



ADVANCING THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS BEING MET
THROUGH REFORESTING DEGRADED
FORMER FOREST LANDS

PROVIDING FOR THE PRESENT
WITHOUT COMPROMISING FUTURE
GENERATIONS



*“Incorporating the Sustainable
Development Goals into the
heart of everyday plantation life”
Mere Plantations*



What is CSR?

“Corporate Social Responsibility “CSR” is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families, as well as of the local community and society at large.”

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development

CSR often looks backward and reflects on what a company has done to contribute to society. Corporate sustainability looks forward and develops a sustainable strategy for the future.



What are SDG's?

- ❑ The Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”) also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.
- ❑ The 17 SDGs are integrated. The SDGs recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.
- ❑ Through the pledge to ‘Leave No One Behind’, countries have committed to fast-track progress for those furthest behind first. That is why the SDGs are designed to bring the world to several life-changing ‘zeros’, including zero poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls.
- ❑ **Everyone** is needed to reach these ambitious targets. The creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources OF all of society is necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context.
- ❑ Ghana is aligning its development priorities in collaboration with Civil Society Organisations “CSOs” and the commercial private sector on achieving SDGs jointly. The Forestry sector plays an important role in the economy of Ghana. The industry is a significant contributor to GDP and to the foreign exchange earnings of the country.



Foreword

As a leading tropical reforestation company, Mere constantly examines its footprint on the environment, the community and the plantation.

Whilst the private sector is not expected to deliver on the SDGs alone, it is understood that business leadership and innovative finance solutions are needed to enable inclusive development and economic growth, especially to have a positive impact on deprived rural areas.

Although the SDGs offer targets for governments and unions of nations, rather than individual companies, Mere thought it would be a useful exercise to evaluate and record its performance against these national markers.

In all reality, Mere expected to hit 8/9 of these goals and wanted to hit over 10. Uniquely, as you will see, Mere have impacted all 17 of these globally important markers.

As Mere moves forward with the plantation, and the opening up of new sites from its land bank, these goals have very much become an integral part of its business and monitoring process. This is something which, understandably, Mere is incredibly proud of.

“Reaching the SDGs will require a step-change in both public and private investment. Public sector funding capabilities alone may be insufficient to meet demands across all SDG-related sectors. However, today, the participation of the private sector in investment in these sectors is relatively low. Only a fraction of the worldwide invested assets of banks, pension funds, insurers, foundations and endowments, as well as transnational corporations, is in SDG sectors, and even less in developing countries, particularly the poorest ones (LDCs).” **United Nations UNCTAD World Investment Report**

“The private sector generates the wealth, which is the oxygen for our economic and social investments, and the private sector is at the forefront of innovation that we crucially need to accelerate progress in our SDGs implementation.” **Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana and Co-Chair of the UN Secretary General’s Eminent Group for the Sustainable Development Goals**



Mere Plantations — Large enough to make a difference yet small enough to care

Mere's commitment to the SDGs is reflected in everyday life on the plantations. It is at the heart of our culture and best business practices and is incorporated into our reforestation business model. This ensures that what Mere does has a positive impact on the ground.

Mere has a 50 year commitment with the Ghana Forestry Commission ("GFC") and the local community to reforest 10,077.97 acres of degraded former forest land.

Mere has created a rare situation whereby a genuinely long-term and highly-profitable business can help provide real jobs and training, meaning that people prepared to work have opportunities to earn money and build a career. This process has long been described by the United Nations Department for Poverty Reduction as the purest and most sustainable form of aid.

Plantation businesses have a role in easing the widespread unemployment in many areas of West Africa caused by expanding populations. Forestry creates employment and trained workers for new tasks which is increasing the awareness of the local people of many environmental issues such as illegal logging, soil erosion, soil fertility, flooding, wildfire, carbon sequestration and climate change.

At Mere a number of people are employed on a permanent basis in plantation functions, machinery operations, in the in-house nursery and timber workshops. Many more are employed as casual workers, most of whom are engaged in planting, weeding, pruning, thinning and silvicultural roles. As many employees are subsistence farmers owning their own small farms the extra income is a welcome addition to their household income.

Global governments and institutions have moved to promote reforestation, realising the long-term benefits in the development of this socially and environmentally friendly industry.





1. End Poverty



Sustainable Development Goal 1 – End poverty in all its forms

Global poverty is defined by the World Bank as the number of people worldwide who live on less than \$1.90 a day. Ghana has made significant progress in poverty reduction over time. With the current population of 31 million, 14 million are estimated to be multidimensionally poor. According to UNICEF research, 3.65 million children in Ghana live in poverty and 1.2 million live in extreme poverty with inadequate resources to meet their basic food needs. Additionally, a child is 40 per cent more likely to live in poverty than an adult.

