

The Rubber Outgrowers Unit (ROU) is the extension wing of the Ghana Rubber Estates Limited (GREL) responsible for the implementation of the Rubber Outgrower Plantations Project (ROPP). ROPP is a government project aimed at assisting Outgrowers to alleviate poverty. The vision of the unit is economic empowerment through rubber cultivation for sustainable rural community development to alleviate poverty.

Its mission statement are to deliver quality and affordable inputs and services to rubber Outgrowers through advance and innovative technology; to enable Outgrowers have sustainable income, enjoy a better living and to contribute to national development and to collaborate with all stakeholders to effectively and efficiently utilize public funds to improve the living standards of the rural communities.

Plan Your Future;



Plant Rubber Trees

Missions! Missions!! Missions!!!

As part of its agenda for the alleviation of poverty in the rural areas, the Government of Ghana (GoG) has been contracting loans from its development partners for the promotion of perennial crop in Ghana of which rubber was identified as one of the components. Since the Rubber Outgrower Plantations Project (ROPP) began in 1995, there has been frequent visits by AFD and its allies to the project for various mission statements. During the third quarter of 2009, a high powered delegation from AFD, KfW, MOFA and MoFEP visited the project from 30th June to 3rd July. The main objective of their visit was to assess the progress of the third phase of the outgrower projects and possible launching of the fourth phase. After holding several discussions with the various stakeholders on the project, they were taken round some outgrower farms at Tikobo No. 2 in the

Jomoro District of the Western Region by the Project Management Team (PMT) led by the Project Director. After the field visit, they also made time to meet with the rubber outgrowers at Tikobo No. 2 and its environs where the outgrowers answered the many questions and issues raised. They were very impressed about the



Time for Discussion with Outgrowers

excellent manner in which the project was being managed. In a related development, the Minister of Food and Agriculture, Mr. Kwesi Ahwoi, paid a one-day working visit to the outgrower projects at Apemanim. In his address to the Minister, the Managing Director of GREL said the AFD was ready to finance a fourth phase of the project with a new approach. He said the fourth phase was under study and that it was expected that 3,750 farmers from the Western, Central and possibly Eastern Regions would be assisted to plant 15,000 hectares of rubber.

On his part, the Project Director, mentioned some of the challenges facing the project which include disputes on land acquisition, socio-cultural problems and conflicts of land use, that is, agricultural versus mining.



AFD, KfW, MOFA and MOFEP interviewing an outgrower at Tikobo II.



Project Director briefing the Minister of Food and Agriculture, Hon. Kwesi Ahwoi



A Section of Outgrower at Tikobo II during the interaction session.

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RUBBER OUTGROWER UNIT (ROU) PLAN YOUR FUTURE; PLANT RUBBER TREES

Inside this issue: Page

Outgrower Projects Hits Over 11,000 Hectars	1
Stimulation	1
Prospects of Natural Rubber Is Still High	2
Mistletoes, Parasitic To Rubber	2
There Is Hope for Agyambra Outgrowers	2
ROU to Plant In September	2
Fertilizer Application In Late August	3
Natural Disaster Hits Rubber Outgrower Plantations	3
Beware of Fake Planting Materials	3
Missions! Missions!! Missions!!!	4

The Paraa

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Outgrower Projects Hits Over 11,000 Hectares

Considering the total work force of the Rubber Outgrower Unit (ROU) of GREL, it seemed quite unbelievable when the Project Director communicated the department and individual objectives for the year 2009 at the first general meeting of ROU in January. Indeed, pessimists attitude was clearly demonstrated by a section of staff, judging from the way they frowned their faces and murmured. Notwithstanding, some of the staff also welcomed the challenge with optimism. Reiterating the words of President Barack Obama of USA, these optimists said "YES, We Can". It was then clear that you either join the "achiever's train" or fall out. But it must be admitted that it was indeed a herculean task if we

meant business. Then came the time for lining and pegging. All ROU staff, including the Project Director, the Project Operations Manager and even the office staff then devised ways and means to contribute their quota towards the achievements of the planting targets. Late completion of land preparation by outgrowers also



A Planted Rubber Stump

contributed to making the achievement of the target even more difficult. But with the desire to achieve and hard work as the hallmarks of Staff, the Unit was able to assist small holders (Outgrowers) to prepare 2,814.95 ha of land and plant same by June 2009, bringing the total hectares of land planted by ROU from 1995 to date to 11,160 ha. Out of the 2,814.95 ha planted this year, outgrowers in the Western Region planted 1753.43 ha, those in the Central Region planted 486.02 ha, Self finance outgrowers planted 499.48 ha while the phases I and II outgrowers who applied for extension of their rubber farms also planted 76.13 ha.

