

# Customary Laws and Practices in the Greater Amanzule Wetland Areas



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Friends of the Nation

February 6, 2013



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**Citation:** Adupong, R., Nortey, D. D. N., and Asiedu, J. (2013), Compilation of Customary Laws and Practices in the Greater Amanzule Wetland Areas. USAID Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance Initiative for the Western Region, Ghana. 42 pages

**Disclaimer:** This publication is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Ghana. The contents of this report are the responsibility of the Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance (ICFG) Program and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Government. Associate Cooperative Agreement No. 641-A-00-09-00036-00 for "Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance (ICFG) Program for the Western Region of Ghana".

**Cover Photo:** Women and children crossing Ekpukpole lagoon at Metika, Jomoro District

**Cover Photo Credit:** Richard Adupong, Friends of the Nation

## **Acknowledgements**

The research team deeply appreciates the support, time and inputs by traditional rulers, traditionalists, family heads, opinion leaders and all others that made the community information gathering a success. Special appreciations go to the Chiefs of Nzulezu, Bobrama and Elenda as well the royal family heads of Beyin, Azulenoanu, New Nzulezu and Ellonyi for their great inputs.



**Figure 1: Chiefs of Nzulezo & Elenda with the research team**

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iv
List of Tables.....	v
Executive Summary.....	vi
1.0 Background and Introduction.....	1
2.0 Methodology.....	2
3.0 Findings.....	4
3.1 Communities and Wetlands.....	4
3.2 Ownership Regime.....	5
3.3 Myth of Origin of the Amanzule Wetland.....	6
3.4 Sex of Wetlands.....	9
3.5 Traditional Importance & Uses of Wetlands.....	10
3.6 Traditional Norms, Customs and Practices.....	13
3.6.1 Wetlands and Women.....	13
3.6.2 Restricted Persons.....	15
3.6.3 Prohibited Animals.....	15
3.6.4 Prohibited Days.....	17
3.6.5 Sex and Wetlands.....	18
3.6.6 The Fetish priest.....	18
3.6.7 Rituals & Rites.....	19
3.6.8 Effects of Violations on Violators.....	25
3.6.9 Threats to Customary Laws.....	25
4.0 Stories from the field.....	27
5.0 Conclusions and Recommendation.....	29
Appendixes.....	30
A. Interview Guide.....	30
B. List of Key Contacts.....	30
C. Inputs from Validation Workshop.....	32

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Chiefs of Nzulezo & Elenda with the research team.....	ii
Figure 2: Interview with Royal family head of Azulenoanu.....	2
Figure 3: Local fishermen displaying fish .....	3
Figure 4: The Research team on their way to Old Bakanta .....	4
Figure 5: Nana Nyameke Alimah II.....	8
Figure 6 Crocodile trapped on the Ankobra River.....	9
Figure 7: A man fishing in the Domunli lagoon .....	10
Figure 8: some uses of wetlands .....	11
Figure 9: Refuse dumped at Upper portion of Edinla lagoon in Ezinlibo.....	12
Figure 10: Women crossing Domunli lagoon .....	14
Figure 11: A Goat .....	16
Figure 12 Cattle grazing around wetland in Half-Assini .....	17
Figure 13: A new bridge under construction over Ellonu lagoon .....	21
Figure 14: Computer .....	26
Figure 15: A Church .....	26

## List of Tables

Table 1 Communities and their wetland .....	5
Table 2: Cutting of mangroves.....	24
Table 3: Community decision to stop cutting mangroves.....	27
Table 4: Footballers & Balibangara lagoon .....	27
Table 5: Showing reverence to wetland gods .....	28

## Executive Summary

The Amanzule wetlands, which include the internationally recognized bird sanctuary is without a formal conservation status. However, over the years, traditional norms and customs have mandated all socio-economic users of the wetlands to keep it in clean state because they are regarded as the dwelling place of the gods. Customary laws have thus contributed to the conservation of our wetlands as communities in the past showed deep reverence for the gods and obeyed such norms and practices. Unfortunately, most of such norms remain undocumented. To reverse the situation, this study was commissioned by the Amanzule Working Group (AWG)<sup>1</sup> to ascertain and document the customary laws and practices in communities within the Ellembelle and Jomoro districts bordering the Amanzule wetland. The study was conducted between January 28, 2013 and February 3, 2013 and covered 22 communities selected based on their proximity to a wetland. As a purely qualitative study, the methodology was designed to generate in-depth information about the subject at stake. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews guide and focus group discussions. Both methods were effectively employed to triangulate information at the local community level. Also, a district level validation workshop was held after the field work to further solicit meaningful inputs from local people as well as to obtain reactions to findings of the field work.

The 7-day study revealed that ownership of wetlands in the area rest with the entire community and seen as ‘a gift by nature’ but with various myths surrounding its origin. Almost all the wetlands are tagged either as male or female and such believe has been handed over to generations by oral tradition. Traditionally, wetlands have provided communities both economic and spiritual benefits and customs / norms surrounding these wetlands were respected in the past.

Key among these norms included:

Norms:

- Certain persons, animals and items such as tenth child, women in their period of menstruation, goats, pigs and ducks among others were restricted from going near wetlands. In most communities, such animals are not even reared for traditional reasons.
- Refuse dumping and defecation at wetland areas were prohibited as the place was regarded as the abode of the gods.
- Fishing expedition is not allowed on certain days as the gods were believed to be spending precious time with their children on such days and needed privacy.
- There are shrines for the wetlands and fetish priest / priestess who acts as the mouthpiece of the gods and thereby performs all necessary rituals to pacify and honour the gods

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<sup>1</sup> The group was formed by the Hen Mpoano Initiative with the benediction and support of the Nzema Traditional Council-*Nzema Manle* to champion conservation in the area.

- The Chief Priest of Amanzule wetland is mandated by tradition to cover his face when crossing the Tanoë River and vice-versa due to aged long rivalry between the two wetlands.

Sadly, the reverence that was offered to most of these norms is gradually losing grounds in the communities with the advent of modern religious beliefs, formal education, modernization, civilization and technology. These factors have rendered most customary laws obsolete, useless and less respected and remain major threats to the use of customary practices in the conservation of wetlands. The result is the degradation of most wetlands in the communities.

To promote environmental sustainability and protect the Amanzule wetlands as well as other natural resources in the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts, there is the need to revisit the past and integrate the good part of our traditions and customs with modern ones. Nevertheless, few formally educated persons and traditionalists, who are stewards of customs, have not disregarded the customs and norms of the society and continue to adhere strictly to them. This is however not the case with majority of the youth in the two districts. It is therefore recommended that such custodians of our tradition actively promote and ensure the full practices of our culture and customs that hitherto helped in the management of wetlands in our communities. As summed up beautifully by a Fetish Priest in the Jomoro District, *‘we must go back to our tradition and customs to be free in life’*.

The research team believes that this report is meaningful for posterity and would draw the attention of people within and outside the Amanzule wetlands to their own tradition that promotes conservation of wetlands and the environment in general.



