



2014 AWARD Fellow

**Mercy Afua Adutwumwaa  
Derkyi**

Position	Lecturer
Institution	University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana
Country	Ghana
PhD	Social Science, University of Amsterdam, 2012
Mentor	Professor Esi Awuah, Vice-Chancellor, University of Energy and Natural Resources
Research Area	Exploration of integrated approaches to improve the livelihoods of resource-poor rural farmers in forest-agriculture ecologies.

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Mercy Afua Adutwumwaa Derkyi’s interest in science started early, and by the time she was undertaking a BSc in Renewable Natural Resource Management at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, Ghana, she soon realized that she had found her true calling.

“I was drawn to forestry and trees, though not to the core technical resource management aspect,” she says. “What really interested me was the relationship between people and trees, and the social dynamics of our reliance on and management of forest resources.”

Derkyi discovered during her undergraduate research that most people in Kumasi did not appreciate urban recreation and green spaces. During her national service, she worked with the Resource Management Support Centre of the Forestry Commission, which further spurred her interest in collaborative forest management and its effects on people’s practices and livelihoods.

Derkyi undertook an MSc in Agroforestry at KNUST, looking at land-use systems from a social perspective. She assessed how farmers put their land to use, whether for agriculture and livestock, forestry stands, agroforestry, or mixed systems. She also explored the differences across communities, factors influencing farmers’ choices, and their willingness or reluctance to adopt new techniques and systems.

Following her MSc, Derkyi ran an NGO dedicated to community empowerment and building awareness of the importance of forest resources. She received training in gender and biodiversity conservation in Benin to help develop eco-tourism and alternative

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income-generating opportunities for women. Derkyi was later sponsored by the Dutch forest resource organization, Tropenbos International Ghana, to pursue a PhD in Social Science at the University of Amsterdam, where she investigated the drivers and impacts of conflicts associated with forest and tree resources. She focused on how communities living on the fringes of protected, plantation, and production forest regimes in the Tano Offin reserve and environs in Ghana’s high forest zone were coping with competing rights and resources. Her findings suggested that conflict resulted from the diverging interests of the human, natural resource, and governing systems.

“Conflict is inevitable, and it is often made worse by policies that deny access, ownership, or consultation with key stakeholders, but what is important is how we deal with it,” says Derkyi. “Conflict management must become an integral component of natural resource management. Otherwise, we run the risk of escalated conflicts, unchecked exploitation of natural resources, and the disappearance of our forests.”

Derkyi’s current research focus is on working with community members to build their capacity to effectively engage in constructive dialogue, articulate their concerns, and negotiate their rights as equal partners with the Forestry Commission. She continues to research models and solutions that could benefit those dependent on forestlands for their livelihoods, while protecting the forests and forest resources. Examples include developing eco-tourism sites, using forest preservation initiatives (e.g. REDD+) to reward communities as forest caretakers, or developing other food and income-generating activities within forested areas.

“Preserving forests and trees is a long-term endeavor,” notes Derkyi. “In the meantime, we must find ways for communities to maintain access to food and livelihoods through creative solutions, such as co-managed forest plantations, shade-loving food or cash crops, and schemes to pay forward the 25-year investment required to grow new trees.”

Derkyi wants to further empower farmers, especially women, to negotiate for their resource rights. She also aspires to influence the development of pro-poor policies between forestry and agriculture. As an AWARD Fellow, she is sharpening her own negotiation, listening, and leadership skills. AWARD is also giving her the chance to review her career path, raise her visibility, and carve her place as a leader in bringing together the social, policy, and environmental elements of natural resource management for more successful results.