



DENSU DELTA RAMSAR WETLAND EDUCATIONAL CENTRE
REPORT ON FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENTS

2023-2024

By

Emmanuel Nii Attram Taye

Centre for Biodiversity Conservation Research

Introduction

The Densu Delta Wetland is a vital ecological region located in the urban settlement of Accra, the capital of Ghana. The wetland is known for its rich biodiversity and ecological significance. It is one of five coastal wetlands designated as Ramsar sites on the criterion of their ability to support significant numbers of waterbirds. This wetland plays a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance, providing habitat for numerous species, and offering a range of ecosystem services. Recognizing its importance, there is a need to establish a Wetland Education Centre at the Densu Delta Wetland to promote conservation, education, and sustainable use of this unique natural resource, especially in the face of increasing degradation resulting from settlements and industrial development as well as land reclamation activities.

This report reviews initial activities undertaken toward the establishment of a wetland education centre at the Densu Ramsar site. The report provides information of meetings with relevant stakeholders to solicit their views and opinions on the wetland centre. The aim was to determine whether there will be a buy-in by the stakeholders and other interest groups, particularly the communities, their leaders, and government institutions.

The activities undertaken included familiarization visits and school outreach.

The activities undertaken so far have been led by researchers from the Centre for Biodiversity Conservation Research with funding from the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat through the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI).

Familiarization visits

I paid a visit to the Panbros Salt Industries Limited to present the proposal documents for the Centre and to discuss their involvement. Mr Kojo Baah, who is the quality control manager and in charge of environmental affairs gave assurance of their commitment to conserve the wetland, indicating that the wetland centre was a welcome idea and that they will support in any way they can. Our discussions led to the realization that there was ongoing encroachment and land reclamation in the wetland and that, it was a serious challenge that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

My team and I then visited the Ghana Water Company, Weija Dam Office. After a brief interaction with the manager on site, we were directed to submit the documents to their regional office located at 37, Accra.

Our next visit was to the Weija-Gbawe Mantse's (Chief's) palace where we were warmly welcomed. We had an interesting conversation with the chief and his leaders, presenting them with some information about the ecosystem services of the wetland and the need to conserve it. We then presented our proposal for the centre to them. A date for a scoping mission to survey key areas in the wetland where the centre can be situated was scheduled and carried out three days later.

We then met the Assemblyman of the Tsokome area, Mr. Bright, visited the management of the Bojo beach resort and then visited some schools in the area. The schools visited include Brighter Vision School, Talented Royals School and Westfield School.

We continued our visits to our target stakeholder offices located within the central part of Accra. These included Ghana Water Company Regional Office, National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) head office, Environmental Protection Agency, Ministry of Environment Science Technology and Innovation, Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources. From Central Accra, we moved to visit more schools in the Weija area. They included Rising International School of Excellence (RISE), Ogbojo Cluster of Schools, Apostolic Faith School, Aplaku, Hill Star School and did a follow up on some schools we had visited earlier.

On our third day, 11th November 2023, we honoured the invitation of the Weija-Gbawe Mantse, and showed them the sites in the wetland with more shorebirds and they also showed us possible sites for the educational centre. Some sites looked more suitable than others for the construction. We will hold further discussions on the final site to be selected for the educational centre in our subsequent stakeholder meetings (see below for a map of the wetland showing potential sites and some biodiversity hotspots).



Figure 1: Map of Densu Delta Ramsar Site showing potential sites for the wetland centre. Centre 1 and 2 are more accessible than 3 and 4. Centre 1 is at the entrance of Pambros Salt industries and centre is within the demarcated operational area of the same industry. Centre 3 is at an estuary, and close to a beach resort and centre 4 is within the community, at Tetegu, but has access to the wetland. The Biodiversity hotspots are areas where various bird species aggregate to roost and(or) forage.

We later visited some more schools in the Weija-Gbawe area, met the Tetegu Assemblyman, and also visited the Weija-Gbawe Municipal chief's office and presented our documents to them. We finally visited the chief of the Wiaboman Traditional Area to have a brief talk with him and his elders and then presented our proposals to them.