## 1.0 Background and Introduction

The Amanzule wetlands remain a critical area of concern to the Hen Mpoano Initiative due to its rich biodiversity features. It is indeed a complex of peat, swamp and mangrove forests, flood plains, and sandy shores with streams, rivers, fresh water lake, lagoons and the sea as environmental features (West Coast, 2012). Unfortunately, this important wetland, despite its useful socio-economic benefits to society is without a formal conservation status. However, over the years, traditional norms/practices have helped to protect and/or conserve most wetlands in the country with the Greater Amanzule<sup>2</sup> wetland not an exception. Yet, most of these customary laws<sup>3</sup>/practices are not documented.

Against this background, a seven day study covering 22 communities in the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts was commissioned by the Amanzule Working Group (formed by the Hen Mpoano Initiative) to ascertain and document the customary laws and practices in the Greater Amanzule wetland areas. As the wetland straddles the coastal plains of the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts and to a little extent, into the Ankobra river estuary in the Nzema East District, key stakeholders in the former two coastal Districts were targeted for the study.

This report provides the methodology adopted for the study, summary findings in terms of customs surrounding wetlands in the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts of the Western region as well as recommendations in conservation of our wetlands.

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<sup>2</sup> Stretching from the Ankobra River to the border of Ivory Coast

<sup>3</sup> Customary law refers to the rules of law which by custom are applicable to particular communities in Ghana.

## 2.0 Methodology

This was entirely a qualitative research. As such, the methodology was designed to strive for in-depth information about the subject at stake without special regard to the issue of generalization. With the duration of the study, data collection process was merged with data analysis and attempts made to establish commonalities, patterns and themes. Primary data was obtained through a 7-day field work using semi-structured interviews guide and focus discussions. Both methods were effectively employed to triangulate information at the local community level. The data collection instrument was slightly modified after it was pre-tested in four communities to assess its applicability, relevance and validity. A validation workshop (*inputs attached as Appendix C*) was held at the district level to disseminate, validate and collect additional information at the district level. A total number of 48 key traditional leaders were interviewed. The number of other community members that took part in the study through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) exceeded 80. Majority of the informants and FGD participants were above age 50 and were purposively selected because they had invaluable insight into traditional norms, had stayed long in their respective communities and regarded most steeped in customs and traditional wisdom and in most instances, served as advisors to power holders or were power holders in their respective communities. They included traditional rulers, Community /opinion leaders, the aged and some local institutions. One fetish priestess in the Jomoro District was interviewed by the led researcher.



**Figure 2: Interview with Royal family head of Azulenoanu**

The study, conducted between January 28 and February 3, 2013, covered 12 and 10 communities in the Jomoro and Ellebelle districts respectively. These 22 communities were selected based

on their proximity to a wetland. They were, in the Jomoro District: New Town (Avolenu), Effasu, Metika, Half Assini, Ekpu, Egbazo, Old Kablensuazo, Ezinlibo, Ellonyi, Ebonloa, Nzulezu<sup>4</sup> (Old and New) and Beyin. The rest in the Ellembelle District were: Old Bakanta, New Bakanta, Azulenonu, Ampain, Sawoma (Ankobra), Bobrama, Kikam, Alabokazu, Asemdasuazu and Alloekpoke.



**Figure 3: Local fishermen displaying fish**

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<sup>4</sup> The research team did not visit Old Nzulezu but had an interview with the Chief of both Old & New Nzulezu at his palace at New Nzulezu. FGD were also held with residents in the new community who all happen to have houses in the Old town and spend most of their time in the Old town.

### 3.0 Findings

The findings of this study were divided into various themes to reflect the themes and sub-themes that informed the interviews. The themes include but are not limited to communities and wetlands, ownership regime of wetland, myth of origin, sex of wetland, traditional importance of wetlands and the norms, customs and practices surrounding wetlands. These themes are detailed below:

#### 3.1 Communities and Wetlands

Most wetlands in the study area got their names from mysterious ways but are all related tightly to tradition. As indicated by Opanyin Abakah Kumi of Ekpu, *“the epokazule lagoon in Ekpu attributes its name to the catch of many epoke (tilapia) in the lagoon”*. Some wetlands equally have their names linked to that of the community. This holds true for communities such as Effasu, Ellonyi and Ekpu. Such communities were named after the wetlands that surround them. For instance in Effasu, a Community elder, Mr. Isaac Nda Mieza noted *“our lagoon is called Effasu Anloenu and so this community was named by our ancestors as Effasu—just after the lagoon”*. Indeed, in all the 22 communities appraised, no wetland has had its name changed over the years. This is because the names were handed over to generations by tradition. As the study targeted communities that had wetlands.



**Figure 4: The Research team on their way to Old Bakanta**

Table 1 below denotes specific communities visited and the wetland in each community.

**Table 1 Communities and their wetland**

No	Community	District	Name of wetland (s)
1.	New Town	Jomoro	Balibangara & Ndamila
2.	Effasu	Jomoro	Effasu Anloenu
3.	Metika	Jomoro	Ekpukpole
4.	Half-Assini	Jomoro	Amanzule
5.	Ekpu	Jomoro	Ekpunza and ekpuanloanu
6.	Egbazo	Jomoro	Domunli
7.	Old Kablensuazo	Jomoro	Domunli
8.	Ezinilibo	Jomoro	Edinla & suhome
9.	Ellonyi	Jomoro	Ellonyi
10.	Beyin	Jomoro	Amanzule
11.	New Nzulezu	Jomoro	Amanzule
12.	Old Bakanta	Ellembelle	Amanzule
13.	New Bakanta	Ellembelle	Amanzule
14.	Asemdasuazo	Ellembelle	Amanzule
15.	Azulenoanu	Ellembelle	Amanzule
16.	Ampain	Ellembelle	Amanzule
17.	Ankobra/ Sawoma	Ellembelle	Ankobra
18.	Bobrama	Ellembelle	Amanzule
19.	Ebonloa	Ellembelle	Amanzule
20.	Kikam	Ellembelle	Bilea
21.	Alloekpoke	Ellembelle	Amanzule
22.	Allabokazu	Ellembelle	Amanzule

**Source: Field Work, February 2013**

### 3.2 Ownership Regime

In all the communities visited ownership of the wetland rest with the entire community. In short, all stakeholders regard it as ‘*a gift from nature*’ and hence no socio-economic group(s) is marginalized or denied access to the services and resources provided by the wetland. Thus, there are no permit regimes required. What is more, there are no formal or informal local user groups for the wetland areas as the wetland is seen as the property of all residents. However, some individuals such as tenth born are regarded ‘unclean’ by customs and are therefore prohibited from getting closer to wetlands; thereby denied access to the wetland services and resources.

Similarly, women are denied access during their period of menstruation. The situation is not different for women who did not pass through three conservative period of menstruation.