- ❑ Mere played a central role in the creation of the plantation Benefit Sharing Agreement, pursuant to which 10% of the value of the standing timber value (“STV”) is paid to the local community. To date, the proceeds of these BSA payments have been allocated to several projects in local villages, like the repairing of boreholes and handpumps that provide reliable clean water to entire communities. As Mere harvest timber on a rotational coppicing basis, the BSA funds continue to flow into the rural community where it is needed most.
- ❑ Mere is creating much needed opportunities for quality rural employment in the forestry sector. This generates income and hard currency that flows through the rural areas, thereby reducing poverty and improving livelihoods and standards of living. Having already provided access to healthcare for employees and their families, Mere has further plans to open a healthcare facility in the off-reserve nursery to cater for the healthcare need of employees and the local forest-fringe communities.
- ❑ Mere provides a framework for career progression and training on an equal opportunity basis. At peak season Mere can have well over 1,000 workers, meaning many families are able to provide for and feed their families with decent quality meals.
- ❑ With half of all people on the planet living in poverty being under 18 years of age, it is vital that help reaches this vulnerable age group. Plantation forestry brings opportunities for the rural youth in the form of apprenticeships and relevant skill share employment, such as mechanics, machine operators and various forestry operations from pruning to mechanical weeding. Mere creates opportunities to access quality forestry education which provides the youth with the knowledge and life skills they need to realise their full potential.
- ❑ Mere assists those members of staff who have trouble with literacy with official form filling such as leases, rental forms, bank documentation etc. Mere has helped all permanent staff to open their own bank accounts and, as there are no cash machines in Abofour, Mere provides transport every month to and from the banks. Mere encourages individuals and families to save and manage their wages against living expenses. Increasing the outreach of financial services to cover rural communities can enhance their productivity and increase the potential for sustainable livelihoods.



2. Zero Hunger



Sustainable Development Goal 2 – Zero Hunger

The figure of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption (also referred to as prevalence of undernourishment) shows the percentage of the population whose food intake is insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements continuously.

- ❖ Ghana hunger statistics for 2018 was **6.50%**, a **0.5% decline** from 2017.
- ❖ Ghana hunger statistics for 2017 was **7.00%**, a **0.5% decline** from 2016.
- ❖ Ghana hunger statistics for 2016 was **7.50%**, a **0.2% decline** from 2015.
- ❖ Ghana hunger statistics for 2015 was **7.70%**, a **0.2% increase** from 2014.

DATA SOURCE: WORLD BANK

- ❑ Mere supports workers in utilising its off-reserve nursery to grow healthy crops. A variety of nutritious foods are grown such as beetroot, carrots, tomatoes and chillies. There are many health benefits associated with eating freshly grown vegetables, such as improved blood flow, lowering blood pressure and increasing performance and overall health.
- ❑ On the edge of the sub-compartments, within the forest reserve, Mere allows employees to grow paw-paw, tomato plants, chillies, maize, yam, cocoa-yam, bananas and plantain. Enabling workers to harvest the crops for their families consumption ensures that employees are healthy and able to feed their dependent families.
- ❑ Mere permits employees to commence work later on a Thursday morning, so they are able do their shopping at the local Abofour market. Mere has organised pick up points from 15 little hamlets to transport to and from the local markets.
- ❑ As part of Mere's CSR programme, contributions are made to a Help the Needy fund which provides essential food and living essentials directly to the rural poor in the forest-fringe communities.
- ❑ Forest-fringe communities have developed sophisticated knowledge of forest products and how they can be collected, processed and eaten. Mere respects this knowledge and these valuable products enrich the plantation forest.
- ❑ Restoring degraded soils and encouraging the regrowth of vegetation provides important environmental benefits which contribute to production of valued goods such as the following: non-timber forest products ("NTFP's") edible and medicinal plants, bark, foliage, wild berries and fruit, nuts, spices, oils, gums, resins, weaving and dyeing materials, aromatics, rattan and bamboo.



3. Good Health and Well-Being



Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Good Health and Wellbeing

Globally, at least 400 million people have no basic healthcare, and 40 percent lack social protection. Enhancing social participation may be promising for effective health promotion. The healthcare system in Ghana has 5 levels of providers: healthcare posts, health centres and clinics, district hospitals, regional hospitals and tertiary hospitals. In rural communities, healthcare posts are the primary healthcare providers.

