-based initiatives for improving livelihoods can develop with confidence. It also shows how local people, with appropriate help, can organise and develop these strategies for themselves.

R7995 Implementation plans for natural resource management strategies for the Kumasi peri-urban interface

This project builds on:

R7854 Further knowledge of livelihoods affected by urban transition, Kumasi

R6799 Kumasi natural resources management

It is being followed up by:

R8090 Who can help the peri-urban poor?

**Korsi Ashong**

Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP)

Justice Henry Prempeh Memorial House

PO Box 5601, Kumasi, Ghana

Email: Pnkorsi@yahoo.com