### 3.3 Myth of Origin of the Amanzule Wetland

Myths of origin which is believed by most people as a tale of creation, describe how certain things came into reality or existence. In other words, it purports to illustrate the source or foundation of certain things in our world and is quite often linked to some sacred forces. In conducting this study, there was the need to identify and / or understand the various myths surrounding the *Amanzule* wetland. This study therefore uncovered four different myths of origin of the *Amanzule* wetland. These are detailed below.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Myth

- According to Mr. Tanoë Arizie Berklundjoe, an 85 year old native of Half-Assini, a farmer by name *Aman* in the olden days was holding an earthing pot and told his elder brother that he wants a stream in Half-Assini since they had to go to their farms to fetch water from the *Alusuale* stream. One day, Aman went to the *Alusuale* stream about 1.5 kilometers off Half-Assini, fetched some water into an earthing pot and returned home. Back home, he dug a small hole and poured the water into the hole. Three days later, he returned to the hole and to his surprise and that of his neighbours, the water had extended and covered a large area. Within three months, the water again extended and even entered the sea without any human pressure. In no time, people found different kinds of fish in the stream and started fishing in it. Naturally therefore, people started calling the stream ‘Aman’s water’. Water in Nzema is *zule*. Hence the name *Amanzule* which translates as *Aman’s water*. On the other hand, *Aman* literally means *people*. Therefore *Amanzule* basically means *peoples’ water*.

*In fact, the latter part of the myth or meaning of Amanzule as ‘peoples’ water’ was confirmed by most interviewees including the royal family head of Beyin.*

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Myth

- Put differently by *Tobiabenlema*, a Fetish Priest in the Jomoro District; a spiritualist in the olden days poured libation asking for a source of drinking water of which a god answered positively but with a condition: that the lagoon be named after him-*Amanzule* and would be located not within the community but in the nearby bush. Asked why that choice of location, the god replied that he did not want contamination from women during their period of menstruation. The spiritualist agreed and the lagoon came and was named *Amanzule*.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Myth

- As narrated by Opanyin Francis Anorh of Allabokazu, a father god had four children. They were in ascending order of age: *Ankobra*, *Tanoe*, *Joain*, and *Amanzule*. The second child, *Tanoe* was the only daughter. The father was believed to have sent his children on various missions and gave them time to report back to him. When the returning time was due, *Joain* came first and for his reward was given the Ghana & Ivory Coast border to reside. *Tanoe* came second and for her reward was asked to follow the brother and help him keep the border and hence the Elubo area became hers. *Ankobra* came third and for his reward, the father gave him the eastern portion (thus Sawoma-towards current Nzema East District) to also reside. However, *Amanzule*, who was the eldest son returned late and the father had no choice than to give him the southern part as his portion and explained to him that since he (*Amanzule*) has suffered a lot, that portion will help him join the sea very easily. *Amanzule* showed great dislike for the offer as the place was dirty and became angry with the father. This was seen in his facial expression and resulted in the dark color of the *Amanzule* wetland.

### 4th Myth

- According to the Chief of Bobrama, Nana Nyameke Alimah II, there lived a very powerful Nzema man called Mr. Armah. He was much respected by all and very wealthy. At the time, he was the only canoe owner and his canoe transported people to and from communities. People visiting the area and wanting to use the canoe on the lagoon tagged the lagoon ‘Armah’s water’. This was because Mr. Armah being the only canoe owner was seen as having absolute access to all corners of the lagoon. As water in Nzema is called ‘zule’, the name was later corrupted as *Amanzule*; meaning Armah’s water.



**Figure 5: Nana Nyameke Alimah II**

### **The Rivalry between the Amanzule and Tanoë wetlands**

Though traditionalist claim the *Amanzule and Tanoë* wetlands are siblings, they have since their childhood not liked each other after it was claimed that their father offered *Tanoë* (the third Child) a better place to stay (Ghana –Ivory Coast border) than *Amanzule* (the eldest child). This rivalry, according to Mr. Yankey of Ebonloa has been extended to all others that happen to support or worship a particular wetland. For instance, it was recorded that whenever the Fetish Priest of *Tanoë* is crossing the Amanzule, she would not by customs attempt to mention or look at the *Amanzule* else her canoe will capsize and will be strike dead instantly. This equally holds true for the *Amanzule* fetish priest when crossing the *Tanoë River*. They both have to cover their faces with a cloth when crossing the lagoon to avoid watching or risk being dead. Another reason discovered through focus group discussion in Allabokazu as to why *Amanzule* is not on good terms with *Tanoë* was that, their father wanted to give Amanzule the border between Ghana and Ivory Coast as his inheritance but their mother, who loved her only daughter (*Tanoë*) so much, overheard the father and was quick to inform *Tanoë*. Tanoë also did not delay in moving and occupying the place before Amanzule. Due to this, *Amanzule* had no option than to settle for muddy and dirty areas where he now resides. Since then, it is widely noted by traditionalist in the area that both siblings never agree and acted as enemies.



### 3.4 Sex of Wetlands

In fact, respondents believed that wetlands are either male or female gods. For instance, most key informants claimed the *Amanzule* is a male god. In some places where there are two wetlands, stakeholders at the community level regard them as male and female. From Nzimitianu towards New Town (*Jomoro District*), *there is a wetland called Mundumundu* and another towards Half-Assini *called Ndabra*. These two wetlands were noted by community leaders to be male and female respectively. Likewise, two closed lagoons located on each side of Ekpu namely *ekpunza* and *ekpuanloanu* are also said to be male and female gods respectively.

The belief as to tagging a wetland as male or female god has been handed down to community folks by oral tradition from their ancestors. In Sawoma, where there is the Ankobra River, there are two rocks in the river believed by both young and old as where the male and female gods of the river resides. It is claimed that in most afternoon, the gods which appear as crocodiles rest on the rocks as they are husband and wife. An 82 year old man in Ankobra, Opayin Francis Ehwii Biney noted, '' *If anyone tries to pass between the rocks with a canoe, he (the husband god) kills you because he thinks the wife would be taken away from him* ''. Though regarded as god, most people in Sawoma (Ankobra) acknowledged eating/enjoying crocodile meat and in most cases special traps are set purposely to catch crocodiles in the Ankobra Estuary. Figure 6 shows a crocodile trapped on the river.



**Figure 6 Crocodile trapped on the Ankobra River**

### 3.5 Traditional Importance & Uses of Wetlands

Without doubt, all key informants and FGD participants could not hide their appreciation to the values provided by wetlands in the olden days and even in recent times. Almost all traditional believers did not miss words in lauding the spiritual protection offered by the wetland gods to the people of Nzema. Next was the economic importance of the wetlands to coastal inhabitants. Wetlands, they believed have over the years provided employment and as such a major source of income to the people along the coast since most of them have remained fishers by tradition. Recently, in some areas, tourists have shown great interest in knowing about the wetlands and therefore becoming another source of employment but to a few. This is prominent in Nzulezu (the famous stilt village) and Ebonloa where Ghana Wildlife Society is contributing to the promotion of tourism.