- Being amongst forests and trees is known to relieve stress and improve health by lowering blood pressure, improve mood, increase energy levels and focus. Being outdoors amongst carbon sequestering trees is a healthy highly oxygenated environment to work in.
- Mere, by providing decent employment, is improving standards of living and prosperity which helps to alleviate poverty, thus improving overall health and wellbeing.
- Mere makes great efforts to maintain forest ecosystems and is respectful of traditional healing plants.
- Mere ensures all employees, both casual and permanent, are able to access healthcare. Any healthcare that has to be paid for is taken care of by Mere. Mere's plans for the long-term are to build and staff a healthcare facility to cater for all workers and their families.
- Mere provides transport to and from the community hospitals. Mere ensures availability and access to clean water and sanitation in addition to healthcare and Mere has provided PPE to staff and the community throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Mere uses best land management practices for road drainage and logging which prevents standing water accumulating, thus ensuring that mosquito larvae do not proliferate and spread malaria. Malaria nets are provided on site and in the nursery to protect against mosquitos.
- Mere protects forest-based traditional cultures as part of a global effort to maintain cultural diversity.
- People exposed to areas with good canopy cover have been shown to experience a third less psychological stress. Mere's plantation provides trees for shade from the hot temperature. It is clear that trees play an important role in promoting overall wellness of forest-fringe communities and those that work in the forest plantation.



4. Quality Education



Sustainable Development Goal 4 – Quality Education

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include teaching, training, storytelling, discussion and directed research. In Ghana, the language structure is complex: there are about eighty-one different languages spoken by substantial number of people in Ghana. At the southern part of Ghana which is largely dominated by the Akans; Twi is the widely spoken language.

- Mere spends time educating employees and the local communities on environmental issues such as good land governance, illegal logging, human caused forest fires and climate change. Mere ensures all staff are educated and aware of the dangers of wildfire. Cooking in the forest reserve is prohibited. Fire safety and hazard awareness training is part of Mere’s standard operating procedures.
- Mere invests significant time and money into training staff on the proper usage and maintenance of forestry machinery and vehicles.
- Equal and diverse education opportunities are available in all aspects of Mere’s plantation development. Career progression is possible through promotion.
- Education is provided on waste and litter disposal and single use plastics. Mere educates casual staff on the application of fertilizer to enable them to use safely on their own small farms.
- Through implementing Standard Operating Procedures (“SOPs”) of sustainable forest management practices, Mere’s employees are able to share this gained knowledge with each other.
- Mere provides on the job skills training which helps casual employees enrol on training programme with Ghana Forestry Commission to become certified foresters.
- Storytelling and traditional songs can be heard being shared between the employees, especially from the elders to the youth. Tradition is passed down from generation to generation and the plantation provides a wonderful green space to share these traditions.



5. Gender Equality



Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Gender Equality

Women in Ghana still face discrimination and inequality. This situation is still occurring decades after the first Women’s International Conference held in July 1960 and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (an international treaty adopted in 1979 and ratified by 189 states in 1981), as well as the Ghanaian Constitutional provisions of women’s rights and equality (1992).

- ❑ Mere is a genuine equal opportunity employer, making no discrimination on stands such as gender, age, race or religion. Equal opportunities are provided and encouraged for those that choose to take them. Employing women in roles vital to forestry value chains is important not only for rural livelihoods but for the well-being of their households.
- ❑ Mere employs nearly 50 % women across the board, with 60% of our casual workforce being female. Ages range from 20 to 57 years, with only half of the females having received a formal education. Only a small percentage of our female staff are married, but the majority are single parents. Mere’s long-term ambitions are to fund and staff a fulltime childcare and early learning centre for the children of all permanent and casual staff.
- ❑ In Mere’s plant nursery, women make up the majority of employees. They are skilled and gentle in caring for and producing quality seed stock, preparing germination beds for the nurturing of healthy growing Teak plants, tending to indigenous species and caring for the soils and vegetable beds. Their contributions to everyday forestry life are invaluable.
- ❑ Many women have highly specialised knowledge of trees and forests in terms of biological diversity, sustainable management, use for various purposes, and conservation practices. Women are aware of the food and medicinal values of forest products, which are particularly important during food crises. Women make specific contributions to forestry and agroforestry value chains.
- ❑ Mere employs qualified female tractor drivers to operate machinery and drive 4 x 4 vehicles around the site. Mere trains women to safely operate and manoeuvre tractors towing trailers and water tankers for the irrigation systems.