STIMULATION - Story by Mr. Robert Kojo Danquah

Stimulation of rubber trees is an important activity in latex production. It is the process of applying chemicals such as ethephon to the rubber trees to induce more latex flow during tapping. It increases production leading to increased income to outgrowers thereby making life more meaningful to both the outgrowers and their tappers. Rubber outgrowers and agents should be mindful of the fact that if instructions for application of the stimulant are not adhered to,

it would have adverse effect on the rubber trees. Technical field visits to matured farms over the years have revealed that a lot of farmers are over-stimulating the rubber trees while others



A rubber tree being stimulated

also apply other chemicals which are not recommended by the Project. These stimulation irregularities have resulted in a lot of panel dryness cases leading to low production of several farms. Indiscriminate disposal of empty stimulant containers by some outgrowers must also be avoided. Farmers must plan their future, by protecting the rubber trees to protect them (outgrowers).



Mr. Emmanuel A. Owusu
The Project Director

Prospects of Natural Rubber Is Still High

It is quite refreshing to note that, from Gh.¢ 0.43 per kilogram of rubber in January 2009, a kilogram of rubber sold at Gh.¢ 0.74 in July 2009.

Considering the fact that it is one of the major agricultural commodities in high demand on the global market, one would expect the prices of rubber to be very high. It would be recalled that outgrowers have witnessed low levels of rubber prices since the last quarter of 2008. This was due to the credit crunch which hit the global market. Many agricultural plantations and their associated

activities became quite difficult to operate. Some agricultural companies even stopped operations due to high operating cost. But GREL continued to buy rubber from outgrowers. There is therefore no shred of doubt about GREL's commitment and capacity to absorb all rubber produced by outgrowers. Keep on maintaining your farms because prices would bounce back again.

Mistletoes, Rubber Parasites



A Mistletoe parasite on rubber tree.

Mistletoe is an air-borne parasitic plant which live off the sap of its host. Although mistletoe spreads silently and slowly throughout a forest, its seed dispersal is slow. The problem with mistletoe is that, it stays with the rubber tree until the tree dies. Spread by birds who eat mistletoe, the parasitic plant grows from seed deposited in bird faeces on tree limbs. If left unchecked can cause die-back of tree limbs and

occasionally the death of the tree, especially in drought conditions. As a parasitic plant, mistletoe receives nutrition from sapping nutrients from a host tree (rubber). Mistletoe also undertakes nutrient production through photosynthesis by the intake of Carbon dioxide and water as do other plants. If you cut off a branch that the mistletoe is growing, it will soon die; so **CUT THEM OFF**.

There Is Still Hope for Rubber Outgrowers At Agyambra - Says Mr. Samuel Gyessie

Agyambra is one of the first communities in Ahanta west to join the rubber outgrower project in 1995 with only one outgrower who planted less than one hectare. The number increased to 119 between 1997 and 2002. However, due to an unfortunate chieftaincy dispute which disorganized and disoriented the community, most of the rubber outgrowers fled the community leaving their farms to the mercy of the weeds. Some of the outgrowers who were still staying in the community also neglected their farm. Today, only 28 out of the 119 outgrowers whose farms were supposed to have been opened in 2009 have come into production. Is it not sad that while they continue to bear maintenance cost, their colleagues are enjoying rubber money? Notwithstanding all the challenges, these outgrowers whose farms have not been opened are encouraged to carry out their slashing and line cleaning for the September complimentary opening.