**Figure 7: A man fishing in the Domunli lagoon**

Indeed, the historic and present uses / benefits of wetlands have not seen significant changes. Most wetlands in the focal area are inundated with mangroves and also serve as crocodile habitat. As such people since time immemorial have not considered such areas for farming activities. In almost all the communities visited, lagoons/ streams are used for varied purposes such as serving as sources of food-fish; source of wood, source of water for bathing, drinking, washing and household chores.



Left: Women washing clothes at Ekpupole lagoon at Metika

Right: Children swimming in Ekpuanza lagoon-Ekpu

**Figure 8: some uses of wetlands**

Over the years, these uses/benefits have not changed. Nevertheless, in few communities, lagoons are no longer used as drinking water as they have been polluted by human activities. However, this seems to be of less worry as such communities now have access to pipe-borne water.

Again, in recent times, some communities have dumped refuse close to the banks of lagoons. This was just not the case in the olden days as people really regarded the place as the abode of the gods and showed their total respect for fear of being strike dead by the gods.



**Figure 9: Refuse dumped at Upper portion of Edinla lagoon in Ezinlibo**

The mangroves found around most wetlands also have traditional importance. Fishermen used and continue to use the mangroves to dye their fishing nets. Local housing also made use of mangroves but were cut on a sustainable manner.

In another dimension, traditional rulers and other key informants expressed the optimism that gods of the wetlands protected them in the past and continue to protect those who have remained faithful to them over the years. It is widely acknowledged that the gods prevent strangers with bad intentions from harming or hurting natives of the two districts. In Half Assini for instance, the *Amankrado* noted that in the past, the god of the wetland moved through the entire community each night in an attempt to prevent evil acts by bad people and even ensured that people with bad intentions or had planned to commit immoral acts were dead before day breaks. It was equally made known that even when a native of the community offends the gods, the offender was not killed by the god but made to fall sick for sometime which will be identified by the fetish priest and therefore ensure that the appropriate rituals were performed to pacify the gods. Traditional leaders in Nzulezo strongly acknowledged that the Amanzule has protected them from all forms of evil / witchcraft.

As pointed out clearly by the Abusuapanyin (family head) of Azulenlonu, ‘*the gods never killed somebody from the community*’. Similarly, it was revealed in most communities that most women who were without children (barren) visited the Fetish priest or prayed to the wetland god and were able to give birth in no time. Again, the *Amankrado* of Half-Assini expressed that most of those children were named as *Amanzule*. Stakeholders in Ellonyi noted that but for the

wetland (*Ellonyi lagoon*) that separates them from Kengen; most people in Kengen would have encroached on their land. The community of Ellonyi is therefore very appreciative of the wetland; serving as a barrier between the communities. The rival between the two communities was facilitated by an ancient conflict between them. The benefits derived from the wetland are therefore viewed in many perspectives. Put differently by Opanyin Ackah Ezan of Jomoro District, *'the gods of our wetlands have really enabled many people to be wealthy ---some obtained better jobs, other attained prominent leadership positions in Ghana and majority of Nzema people travelled outside Ghana and are still staying there—all due to the assistance of the gods'*. Thus, traditionally people have benefitted from wetlands in many forms.

### **3.6 Traditional Norms, Customs and Practices**

Traditional beliefs and taboos play crucial role in most communities in Africa, with Ghana and the Amanzule focal area not an exception. As gleaned from most key informants, wetlands in the Nzema area are gods and entities with many taboos. For instance, only cast nets are allowed in the Domunli lagoon in Kablensuazo and Egbazo and thus a taboo to use any other fishing net. Also, petrol is a forbidden entity on the Balibangara lagoon at New Town whiles in most places wetlands cannot be crossed with a dead person or corpse.

This section highlights some norms that surround wetlands in the greater Amanzule areas.

#### **3.6.1 Wetlands and Women**

Even though wetlands in the Amanzule area are regarded as the property of all, women are at certain times restricted from having access to resources of the wetland or denied access for traditional reasons. Women in their period of menstruation are forbidden to draw water from a river/stream or even cross a wetland (lagoon). In situations where a woman happen to experience her menstruation whiles in the bush/farm or perhaps have already crosses the lagoon, she must return with a leaf in her mouth and not greet anyone on her way back home. By tradition, anyone who sees such woman understands her condition and would not greet or attempts to engage her in some pleasantries. Similarly, women who did not pass through three conservative periods of menstruation (locally referred to as *Armoo in Nzema*) are not allowed to also go near wetlands and in some parts of Nzema, such women are not even allowed to stay in the community.



**Figure 10: Women crossing Domunli lagoon**

The situation regarding women during their period of menstruation takes a different dimension in Nzulezu (the village on stilt). In Nzulezo, there were special rooms outside the community where women who were menstruating were mandated by customs to reside until the period is over. Their husbands in such times were made to equally stay with them throughout the period. Currently however, such women only go the special room to take their bath but do not stay there. It was sad to note that there were instances in the past where some women who went to take their bath in that special room got drowned and died.

In most communities, there are days that women are not permitted to go near or enter a wetland but the days differ from community to community. In Half-Assini, women are disallowed getting close to the lagoon on Thursdays. Mostly on some of such Thursdays, as expressed by traditional rulers, the gods were offered food and women were not allowed to witness the rituals. In Figure 10, such women in Old Kablensuaso will not dare cross the Domunli lagoon on Thursdays. In the olden days, the basic believe was that women were not very clean or pure in traditional terms and so might bring bad luck to the community when they are allowed to bath in lagoons especially during their period of menstruation. This was the case in Half-Assini and so women were prevented by custom from bathing in the Amanzule.

### **3.6.2 Restricted Persons**

- **Tenth Child (*Bulu*)**

In the olden days, most cultures in Ghana wanted and adored large families as in most instances, *‘more children meant more farm hands or more labour’*. Most average household sizes were 10. This made polygamous marriages very rife. However, the situation seems to have been quite different in most communities in the study area. In fact, in most part of Nzema land, a tenth child (known as *Bulu*) was not allowed and was barred by taboo to enter wetland areas or the house of the fetish priest / priestess. Mostly, such children were aborted, killed at birth, sold or given out as *‘gifts’* to people in other communities within the country where such practices did not apply. The mother of a tenth born/child was washed and cleansed when a fetish priest performed the necessary rites before she could cross a lagoon. Interestingly, it was revealed during the study that in recent times, as such customs are becoming obsolete in most communities that hitherto strictly adhered to them, some of such parents have attempted going back for their children but most were not successful. The critical question is why Tenth born? Well, Opanyin Miezah, a traditionalist answered: *‘because our tradition simply objects to such children’*.

This practice is in sharp opposite to what pertains in most Akan societies in Ghana; where the family of a woman who delivers a tenth child (known in Akan as *Badu*) offers a fully grown bearded sheep to the husband to show appreciation for helping to perpetuate their lineage and also as a confirmation of the strong manhood of the husband.

- **Widows/Widowers**

If a married person loses his/her spouse, the widow/widower is not allowed in most communities to go to the farm/bush or close to a wetland for a minimum of three months.