6. Clean Water and Sanitation



Sustainable Development Goal 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation

A key trend of urbanisation across Africa is villages evolving into small towns but lacking the accompanying investment in basic services. The Ashanti region, Ghana's most populated region, is an example. It's not safe to drink tap water in Ghana. In fact, many in Ghana still lack access to clean drinking water and safe sanitation. The situation is improving but there is a long way to go. For many Ghanaians in rural areas, and for those without the ability to purchase bottled or bagged water, access to potable water is still an issue. Water-borne illnesses are prevalent in Ghana, and diarrhoea is still a leading cause of death for children under the age of 5.

- Mere provides unlimited access to fresh, clean water and sanitisation, both on the plantation sites and at the off-reserve nursery.
- Mere is proud to have funded, through its pioneering BSA, the repair and maintenance of broken boreholes and hand-pumps that serve the Boayaase District. This has provided greater access to fresh clean water for the forest fringe communities.
- Mere provides permanent and casual staff and the local community with PPE and hand sanitation products.
- Mere regularly analyses the water from the local quarry. Monitoring against World Health Organisation ("WHO") standards, Mere ensures that the water we feed the plants is also safe for human consumption. Mere improves the ditches and roads which helps water disperse and not leak into the wells/drinking water.
- Mere ensures good flood water management (surface water management), which means that the flood water is not polluted and maintains good water from the wells for drinking. Mere provides drainage around wells, so water run off can escape rather than contaminate the well water.
- Growing amongst Mere's Teak trees, there are medicinal trees/plants that have properties that can control diarrhoea. These trees/plants have been protected by Mere from deforestation and wildfires. Indigenous knowledge on ways to maximise the medicinal potentials in indigenous plants is shared amongst African rural communities.



7. Affordable and Clean Energy



Sustainable Development Goal 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy

Electricity is the dominant form of modern energy used in Ghana, accounting for about 65 % of the energy used in the industrial and service sectors and about 36 % in residential use.

According to the Ghana Energy Commission (2019), the electricity access rate in rural areas was 67.2% in 2018. The recently published Ghana Living Standards Survey (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019), indicates that regions in the northern parts of the country have much lower access to electricity, compared to regions in the southern parts of the country.

- As power outages are a frequent occurrence in rural Ghana, Mere has spent large sums of money investing in stand-by generators that can provide an uninterrupted power supply. Mere's generators run on Ford Puma engines for fuel efficiency.
- LED lightbulbs are used in the site cabins and in the head office in Accra.
- Mere optimise fuel efficiency in tractors, trucks and Land Rovers.
- Where possible, Mere uses motorbikes due to their lower fuel usage and low ground impact.
- Mere has installed solar panels on the main office in Accra.



8. Decent Work and Economic Growth



Sustainable Development Goal 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

Rural Ghana is an area of huge contrast. Ghana is Africa's fastest growing economy and has recently been recognised as one of the world's fastest growing economies. Despite this, employment in rural areas is hard to come by. In 2020, 28.46 percent of the employees in Ghana were active in the agricultural sector, 22.19 percent in industry and 49.36 percent in the service sector.

Mere is committed to building sustainable employment for large numbers of people in the local communities. Mere entered into a voluntary BSA where a percentage of all timber income goes direct to the community through the District Assembly. This type of agreement is now standard practice globally for all UNFCCC or UN-REDD+ plantations.

- By providing stable and reliable employment and skills-sharing opportunities in the rural community, Mere enables the local community to retain a development trajectory and reverse the trend of urban migration of the youth.
- Mere believes that if the rural youth want to move away to secure better jobs, that's great. If the youth have to move away, then we have failed.
- Without appropriate reliable employment within the forest, halting illegal logging as a necessary means of income is impossible.
- Through example, Mere show the communities that are working in forests, that there can be a viable alternative to illegal logging.
- Jobs are created for workers in the local community. Private sector jobs are created for trained workers that have completed the apprenticeship/ training with Ghana Forestry Commission. Places are then available for new training contracts with Ghana Forestry Commission.
- Skills swap and skills sharing helps to keep the knowledge alive. The knowledge held by the forest-based indigenous communities is unique and invaluable to plantation developers, and the wider international community as a whole.