Richard Amo Yartey, Chief disaster control officer at the National Disaster Management Organization, contacted us after we submitted the documents to his office. We scheduled a visit and among the issues discussed were the incidence of people building in waterways and the mandate of the NADMO to ensure that areas of water flow are not closed off as this causes flooding in areas where flooding did not occur previously. Another issue was the land reclamation that has become increasing rampant in recent years, with some traditional rulers filling up portions of the wetland to make room for building development. Mr Yartey shared some insights into the mandate and operations of NADMO and entreated us to organize a training workshop for their field staff in the various units in the communities on the benefits of the wetland and the need for conservation action.

School outreach

Initial visits were paid to schools within the Densu catchment area. The visits sought to introduce the team to the heads of these educational institutions to create a rapport that can be leveraged on later for engagement with the students. Out of the school visited, three were selected to participate in the pilot school outreach program. Two of the school were visited in December 2023; the third school failed to provide a suitable date for the team to visit.

At the two schools visited, a presentation was given that touched on “what are wetlands”, “the importance of wetlands”, “state of Ghana’s wetlands”, and “how to conserve wetlands”. After the presentation, the students were allowed to ask questions and this was followed by a short quiz to gauge how much of the information presented they remembered. Finally, the students were introduced to the flyway game, led by Emmanuel (who learned it from Tim Dodman). Both the teachers and students were excited to be learning about the environment and conservation from practitioners. The reception was positive at the schools and we hope to extend to other schools and organize some field visits.

Stakeholder engagement meeting

A stakeholder engagement meeting was held on the 22nd March 2024. Key stakeholders within the Densu basin were invited to take part in discussions concerning the conservation issues in the wetland and the establishment of the Densu Delta Wetland Education Centre. The meeting was attended by representatives from Governmental Institutions, NGOs, State agencies, Academia and local communities around the wetland.

A consensus was taken to obtain the views of participants in the meeting on the establishment of the centre. There was a unanimous affirmative response. A detailed account of the proceedings of the meeting is attached to this report.

Next steps and future activities

1. A roadmap was drawn which defines some activities to be undertaken prior to the formal establishment of the centre. It was agreed that due to the urgency of the situation in the wetland, urgent action needs to be taken and thus a public education campaign should be undertaken as soon as possible while attempts are made to engage policy makers and national opinion leaders.
2. On the issue of financial support for the proposed activities, it was suggested that proposals for specific activities and projects be presented to local corporate and government

institutions as well as international conservation entities. A core working group will be formed after the broader stakeholder meeting to handle the technical issues concerning the proposed activities.

3. We will engage with more schools and arrange field visits for the students.
4. We held a meeting with Frank Koomson (Project Manager, UNDP, Storytelling) on the way forward regarding using storytelling as a means of awareness creation. We itemized some items and activities to undertake for such a project. The next step is to draw a budget and start seeking funding while we carry out the activities that we can do without funding (more of this after our next meeting).
5. Engagements with media houses concerning the conservation of the Densu wetland and the establishment of the wetland centre.

Conclusions

From the many conversations and discussions with relevant stakeholders at various times and the deliberations during the stakeholder engagement meeting, it is clear that the Wetland education centre is wanted and needed. This is especially because of the rapid rate of degradation in the wetland. It is my belief that the wetland will serve as an advocacy hub to initiate and engage in public discourse towards the preservation of wetlands and their resources. The first steps that need to be undertaken are underway with the creation of a news story around the wetland and the wetland centre being prepared by the team at radio universe.

When we all work together for nature, nature rewards us. I envision the establishment of the wetland education centre, and the Densu Delta Ramsar Wetland providing services and resources to support the communities surrounding it.

Gallery



Figure 2:Scenes from the stakeholder engagement meeting



Figure 3:The Densu dam as seen for the compound of the Ghana Water Company, Weija plant.



Figure 4: School outreach with students at the Hill Star School



Figure 5: School outreach with students at the Brighter Vision School



Figure 6: Familiarization visit with Mr. Richard Amo Yartey and his assistant at NADMO