- **Twins**

By way of definition, a twin is one of two offspring produced in the same pregnancy. In some part of the Ellebelle and Jomoro Districts, twins (whether identical or otherwise) equally suffered or were not allowed into wetland areas till after the performance of the necessary rites / rituals by traditional authorities.

### **3.6.3 Prohibited Animals**

By traditional beliefs and certain rituals performed in the olden days to ensure the prosperity and continuous existence of some communities in the study area, certain animals mostly used in such ritual are not reared in the communities.



**Figure 11: A Goat**

In most communities surrounded by the Amanzule wetland or other lagoons in the Nzema area such as Kikam, Elloyin and Beyin, goats are not allowed and also not permitted close to wetlands. Interestingly, most residents in such communities acknowledged eating goat when they out. One may ask why? The answer is linked to a ritual performed using goat in the olden days to save the people of Nzema during a war between the Nzema's and the Ayin people. But basically, the reason is quite similar in most communities. As narrated by Mr. Lawrence Kwesi, a community elder in Ellonyi:

*Women in Ellonyi were not able to give birth. The community sought for the cause of this misfortune but could not get answers to their problems. On one faithful night, a man visited the palace at mid-night and saw all the goats in the community having a meeting at the palace with an agenda or theme about women in the community. According to the man, the goats agreed and promised not to allow the women to get pregnant and even the few who by chance get pregnant will deliver children very short in stature. From their meeting the man noticed that the goats were the cause of barrenness in the community. He reported the case to the chief the next morning. This report was later confirmed by another man. The then chief, Nana K. Anokye ordered his people to sell all their goats to other communities or kill them. After all necessary rituals were performed, the community vowed never to rear goats in the area. This is the reason why goats are not reared in Ellonyi and most communities in the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts.*



In other communities like Old and New Bakanta (*meaning twin lagoon*), local pigs are not allowed in the community let alone closer to the wetland. Piggery was abolished because pigs were found of exhuming young people at the cemetery and making wetlands areas very dirty. However, in recent times, rearing of foreign breed of pigs is allowed in the community. The olden generations found ways to keep our wetlands in clean state. Unfortunately during the study, cows and pigs were found around the Amanzule wetland in Half-Assini as depicted in Figure 12.



**Figure 12: Cattle grazing around wetland in Half-Assini**

### **3.6.4 Prohibited Days**

Regardless of the fact that ownership of wetlands in the study area is by the entire community, there are norms that prevented and still prevent people from entering wetland areas on certain days. These days differ among communities but common ones include Wednesdays and Thursdays. It is believed a defiant person who enters a wetland or the bush at forbidden days incurs the wrath of the gods. As a punishment, such persons are often overtaken by darkness in broad daylight and therefore lose their way back to the house. Again, in most coastal communities of the Amanzule area, it is a taboo to embark on fishing expedition on Tuesdays. However, in Nzulezo, fishing in the *Amanzule* is strictly forbidden on Thursdays. The reasons for non-fishing in the wetlands on certain days have traditional significance. According to local authorities in Nzulezo, the Thursday was disallowed because somewhere in the olden days, their ancient enemies were reported to have drowned in the lagoon on a Thursday. But quite generally, the taboo not to enter wetland or engage in fishing on certain days was believed by the older

generation that on such days the gods spent precious time with their children and should not be disturbed. Nevertheless, such days of restriction, though the traditional reason might sound unscientific was capable of helping in fish reproduction.

### **3.6.5 Sex and Wetlands**

In the olden days, sex was the preserve of the married in society but this seems to have changed in recent times as evident by the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy in our communities with the study area not an exception. The place to have sex was equally vital and the house was the recommended option. It was therefore a great taboo for a man to have sexual intercourse with a woman in the bush or around a wetland. As traditional sex was performed by the woman mostly lying on the ground/floor with the man on top of her, it was the general belief that when sex was done in the bush or near the wetland, the gods of the wetland or the bush used the woman as their sacrificial lamb.

### **3.6.6 The Fetish priest**

The Fetish Priest / Priestess is the mouthpiece of the gods and acts as the ‘operator’ of the wetland. In almost communities, there are shrines specially designed for the wetland god and such shrines are occupied by the fetish priest/priestess.

Indeed before the advent of Christianity in the two districts, fetish priest played a pivotal role in the social and cultural lives of the people of Nzema. Fetish priest/priestess, apart from the Chiefs who were the custodians of the land, wielded a lot of influence because of the important roles they played in their respective communities. Prominent among the roles these priests played and continue to play though at a lesser rate are:

- Fetish Priest on the last day of every Kundum festival (locally called *Abisa*) in collaboration with the Nvavile clan (*Abusua*) who are the historical founders of the festival prepare a concoction to be sprinkled along the length and breadth of the community in the belief that prosperity will shine on the community in succeeding years. The food offered to the gods was in most cases prepared by a fetish priest not the priestess in cases like the Amanzule wetland where the god is believed to be male. As explained by the Fetish Priest interviewed, *‘in situations where a Fetish Priestess was supposed to play a role in the rituals, her face must be turned away from the ritual scene and her back made to face them---as a woman, you are not supposed to look at what is happening’*
- Fetish Priests / priestess on the death of somebody especially someone who died under mysterious circumstances have to perform certain rituals with some specific live animals

such as sheep or chicken in order to extricate the soul of the dead person from the bondage he/she is under in the realm of the gods who might have ‘killed’ him or her.

- Sometimes when someone is knocked down by a vehicle at a place where a god supposedly resides, or two persons fight at such a place, the souls of the person knocked down by the vehicle or the persons who fought each other at the place must also be extricated from the gods grips by performing rituals which is done by the fetish priest. This mostly involves the slaughtering of sheep or chicken at the place.
- A fetish priest / priestess usually from the Chiefs own clan has to perform certain rites to cleanse the stool at the end of every year.
- In the olden days, when a plaque or an epidemic such as measles or chicken pox visits a community, it was believed that the inhabitants might have incurred the wrath of the gods and it was therefore the responsibility of the fetish priest / priestess to perform certain rituals with the appropriate animals to appease the gods of the land. As indicated by 56 year old Mr. Justice Agbodjan of Bonyere; *‘honestly, when such rites were performed such diseases really vanished from the community within few days/ weeks’*.

### **3.6.7 Rituals & Rites**

A ritual is basically some prescribed order of a religion; in this case the traditional religion; and encompasses a set of actions performed for certain symbolic values. One may ask, why are some rituals performed for wetlands? The answer in all the communities were always: *‘because wetlands are gods and those rituals were started or initiated by our ancestors and so we do likewise’*.