9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure



Sustainable Development Goal 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

- ❑ Mere contributes to the development of communities around the project site by supporting infrastructure development.
- ❑ Mere has built and repaired connecting roads in and around the plantation site which aides the community. Mere rebuilt the road to the N10 through to our land, benefitting 2 connecting communities and several smallholder farms. Mere has also invested in rebuilding bridges.
- ❑ Mere uses low-weight bearing machinery and equipment including tractors and graders to ensure minimal spoil disturbance and has invested heavily in 4 x 4 trucks that are also low-weight bearing and economical to run.
- ❑ Mere ensures all employees, and their families, have access to basic sanitation.
- ❑ Mere ensures employees have access to electricity.
- ❑ Most of Mere’s employees have access to the Internet and nearly all have mobile phones. Mere pay good salaries, in excess of the average wage in Ghana, allowing employees to afford technology and access to the wider world.
- ❑ Mere invests in scientific research and technology. From soil research to satellite analysis, Mere works to keep at the forefront of innovation in the plantation forestry industry.

“Abofour and its environs is a developing town, and the presence of the Afram Headwaters Forest Reserve and Mere has contributed to the serene environment of land for farming purposes within the adjoining neighbourhood. Thus, demand of land for agricultural purposes is on the ascendancy. The presence of Mere has served as a catalyst which has attracted development and several workforces into the neighbourhood and is bringing life to the Abofour township and its environs.”

**SAMUEL BENSON ADJEI MSc. BSc. F.Gh.I.S
(Valuer, Real Estate Consultant)**



10. Reduced Inequalities



Sustainable Development Goal 10 – Reduced Inequalities

Income inequality requires global solutions. This involves improving the regulation and monitoring of financial markets and institutions, encouraging development assistance and commercial direct investment to regions where the need is greatest. Facilitating the safe migration and mobility of people is also key to bridging the widening divide.

- Mere ensures equal opportunities are available to those that choose to take them.
- Mere does not discriminate on grounds such as gender, age or colour. Mere applies a zero-discrimination policy.
- Piety is seen throughout Ghana, with a rough 50/50 split in the country between Christians and Muslims. Mere accommodates our Islamic workers by, for example, allowing prayer time and fasting during Ramadan. Likewise, a number of Mere's Christian employees are Seven-day Adventists, meaning Saturday which is the sacred day is a day off work. Sacred/taboo days are respected and incorporated into the planning of plantation activities.
- Mere provides quality jobs covering a variety of skill sets and matches people to appropriate roles within the organisation.
- By providing quality forestry employment opportunities, Mere is increasing the average income of families in the local community which produces a virtuous cycle as the funds circulate through the economy.
- In the recent general election (7th December 2020), Mere ensured all its employees were able to register to vote. Mere ensures all employees are available to be counted for the Ghana Population and Housing Census ("PHC") (27th June to 11th July 2021). The slogan for the 2021 PHC is "you count, get counted", with the aim for comprehensive coverage to ensure that no one is left behind.
- Through the Coronavirus pandemic, Mere has taken steps to protect its workforce. Mere instantly implemented education programmes and processes to protect its workforce and their families through social distancing, hygiene (provision of soaps, water, masks), and clear information conveyed in an appropriate manner. Mere is delighted to report, at the date of writing, that it has lost no workers to Coronavirus.



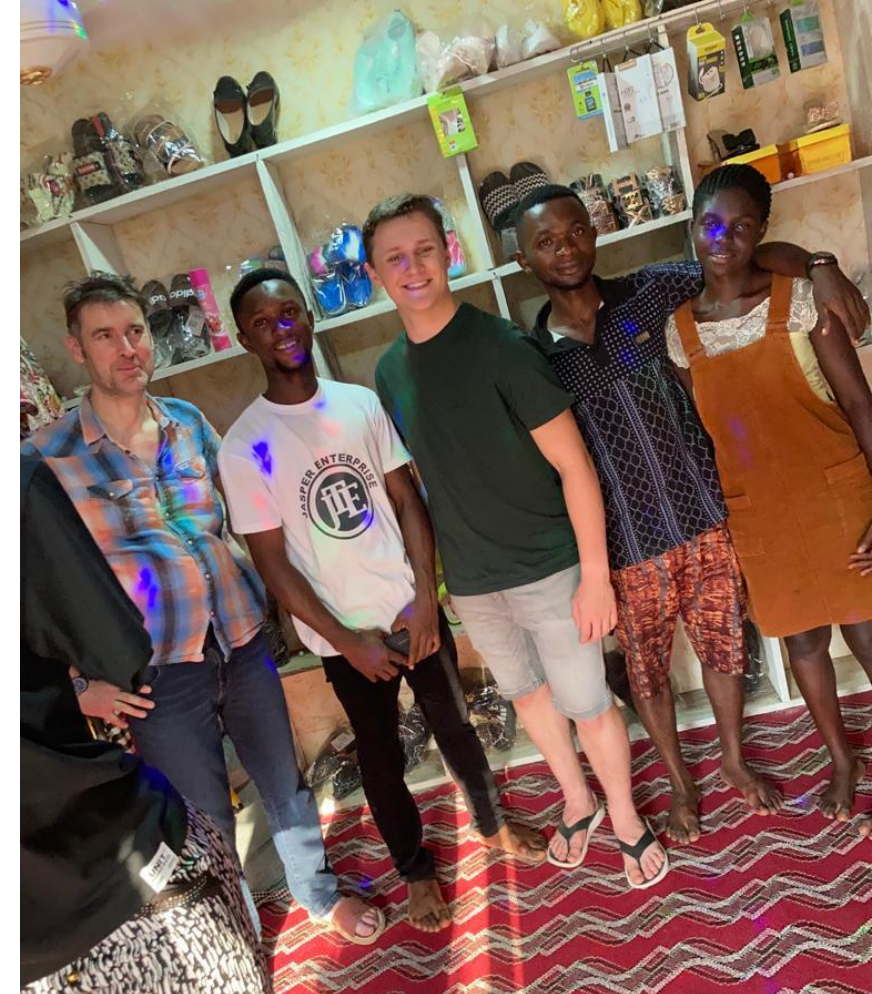
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities



