

# Equitable Fire Management in Ghana: co-developing an adaptable framework with local communities using social science and arts-based methods

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## PROJECT SUMMARY

The *Equitable Fire Management in Ghana* project, led by Adriana Ford (Department of Geography), brought together researchers, artists and community members to rethink how fire is understood and governed in Northern Ghana. Using participatory and arts-based methods, it centred the knowledge of local fire users—herders, farmers, and hunters—whose perspectives are often missing from formal policy.

Working with A Rocha Ghana, the team held a two-day workshop in Damongo with 31 participants. Through rich picture drawing, dialogue, and feedback sessions, the group explored more inclusive approaches to fire governance. These discussions shaped a large public mural by Ghanaian artist Daniel Kwaku Anetang, capturing the complexity of fire as both risk and tradition in the savannah landscape.

The project also supported a UK visit by A Rocha Ghana's Godwin Dzekoto, who co-authored a policy brief now being shared with West Gonja's Medium-Term Development Plan team. *Flames of Duality*, the mural, was launched alongside the brief in June 2025. Together, these creative and policy outputs offer a compelling model for locally grounded, collaborative environmental governance.

## HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The project emerged from the PhD research of Rahina Sidiki Alare (King's College London), which explores fire governance in Northern Ghana. Her work revealed tensions between national fire policies and traditional burning practices used by local herders, farmers, and hunters. Building on established connections with conservation NGO A Rocha Ghana, Rahina partnered with Godwin Dzekoto and Dr Adriana Ford to design a project that would bring diverse stakeholders together.

With support from artist Daniel Kwaku Anetang and Professor Kate Schreckenber, the team secured AHRC funding to co-develop a framework for equitable fire management through participatory research and creative methods. The project design drew on previous experience with similar art-science collaborations and was intentionally open-ended, allowing space for the community to shape both the workshop content and the final artistic outputs.





## WHAT HAPPENED?

The project was anchored by a two-day participatory workshop co-organised by Rahina Sidiki Alare and Godwin Dzekoto and held in Damongo, Savannah Region, in October 2024. The workshop brought together 31 participants from across government, NGOs, academia, the private sector, traditional authorities, and local communities—including herders, farmers, and hunters whose fire knowledge is often overlooked. The aim was to create a shared space where different knowledge systems around fire use could be explored and valued.

The workshop included a mix of structured discussions, interactive group activities, and creative methods. One key activity was the “rich picture” exercise, where participants visualised their experiences with fire and its role in their lives and landscapes. These drawings, along with group reflections, helped surface both tensions and opportunities within existing fire management practices. Local artist Daniel Kwaku Anetang participated in the full workshop, using these conversations and illustrations as inspiration for a large public mural.

Alongside the workshop, pre- and post-event surveys were conducted to assess shifts in participant perceptions around fire, equity, and governance. Early analysis indicated improved understanding and a stronger sense of inclusion among participants. The mural, titled *Flames of Duality*, was informed by the rich picture exercises and group discussions. Created by artist Daniel Kwaku Anetang, it was unveiled in Damongo in June 2025, alongside the policy brief, with local media and stakeholders in attendance.

In November 2024, Godwin Dzekoto travelled to King’s College London for a one-week research exchange. During his visit, he delivered two public seminars, collaborated with Rahina Sidiki Alare on a policy brief, and met with colleagues from the African Leadership Centre and Imperial Global Ghana to explore future partnerships. The policy brief has been shared with the West Gonja Municipal Assembly Medium-Term Development Plan preparation team.





## WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The *Equitable Fire Management in Ghana* project had a significant impact on both local participants and the broader networks involved. For many workshop attendees—particularly herders and hunters—it was the first time their fire knowledge and lived experiences had been formally recognised and included in a policy-focused conversation. Participants reported feeling heard and valued, and post-workshop surveys showed positive shifts in understanding around fire use and its environmental implications.

Through the workshop, participants established an inclusive network of researchers and practitioners, including the state, NGOs, the private sector, traditional authorities and local communities to support and promote equitable fire governance across Northern Ghana. To facilitate ongoing discussions and share ideas related to fire management, participants established a WhatsApp group for communication and outlined potential activities to be implemented. The proposed activities included holding an annual workshop to discuss changes in fire regimes, intensifying bushfire sensitisation programmes at all levels across Northern Ghana, and engaging Fulbe tribes as fire volunteers.

The project also generated meaningful institutional impact. The co-authored policy brief—developed by Rahina Sidiki Alare and Godwin Dzekoto—shared with the West Gonja District Assembly Medium-Term Development Plan preparation team, providing a concrete route for influencing national fire policy. In parallel, Godwin's research exchange visit to London strengthened links between A Rocha Ghana and institutions such as the African Leadership Centre and Imperial Global Ghana, laying the groundwork for future collaborations.

While modest in scale, the project demonstrated how academic research, artistic practice, and policy engagement can be combined to foster more equitable environmental governance. It also offered valuable learning around partnership-building, creative facilitation, and the importance of centring local voices—insights that are already informing future projects in Kenya and beyond. The project has opened pathways for continued collaboration between King's and A Rocha Ghana, with potential for future work under the Leverhulme Wildfires Centre.

## ADRIANA'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

### 1. Be flexible and let the project evolve with your partners.

Building in space to adapt your approach, whether through timelines, outputs, or creative direction, can lead to richer, more locally grounded outcomes. In this project, shifting from indoor artwork to a public mural allowed for greater community visibility and long-term engagement.

### 2. Take time to define the change you want to make.

At the start of the project, attending an AHRC impact workshop helped the team reflect more clearly on their intended change. Clarifying your impact goals early on ensures that your activities, methods, and outputs are all aligned—and helps make your case for future funding stronger.

### 3. Prioritise strong partnerships and keep communication consistent.

This project was made possible by long-standing relationships and trust between partners in Ghana and the UK. Regular check-ins and a manageable team size helped keep things on track. Don't underestimate the value of clear roles and open, flexible collaboration.

## FURTHER READING

- A Rocha Ghana and UK Wildfires Centre Host Fire Management Workshop: <https://ghana.arocha.org/en/2024/10/21/a-rocha-ghana-and-uk-wildfires-centre-host-fire-management-workshop/>
- Equitable Fire Management in Ghana: Policy Brief (2025): <https://centreforwildfires.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Equitable-Fire-Management-in-Ghana-Policy-Brief-2025.pdf>
- Equitable Fire Management in Ghana: Workshop Report (2024): <https://centreforwildfires.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Equitable-Fire-Governance-in-Ghana-AHRC-KCL-Leverhulme-Wildfires-A-Rocha-Ghana-Workshop-report-2024.pdf>



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