Indeed, respondents believed that all wetlands or water bodies are gods. As such, in most cases, annual rituals are performed to honour and thank such gods. These rituals are marked by the sacrifice of certain animals deemed appropriate or liked by the god in question. At such occasion, people from home and a far who believe the god has helped them in any way pay tribute or show their appreciation in their own preferred way. The communities offer their thanks for helping them throughout the year. Such rituals are led by the traditional priest with the support of the Chief and his elders. Sacrificial animals differ from one wetland god to another. The common ones however are sheep and cow. In Ellonyi, a traditionalist claimed that the *Ellonu* lagoon prefer dogs. These animals are slaughtered to pacify and/or honour the gods. Nowadays, due to the tourist attraction to areas especially Nzulezo and Ebonloa, rituals are occasional performed in such communities to save visitors from any bad omen. This, as indicated by a Tourist Guide in Ebonloa is *‘because some visitors such as women in their period of menstruation or tenth born who are mostly unaware of our customs enter such places but are*

*always forgiven by the gods; so the community from time to time ought to pacify the gods for the known and unknown sins committed against the gods—this ensures that nothing bad happens to the community and the tourist''.*

Generally, most of the gods according to community elders do not harm people and are kind to their people. Traditional leaders however agreed that the gods shows extreme dislike for deviant behaviours such as lying, stealing, adultery and murder among others. Such persons of bad character are punished in diverse ways by the gods if several warnings are not adhered to.

An opinion leader in Half-Assini noted: *In the past when a yearly sacrifice was approaching, it was announced for the information of the general community by the fetish priest or the Chief. This enabled all persons or groups who have been helped by the god to show their appreciation when the time was due. For instance, most fishermen from Central Region and other coastal areas in the Nzema areas of Ellembelle and Jomoro district at several instances brought items to the community elders to perform ritual on their behalf with the hope of getting more fish. On the faithful day all the items are gathered and received by the elders of the community or the fetish priest for the necessary sacrifices to be done. However, women were not allowed to the shrine or location where such rituals were done. Food was prepared for the god. After offering portion to the gods, the rest was offered to the people excluding children and those unpure: 10<sup>th</sup> born, people without children etc. Indeed, the place for such sacrifices was fenced and all individuals regarded unclean or unpure stood outside and were served outside. Such person were not given part of the god's food but offered some food items. This is not the same in other communities. Elsewhere within the district, it is a taboo for such 'unclean'' persons to even get closer to the ritual location*



**Figure 13: A new bridge under construction over Ellonu lagoon**

Indeed, such rituals, as pointed out by community elders were very important and strictly adhered to. At Azulenoanu, it was indicated by a family head that *‘the community at some point in time stopped performing the necessary rituals and this resulted in the gods killing most community members. However, upon advice from the Chief priest, we started performing the rites and the killings stopped and in return the community received blessing and protection from the gods’*.

The importance of such rituals is paramount when a new project is being initiated closer to a wetland. Currently with the bridge construction over the Ellonu lagoon in Ellonyi, traditional leaders indicated that the chief priest was notified and given the necessary items for the needed rituals prior to the commencement of the bridge construction. The rituals were therefore performed and the project currently under-way.

**The section below highlights some rituals performed on some occasions and at certain times.**

- **Kundum festival**

Most communities in Nzema celebrate the *Kundum*<sup>5</sup> festival. The festival mostly celebrated between August and November lasts at least seven-days and rotates between communities. It features prominent traditional dance and drumming. In such communities where the Kundum festival is celebrated, rituals are performed during the festival to pacify and honour the gods of the wetlands and other gods.

- **Birth of a New Child**

Most parents all over the world are often glad to welcome their new babies. Such babies go through both primary and secondary forms of socialization. The needed tradition or welcome rites are performed with the hope of making them better adults. This is not different in most part of the Ellembelle and Jomoro districts.

In most communities with lagoons / wetlands within the two districts, three weeks old kids are shown and dip into the lagoon water three times. It is believed that the ritual enables the child to receive blessing and protection from the gods. Such child automatically becomes a good swimmer as he or she grows. In fact, such children and for that matter natives never get drowned in such water body and are believed to have the protection of the gods. This practice as noted by most key informants accounted for the respect accorded wetlands in the olden days. These included the non- dumping of refuse and defecation at wetland areas.

- **Visitors and Wetlands**

It is believed that wetlands in the area hates visitors who challenges their ability or compare their size to other wetlands and further claim to be better swimmers. Such people always die trying to swim in the lagoon. When such unfortunate incidence happens, rituals are performed to locate the body of such persons.

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<sup>5</sup> It is claimed that the Kundum festival was originally practiced by the neighbouring Ahantas and later adopted by the Nzemas.

- **Dying in a Lagoon**

When someone dies in the lagoon, the soul of that person would have to be called from the lagoon to the grave with a leaf. However, if the person does not die, rituals are still performed to call the soul of the person from the lagoon to the sleeping or resting bed of the victim with a leaf. The victim has to sleep on the leaf for some time before he/she can fully recover.

- **Crossing wetlands with Corpse**

In most communities bordered by wetlands such as Metika, it was indicated by focus groups discussants that it is forbidden to cross the wetland or Amanzule while carrying a dead person / corpse. Indeed, one cannot cross the lagoon with a corpse. In Metika, community leaders noted that negotiations are currently ongoing between the people and the gods through the Fetish Priest to allow the community cross the lagoon with corpse. For now, when someone dies in Metika and has to be conveyed to the morgue in Half-Assini, transportation is via the sea or bush route to Jaway which is longer than crossing the lagoon and boarding a vehicle.

- **Black Colour**

Globally, colour has several implications and meanings. This holds true for most communities in the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts. Certain colours are seen as the preserve of some wetland gods. In most cases, the Fetish Priest during rituals wears black cloths and use black goats for sacrifices. As such, the god of *Amanzule* by tradition hates black colour. Oral tradition also states that the *Amanzule* hates the black colour because the colour of the wetland is black.

## Cutting of mangroves

**Table 2: Cutting of mangroves**

### Cutting of mangroves

Generally, people saw wetland areas as sacred and so did not even consider cutting mangroves in the past. As stated early, wetlands areas were seen as the abode of gods and so were kept pure and as noted by a Linguist, *'people were just afraid to cut mangroves because of the gods and the norms associated with wetland'*. In another view, an Opinion leader at Ekpu, Mr. Nobah emphasized that *'there were much better wood in the forests and hence no need to cut mangroves'*. However, as time went by, mangroves were used by some communities including but not limited to Old Kablensuazo and Egbazo for housing purposes. Again, in most fishing communities within the districts, fishermen use mangroves to dye their



fishing nets which they claim offers their net longer life span. Fishmongers also admitted using mangroves to smoke their fish. Their reason was simple: *fish smoked with mangroves offers superior taste that is uncomparable to any other wood.*

### Declining state of rituals

Hitherto, communities during their yearly sacrifices could offer large numbers of animals (such as sheep, cow and chicken) but this is not the case in recent times due to several factors including economic hardship as noted by most community leaders. For instance, in Sawoma, it was revealed by key community leaders that the community used to offer sacrifices to wetland gods in the forms of cows but now due to serious economic conditions, rituals are performed with sheep and fowls. Indeed, the rituals that were performed in gargantuan forms have reduced in recent times. This was perfectly articulated by a 78 year old Opinion leader in Half-Assini. As he put it, *'in those days, at least 20 goats were used for the yearly rituals but now we use just about*



4-5 goats''. In some cases, when a Chief dies, some customs and rituals are halted till after the burial and final funeral rites of the Chief.