Sustainable Development Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

More than 10% of Ghanaians live at the fringes of forest reserves and benefit from timber and non-timber forest products. Farmers dominate almost all forest fringe communities in Ghana. Forest resources contribute up to 38% to the income of Ghana's forest dwellers and about 6% annually to the Gross Domestic Product of the country.

- As a formal policy, Mere tries to provide employment opportunities for the forest fringe communities first and foremost. This in turn helps to halt the urban migration of youth which enables communities to have a younger age profile and family-centric controlled growth.
- Relatively large amounts of hard currency flow into the local community, through the payment of wages and supplier invoices, which has helped the local economy to develop significantly over the past decade.
- Understanding why the forest reserve has become degraded is critical to reforestation success. Only by understanding the drivers of the previous logging can a sustainable development plan be put into action.
- Mere educates employees and the forest-fringe communities on sustainable land management practices and the effects of deforestation on global climate change.



12. Responsible Consumption and Production



Sustainable Development Goal 12– Responsible Consumption and Production

1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted every year, while almost 2 billion people go hungry or undernourished. The food sector accounts for around 22 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions, largely from the conversion of forests into farmland. Globally, 2 billion people are overweight or obese.

After the initial loss of forest cover at Afram Headwaters, through a combination of concession and illegal logging, the land began to be used by illegal farmers so any chance of forest rejuvenation was lost. Through lack of awareness these illegal farmers very often used fire and chemicals to easily clear land. No agricultural management or crop rotation at all was used, meaning over a very short number of years top soil nutrients became completely depleted rendering the land useless and the farmers have simply moved on to another area.

- During initial establishment phases, Mere carefully and systematically works to release layers of nitrogen lock-up below the traditional root levels which have been depleted by maize, yam, tomato and chilli production. This is a skills share that has been introduced to the communities increasing their awareness of nitrogen lock up and controlled release of subsoil nutrients.
- Mere is producing high-volume, high-rotation, high-quality coppiced timber in a sustainable way.
- Mere is constantly mindful of operating within a forest reserve, albeit one which was totally degraded at the start, and uses the minimum amount of chemicals and artificial fertilisers as possible.
- Mere relies on strong natural forest management practices, including mulching over chemical weeding. This has the added benefit of providing a year-round flow of nutrients being returned to the soil.
- Managed grass cover provides shade for the soil and stability during heavy rains, significantly reducing the amount of soil run-off and nutrient degradation used is often seen within managed plantations
- The directors of Mere funded a local entrepreneur, Eric, to start his own laundry business. Eric started with two full time employees – one being his sister, who later set up an ironing business on the back of Eric's initiative. Eric in turn started 'Help the Needy' initiative, giving basic essentials to the poor. Mere support this business as it ensures food does not go to waste in the community and healthy food can reach those who need it and are less fortunate. Mere aims to leave no-one behind by providing opportunities for development and growth.



13. Climate Action

Sustainable Development Goal 13 – Climate Action



To limit warming to 1.5C, global net CO2 emissions must reduce by 45% between 2010 and 2030, and reach net zero by 2050. Climate pledges under The Paris Agreement cover only one third of the emissions reductions needed to keep the world below 2°C. Bold climate action could trigger at least US\$26 trillion in economic benefits by 2030.