ROU to Plant In September

Although the total hectares of rubber planted this year by the Rubber Outgrower Unit of GREL has been unprecedented in the history of the project, the target of 3000 ha was short by 6.17 percent, translating into 185.05ha. An attempt would thus be made to make up for the short fall in the minor season. This means that outgrowers who could not complete their land preparation on time during the first round of planting now have the opportunity to do so and be planted for in September. It would also be recalled that from the 10th to the 25th of May, 2009 the weather was very dry and that there was no rain during this period. As a result, there was drought which affected the rubber stumps planted within the period. Hence, high mortality has been recorded on all the fields which were planted within the period. The Project Director is therefore, through this medium, giving full assurance to all the affected outgrowers that all the dead rubber stumps would be replaced in September. Affected outgrowers are kindly requested to dig their holes again for replacement planting to be carried out from 21st September to 3rd October, 2009.

Fertilizer Application Commences In Late August

Most agricultural soils in Ghana are poor in fertility due to continuous cropping or leaching as a result of heavy rainfall. For this reason, the Rubber Outgrower Unit of GREL applies fertilizer on rubber trees which are in years zero (0), one (1) and two (2) annually. The main aim of this activity is to enhance the growth of the trees to reduce the gestation period for tapping. This year's programme is scheduled to start from late August in the Ahanta West and Nzema East Districts of the Western Region. The fertilizer NPK (151515) would be applied at a rate of 200g per tree on all trees planted in 2009 while those planted in 2008 and 2007 shall receive 400g per tree. All Outgrowers must have done the inter-row slashing and line cleaning or ring weeding

before the application date to facilitate movement of labour and equipment during application and also to reduce competition with weeds after application. The fertilizers must also be in the farm



Before the contract workers to do the application of the fertilizers arrive on the farm. Outgrowers are also requested to supply additional labour to assist in the fertilizer distribution. A furrow is made with a hoe around the plant with the ring radius ranging from 0.5 to 1.5m depending on the age of the plant or within the range of the canopy. The required quantity of the fertilizer is then spread in the furrow after which a hoe is used to cover the furrow with soil. As with all chemicals, the hands must be washed thoroughly immediately after the activity. Care must be taken to avoid contact with the trees by the fertilizer to avoid scorching. Lastly, the fertilizer must be handled carefully to avoid wastage.

Natural Disaster Hits Rubber Outgrower Plantations

Natural disaster is the effect of a natural hazard (example flood, volcanic eruption, earth quake or landslide) that affects the environment and leads to financial, environmental and/or human losses. Because they are naturally occurring, disasters pose an ever present threat which can only be dealt with through proper planning and preparedness. Thus during the recent flooding of several communities in the country caused by persistent rains, rubber growing areas in the Western and Central Regions were not spared by the rains. This led to flooding of some outgrower farms in locations such as Anwianu, Awukyire, Nzema Akropong etc. in the Western Region. The water level in some outgrower fields measured up to 12 metres, which meant that all trees which measures less than 10 metres were completely submerged in the water and this continued for

five (5) continuous days in some cases. On some occasions, the strong winds which preceded the rains were enough force to break most of the trees. A field visit undertaken by the Project Director, the Project Operations Manager and the Field Manager-In-Charge of Nzema East and Jomoro Districts to assess the extent of



damage caused by the rains to the rubber trees revealed that the affected trees had severely been damaged. For instance, most of the year one and year zero plantings which were completely submerged in the water were found to be dead after the water had receded. Some of the trees had broken off at a height of one (1) metre from the ground. The affected outgrowers appeared to be very demoralized.

The big question really is how they can repay their loans. Perhaps, it is time to think of the possibility of insuring outgrower farms against such disasters. Must the financial operators bear the responsibility or the outgrowers themselves? Which way do we go? Well, think about it.

Beware of Fake Planting Materials

In tree crop production, source of planting materials is very important especially if they are being planted for commercial purposes. Good planting materials guarantees high yield, resistance to wind damage, pests and diseases. Thus the need to verify the source of your planting materials cannot be under-scored. In the rubber industry, poor quality planting materials would result in low yield, susceptibility to wind damage, root and even leaf diseases. To ensure good density and good growth, outgrowers are cautioned to be mindful of where they get their planting materials. There are few certified micro nursery operators in the industry. Although GREL can guarantee the quality of stumps from such operators, several people have entered the industry with no technical competence. Beware of them because they are in to exploit ignorant farmers.