### **3.6.8 Effects of Violations on Violators**

Total adherence to rules, norms and customs is the desire of all societies. This however seems to be the wish of an *ideal society*. In our world of today, people either directly or indirectly violate all forms of norms. Without doubt, in some societies, not an hour pass without a reported case of violence or someone breaking some rules/norms. Such violators/offenders are always dealt with by the appropriate authorities. Violation of norms existed in the olden days but on lesser rate.

Traditionally, violators of norms or taboos risk incurring the wrath of the gods. For instance, it is believed that people who enter wetlands on prohibited days are often overtaken by darkness in broad daylight and therefore lose their way back to the house. Again, in most coastal communities of the Amanzule area, it is a taboo to embark on fishing expedition on Tuesdays on the wetland. It was pointed out by most interviewees that people who in the past did not obey to non fishing days in the wetland got drowned. In fact, violators and attempted violators were also fined by the traditional authorities and in some instance the Chief fisherman in the community.

Such fines were inclusive of drinks (mostly schnapps) and at most times sheeps that were presented to the Fetish Priest for the appropriate rituals to pacify the gods. Again, refusal to honour such fines resulted in the dead of the violator. However, traditional rulers made it clear that in the past, the gods did it delay in punishing most violators of certain norms by instantly striking them dead. Specially mentioned was an attempt by a tenth child to cross a wetland.

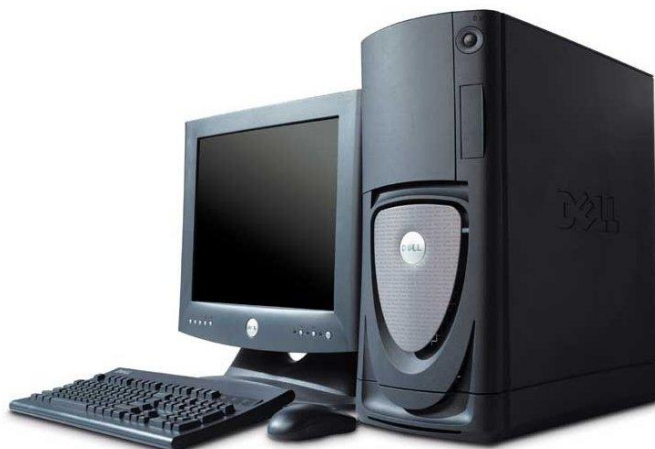
### **3.6.9 Threats to Customary Laws**

There are some existing and potential threats to the use of customary practices in the management of the wetlands. The study revealed the following threats:

- i. Modern Region
- ii. Technology
- iii. Modernization

Indeed, the factors noted above have contributed to the less importance attached to customary laws and practices in the protection of wetlands and the environment in general. Modern forms of religion have undoubtedly influenced traditional customs and practices. Some practices have been halted due to modern religious beliefs. There are several communities where upon the dead of the fetish priest, there has been no replacement. In Kikam for instance, according to 83 year old Aduana Abusupanyin (family head of Aduana clan), Agya Boah, '*since the Fetish Priest of*

*the Bilea wetland died about 40 years ago, there has been no replacement as people deemed fit for the position have turned to Christianity and showed great disinterest for the post''.*



**Figure 14: Computer**

Moreover, due to the influence of formal education and modernization, many people have neglected the customs that hitherto was the backbone of the sustainability of the environment. Similarly the advances in technology and its adoption by most people have led to less respect for customary laws. There is no gainsaying that these factors among several others would continue to impact negatively on customs and traditions that protected wetlands in our society.



**Figure 15: A Church**

#### 4.0 Stories from the field

##### A. Metika

**Table 3: Community decision to stop cutting mangroves**

In the picture, the area being pointed by the community members were once full of mangroves. However, in an attempt to expand the lagoon, the people of Metika decided to cut all the mangroves in that portion to make way for more water.



This was also to increase their swimming space/area but this action rather resulted in the introduction of new aquatic weeds which is now a problem since these weeds are taken over the entire surface area of the water body. The community has therefore deeply regretted

their action and has since ordered that mangroves should not be cut in the area.

*Source: Community members--Johnny Ackon & James Kabenlah (pictured above)*

##### B. New Town

**Table 4: Footballers & Balibangara lagoon**



Footballers in New Town had a belief that worked for many years that the *Balibangara* lagoon (shown left) was capable of helping them to win football games on two conditions. That the match is played in their community and that they are able to whiles playing the match, let the ball enter the lagoon. As such, when it came to playing football matches with other communities on home ground they only had to play the ball into the lagoon. Once the ball was brought back to the field/playing ground, more goals were guaranteed by the home team-New Town and were always winners at home soil. This was confirmed by some people in Half-Assini.



*Source: Community member-Half Assini & Hon. John Ekobo-Half Assini*

### C. Old Kablensuazo

**Table 5: Showing reverence to wetland gods**



- a. At Old Kablensuazo, there was the removal of an oil processing machinery around the *Domunli* lagoon to a location near the sea because the community believed their operations around the lagoon may have serious implications on the future of the lagoon. This was also to show reverence to the wetland god.
- b. There are two wetland gods surrounding the Domunli lagoon at Old Kablensuazo; namely *Ackah* and *Domunli*. The former (*Ackah*) was found of using *Domunli's* name to commit crimes like killing of innocent people. Speaking angrily through the Chief Fetish Priest, *Domunli* insisted that *Ackah* be removed to a different location far from the wetland. The request was granted/obeyed by the Chief and a new shrine was built elsewhere but still on the land of the community for *Ackah*.

**Source: Chief (Nana Kofi Mieza) and Community Elder (Mieza Enyaku)- Old Kablensuazo**

## 5.0 Conclusions and Recommendation

The taboos and customs in most communities with wetlands have helped in conserving their natural resource in a sustainable manner. Wetlands were kept pure and clean because people regarded it as the dwelling place of the gods and had special reverence for the gods due to their perceived divine powers.

Communities were afraid that violating the norms would incur the wrath of the gods who were capable of striking violators dead instantly. However, the reverence given to some of these traditional believes is gradually loosing grounds in most communities in the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts with the advent of foreign religion, formal education and technology.

Majority of the youth in the two districts regard most customs less useful and fetish. In fact, attempt by the research team to inquire about the knowledge on customs surrounding wetlands of most senior high students in the study area proved that most students knew little or nothing about the topic. As such, it would be prudent for stakeholders concerned with our tradition and customs to properly document and disseminate books or educational materials on our tradition to the youths to ensure that the current generation does not lose out on our traditions and customs. Alternatively, the elderly and traditionalists in our communities should be self-motivated and continuously share such customs/traditions with the youths. Likewise, traditional rulers should enforce all local norms/laws and punish violators.

It is recommended that communities surrounded by wetlands revisit the customs and traditions practiced in the past and integrate the good part of our traditions and customs with modern ones. This would protect the Amanzule wetlands and other natural recourses within the Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts and further promote environmental sustainability. As noted by the Fetish Priest interviewed, '*we must go back to our tradition and customs to be free in life*'.