As the world moves away from concrete and steel, wood is proving the sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative. The current demand for wood is extremely high and is continuing to grow. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (“WWF”), it is predicted that global demand for timber will triple by 2050; other estimates put future demand even higher. Wood is the sustainable and renewable material the 21st century needs. Locking-up carbon for the life of the wood, requiring little energy to produce (compared to steel and concrete) and it is easily reused and recycled. At the end of its life, it can be used to produce renewable energy.

- ❑ To date, Mere has planted and husbanded circa 4 million trees, replacing any failed or underperforming trees up to three years of age in the beat-up process.
- ❑ Mere has commenced planting 5% of the plantation site with indigenous species, thus improving the biodiversity and encouraging native flora and fauna species back into Afram after decades of harmful anthropogenic activities.
- ❑ Through investing in good land management practices and good governance, Mere has made the degraded land productive again. With an 8-metre wide firebreak around the perimeter of the plantation, and 4-metre wide internal breaks and riparian buffer zones, remaining old growth trees and native vegetation are protected from wildfire. Important habitats in the forest reserve are also protected as a result of these measures.
- ❑ At the end of 2020, Mere’s plantation had absorbed a cumulative total of 987,737 t/CO2, absorbing roughly 3kg of CO2 every second.
- ❑ Through sustainable rotational coppicing and ensuring minimal ground/soil disturbance whilst keeping tree cover maintained, Mere is preventing further forest degradation. By reversing the loss of forest cover by planting and growing trees and protecting existing trees, Mere are contributing to the global effort of addressing climate change. The wood that is coppiced is not burned and has a commercial value. Any wood that doesn’t have a commercial value is chipped and mulched back into the soil.

Mere believe this is true carbon neutrality.



14. Life below Water



Sustainable Development Goal 14 – Life below Water

Human transformations of Earth’s surface have impacted water exchange between land, atmosphere, and ocean, ultimately affecting global sea level variations. Impoundment of water in reservoirs and artificial lakes has reduced the outflow of water to the sea, while river runoff has increased due to groundwater mining, wetland and endorheic lake storage losses, and deforestation. In addition, climate-driven changes in land water stores can have a large impact on global sea level variations over decadal timescales.

- ❑ Below ground water, as climate change increases, becomes absolutely critical. At Afram Headwaters, the water table is less than 2 metres below the low-lying topography. With the correct trees in the correct location, this enables Mere’s trees to secure tap roots in the water table year-round. Careful pollutant and nitrate management is essential to ensure the quality of the subsoil water table remains consistent and viable. Not only is Mere careful and diligent in the use of chemicals, but it regularly test the water table quality and quantity throughout the site.
- ❑ Water availability has a direct impact on the health of forests and their inhabitants, which shows the importance of the relationship between forests and water. Trees are made up of more than 50 percent water and need a steady source of it in order to grow and stay healthy.
- ❑ A simple mathematic equation would point us in the direction that if we reduce CO₂ in the atmosphere, we can reduce the effects of ocean acidification. Limiting the combustion of fossil fuels is an obvious solution. Healthy forests have the ability to absorb CO₂ from the atmosphere, often referred to as a “carbon sink.” Thus, deforestation is another major contributor to atmospheric CO₂. When forests are cut down, we not only lose important repositories that breathe in and sequester atmospheric carbon. If timber is burned or even left to rot, carbon once stored in the felled trees is also released. A significant amount of carbon is stored below ground in the soil and roots as well, and this too can be released following the disturbance of deforestation. Mere is reducing further deforestation and increasing CO₂ sequestration through the growth of millions of trees.
- ❑ Mere’s approach to forest management has implications for our oceans. With the potential to either release or absorb CO₂, there is a growing focus on managing forests to enhance their capacity to capture and store it. Thus, healthy forests can take in carbon that the oceans would otherwise absorb. But a strategic, science-based approach is key. One might think that the more trees the better. However, a recent study by The Nature Conservancy and partners actually found that thinning young forests can allow trees to grow larger, increasing their value in terms of long-term carbon storage, as well as promoting wildlife habitat, resilience in the face of wildfires and creating potential timber production.



15. Life on Land

Sustainable Development Goal 15 – Life on Land



Around 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods. Forests are home to more than 80 percent of all terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects. 2.6 billion people depend directly on agriculture for a living. Nature-based climate solutions can contribute about a third of CO2 reductions by 2030. According to Client Earth, 2.5m million people depend on Ghana’s forest for their livelihoods.