## Appendixes

### A. Interview Guide

1. What is the name of the wetland in this area? Do you have an idea about its origin or how the name came about?
2. Has the name changed over the years?—why & why not?
3. Which socio-economic group(s) in this community benefit from the wetland resources and services?
4. Who owns this wetland and how does one have access to its services?- Are there any permit regime to have access to the resources and services that the wetland provide?
5. How was the wetland used in the past? *Give years if possible*
6. Why was it used in certain ways in the past?
7. What were some of the traditional norms, customs and practices that governed its use in the past?
  - Traditional beliefs that surround the wetland
  - Taboos governing the wetland
  - Traditional rituals/rites occasionally performed for the wetlands
  - Any special shrine for the wetland; If so, Is somebody regarded as the ‘operator’ (fetish priest) of the wetland?
  - Are certain groups of people restricted from having access to resources of the wetland? If so, who are they why?
  - Are there local user groups for the wetland areas? If yes, where are they? What are their names? Are they organized in any form of association, local organization etc? What norms guide their activities?
8. What is the present state of **Questions 5-7**
9. What are some of the existing and potential threats to the use of customary practices in the management of the wetlands?

### B. List of Key Contacts

No.	Name	Community	Position
1.	James Abakah-Kumi	Ekpu	Elder
2.	John Amoah	Ekpu	Elder
3.	Etwebu Ackah-Ezan	Half-Assini	Amankrado
4.	Tanoe Arizi Berklundjoe	Half-Assini	Elder
5.	Jonny Kofi Ackon	Metika	Opinion leader
6.	James kabenlah	Metika	Opinion leader

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Position</b>
7.	Isaac Nda Mieza	Effasu	Elder
8.	James Ndabia	Effasu	Elder
9.	Akumi Edmond	Effasu	Tufuhene
10.	Saa Nyamera (Except God)	New Town	Trader
11.	Albert Armooh	New Town	Opinion leader
12.	Kwame Red	Ampain	Traditionalist
13.	Agya Anthony Ackah	Ampain	Elder
14.	Mieza kofi	Old kalensuazo	Chief
15.	Mieza Enyaku	Old kalensuazo	Elder
16.	John Blay Tanoh	Egbazo	Elder
17.	Mathew Fulley	Egbazo	Chief
18.	Antiw Ackah Abezie	Ezinlibo	Opinion leader
19.	Esuah Boadi	Ezinlibo	Fishmonger
20.	Komenle Eba	Elloyin	Fishmonger
21.	Mary Awie	Elloyin	Fishmonger
22.	Ewhia Adonle	Elloyin	Fishmonger
23.	Bonzo Agoo	Elloyin	Fishmonger
24.	Mary Nyanko	Elloyin	Fishmonger
25.	Akua Arizah	Elloyin	Fishmonger
26.	Lawrence kwasie	Elloyin	Abusuapayile
27.	Abezi Nyameke	Elloyin	Safohene
28.	Abusuapanyin	Beyin	Abusuapanyin
29.	Aboagye Kwodjo Antiw	Asemdasuazo	Elder
30.	Awah kabenla	Ebonloa	Opinion leader
31.	Daniel M .Yankey	Ebonloa/Nzulezo	Opinion leader
32.	Frank K.Anyima	Ebonloa	Opinion leader
33.	Patrick	Ebonloa	Youth
34.	Aba Qwansima	Allakpoke	Youth
35.	Ama Blay	Allakpoke	Elder
36.	Gyazu	Allakpoke	Elder
37.	Francis Anorh	Allabokazo	Opinion leader
38.	Godwil Prah	Allabokazo	Elder
39.	Paul Ezoarh	Allabokazo	Elder
40.	Nwi Boah	Old Bakanta	Abusuapanyile
41.	Eyimah	Old Bakanta	Safohene
42.	Nana Takilika VII	New Nzulezo	Chief
43.	Omanpanyini	New Nzulezo	Omanpanyini
44.	Kojo Rockson	New Nzulezo	Okyeame

No.	Name	Community	Position
45.	Nana Ellenda	New Nzulezo	Chief
46.	Ebulley Nzulezo	New Nzulezo	Okyeame
47.	Tufuhene	New Bakanta	Tufuhene
48.	Agya Boah	Kikam	Abusuapanyin
49.	Nwanza Miali	Azulenoanu	Abusuapanyile
50.	Nana Nyamekye Elimah II	Bobrama	Chief
51.	Francis Ehwii Biney	Ankobrah	Elder

### C. Inputs from Validation Workshop

#### Some notable remarks by workshop participants

##### Prohibited Animals / Items

- Goats and Pigs are not allowed in most communities surrounded by the Amanzule wetland due to traditional reasons. In the olden days, pigs normally brought out the carcasses of dead persons after they have been buried. Communities were not extremely worried till the carcass of a royal person was brought out. As a result, most communities unanimously decided not to rear pigs.
- In most part of the Amanzule wetland, jewelries and red cloths are not allowed near the wetland and also should not be carried whiles crossing the Amanzule.

##### Prohibited Persons

- People suffering from leprosy were not allowed to stay in most communities let alone go near lagoons. They were offered places outside the communities until they were fully healed before they could join the community.
- Women during their menstrual cycle are not allowed to cross lagoons in most villages surrounding by the Amanzule wetland. Violators of this norm incurred the wrath of the gods. *‘A woman in her menstrual period visited a village with her kids and they all had rashes. They only got healed by going back to the village to perform some rituals’*. Again, *‘ If a woman who is menstruating tries to cross a road when the chief priest is feeding the gods, she ceases to menstruate for the rest of her life. Also none of the food used in feeding the gods is sent to town. The reason is that if a woman eats that food, she ceases to go through her menstrual cycle for the rest of her life’*.
- Tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) child/ born was disallowed entry to wetland areas. Most parents in Ellembelle and Jomoro Districts either killed or abandoned their tenth born. However, it got to a time when an old lady started taking this kids from their



parents to cater for them and hence the practice begun to reduce gradually.

### **Summary of Comments/Suggestions by Participants**

- Christians (especially leaders) should respect and abide by traditional norms
- Most youth are unaware of the customs and taboos and the few who do disregard such customs due to modern religious beliefs and modernization.
- The aged and traditional believers should educate and sensitize the youth on the importance of our traditions and customs in the conservation of the natural environment.
- Fishes like cool places but with the continuous cutting of mangroves, it has resulted in lagoons being warmer and warmer and hence laws should be enacted to protect mangroves from being cut.
- There should be by-laws on the protection of our wetlands and enforcement.
- The laws on the use of chemicals in water bodies should be enforced.
- Those who enact laws must themselves abide by those laws to set examples.
- Communities must resort to the use of gods to put fear into people to protect and conserve the natural resources since these places are the abode of the gods.
- In the past, fishmongers and processors used coconut stuffs (branches stem and shell) in smoking fish. However, due to the collapse of the coconut industry, fish processors have turned attention to the use of mangrove. Therefore, an alternative source of fuel wood is needed to curb the cutting of mangroves.