- Mere implements a sustainable forest establishment, management and maintenance programme.
- This programme provides the restoration of soil health through good soil management, naturally increasing soil nutrient content, soil fertility, soil structure, improving subsoil-water storage, managing soil organic matter and ground vegetation, thus improving the soil carbon lock up.
- The riparian buffer zones bordering rivers and other bodies of water are managed solely by Mere, ensuring biodiversity is allowed to flourish without the risk of harm from illegal loggers, illegal farmers, or any others seeking to destroy these habitats.
- Through Mere’s sustainable land management programme, healthy vegetation is maintained between tree rows to not only protect the surface against water and wind pressures and to modify soil hydrology, but to serve as wildlife habitat and provides multiple ecosystem services.
- Mere is seeking to restore some of the natural beauty and benefits of nurtured ecosystems, whilst achieving its afforestation and reforestation goals over the lifetime of the project.
- Growing indigenous species forms part of our agreement with the Ghana Forestry Commission.
- Mere is already seeing significant return of wildlife with mammals, insects and birds – including breeding pairs of birds of prey seen on the site.



16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions



Sustainable Development Goal 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

By the end of 2017, 68.5 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. There are at least 10 million stateless people who have been denied nationality and its related rights. Corruption, bribery, theft and tax evasion cost developing countries US\$1.26 trillion per year.

49 countries lack laws protecting women. Today, women in Ghana are recognised under law as having equal rights with men in all spheres of life.

- As forest governance increases from through the continued implementation of REDD, REDD+ and FLEGT, there is pressure like never before for forest and forest-fringe communities to uphold laws and comply with rules which promote sustainable practices in forests.
- Mere is working with communities and leading by example in the adoption and implementation of these Global Forest Goals.
- Many forest-fringe communities that have generationally gathered everything they need from the forest including cutting down trees as required for fuels and building materials, clearing land in the forest to farm and hunting in the forest via traditional methods such as burning. Laws making such illegal practices would almost certainly be met with major hostility and resistance if alternative means of allowing necessary resources were not provided.
- By providing quality jobs for forest communities, Mere is embarking on fire prevention training and showing how quality living can be achieved through sustainable practices. For forest-fringe families, Mere business practices show a clear viable path for continued forest dwelling in the 21st century.
- Mere are bringing the forest environment into the 21st century by providing security for the community and property which in turn helps staff and neighbours maintain pride in the environment and appreciate the rule of law. In enjoying the benefits of a law abiding, and mutually respectful environment, this encourages all who benefit from it to have a lawful and peaceful existence.



17. Partnerships for the Goals



Sustainable Development Goal 17 – Partnerships for the Goals

The United Nations Development Programme (“UNDP”) makes clear that engaging investors and businesses to channel private sector capital to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs in Ghana is essential if the goals are to be achieved.

- ❑ In 2009, a Benefit Sharing Agreement (“BSA”) was devised for commercial plantations development. This is a voluntary agreement between Mere, the Government of the Republic of Ghana (acting through the Forestry Commission of Ghana), the Landowner (Offinso traditional area) and the District Assembly. This type of BSA is now standard practice globally for all UNFCCC/UN-REDD+ plantations.
- ❑ Mere works with the Plantations Division of the Forestry Commission of Ghana and the Timber Industry Development Division (“TIDD”) to ensure our legal timber reaches the market as compliant, sustainably produced timber.
- ❑ Mere has full chain of custody through the whole process.
- ❑ The EU published the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (“FLEGT”) Action Plan in 2003. The Action Plan sets out a range of measures available to the EU and its member states to tackle illegal logging in the world’s forests. FLEGT provides the only way a company cannot be charged with bringing illegal timber to market. All other commonly relied on standards are voluntary. FLEGT, however, is the United Nations sponsored legal framework. All Mere’s timber is guaranteed legal, legitimate wood, sustainably grown and harvested using best practice by Mere under the REDD+ umbrella and is fully registered and recorded as FLEGT-compliant.
- ❑ Mere advocate for a ‘Ghana Beyond Aid’, whereby resources can be leveraged in partnership with direct foreign commercial investment to grow the economy and establish a wealthy, inclusive, sustainable, empowered and resilient (WISER) society.

“Societies conceptualise CSR differently depending on the socio-economic context. At one extreme are societies – usually with a high level of economic development and strong democratic traditions – that expect business to be a vehicle for sustainable development.

At the other extreme are societies – usually less economically developed – that expect business to be a purely economic activity that provides jobs and fulfils other economic functions.

Societal expectations of business responsibilities broaden as a society passes through the phases of economic development and as its population increasingly seeks to meet not only physical but also social and personal-growth needs.” FAO.org

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