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**INVESTIGATION OF UNAUTHORISED  
FELLING OF PALM TREES AT CSIR-FRI, OKPONGLO**

COMMITTEE REPORT SUBMITTED TO  
**THE DIRECTOR, CSIR-FOOD RESEARCH INSTITUTE,  
ACCRA, GHANA.**

BY  
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## INVESTIGATION OF UNAUTHORISED FELLING OF PALM TREES AT CSIR-FRI, OKPONGLO.

### **BACKGROUND:**

It was found out on Monday, January 28, 2013, that some palm trees were felled on the compound of CSIR-FRI, Okponglo. Preliminary investigations revealed that the felling was done without authorization. The investigations also revealed that the palm trees were sold to a palm wine tapper who comes in and out of the Institute to tap the wine. The proceeds of the sale was said to have been shared among five staff (Messrs. Abass Abdulai, Godson Agbaley, Samuel Quaye, Daniel Asara and Sylvanus Akanue) of the Institute. The palm wine tapper (Mr. Moses Ahedor) was invited to the office of FRI on Tuesday & Wednesday, February 12-13, 2013 for his side of the story.

The destruction of the palm trees without authorization is a major offence according to the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), Article XV, (d) ii. This action amounts to "willful damage to or destruction of Institute's property". Management therefore decided to constitute a committee to investigate the issue further and recommend an appropriate punitive measure.

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The terms of reference set out for the committee were:

1. Find the underlying causes of the action taken by the staff involved
2. Confirmed the veracity of the preliminary information provided by the Palm Wine tapper and unearth new information related to the act including the total cost of the transaction, etc.
3. Identify all other internal/external persons related to the act
4. Recommend appropriate punitive actions to be meted out to the offenders taking into consideration the gravity of the offence
5. Submit report to the Director by 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2013.

## **PERSONS INVESTIGATED/NUMBER OF SITTINGS**

The people interviewed/investigated are as follows;

Mr. Abass Abdulai  
Mr. Sylvanus Akanue  
Mr. Godson Agbeley  
Mr. Samuel Quaye  
Mr. Moses Ahedor (Palm wine tapper)  
Mr. Daniel Asara

The committee sat on four (4) occasions; 15/02/2013, 18/02/2013, 21/02/13 and 26/02/13.

## **FINDINGS**

**INTRODUCTION:** The convener organized a preliminary meeting for the committee members to map out strategies to carry out its mandate successfully. Invitation letters (sample copy attached to report) were given to staff involved in the case inviting them to appear before the committee. The convener introduced members of the committee to the invited persons when they appeared before the committee. He then informed them why they were invited. He further appealed to the invited persons to be cooperative and truthful in all they recounted about the case. The committee members asked follow-up questions to get the facts about the case. The invited persons were discharged after the committee was satisfied with the information provided. The committee had the following information after the interrogations.

### **MR. ABASS ABDULAI**

Mr. Abdulai informed the committee that he complained through the then Estates Officer Mr Jacob Kuwornu, to the then Director, Dr. Paa Nii Johnson that the palm trees in the garden were overgrown and harvesting of the fruits became difficult. When the palm fruits are ripe and they are not harvested, they are eaten by birds and rodents after which the seeds were scattered under the trees. The seeds destroy the blades of the Lawn Mower when the garden is being weeded. He however admitted that he was not given any feedback by Mr. Kuwornu and Dr. Paa Nii Johnson to pull down the palm trees.

Mr. Abdulai further admitted that he and two others, Mr S. Akanue and Mr. S. Quaye, sold out ten (10) palm trees to a palm wine tapper introduced to them by Mr. G. Agbeley. A total of

seventy Ghana cedis (GHC70.00) was realized from the sale with each palm tree sold for GHC 7.00. The said amount was paid to Mr. S. Akanue because he was not around when the palm wine tapper came to do the payment. The money was later shared among five staff members as follows;

1. Mr. Abass Abdulai - GHC 15.00
2. Mr. Sylvanus Akanue - GHC 15.00
3. Mr. Godson Agbeley - GHC 10.00
4. Mr Samuel Quaye - GHC 15.00
5. Mr. Daniel Asara - GHC 15.00

Mr. Abdulai admitted that it was a great mistake on his part not to inform the appropriate authorities before they decided to undertake such an exercise.

#### **MR. GODSON AGBELEY**

Mr Agbeley informed the committee members that, he knew some years back that Mr. A. Abdulai wanted somebody to cut down the palm trees because they were overgrown. He brought in a man at the time but his charge was too expensive. According to Mr. Agbeley, he saw someone selling palm wine recently near the main gate of the Institute and told him about availability of some palm trees for sale. Mr. Agbeley later took the man round the Institute to show him eighteen (18) palm trees. Mr S. Akanue questioned him why he was taking the people around without his notice. He had to apologise to Mr. S. Akanue for his action but explained to him that it was Mr. A. Abdulai who asked him to take them round. He said he later told Mr. A. Abdulai to inform the office before the felling of the trees.

Mr Agbeley also told the committee that he came to work on Saturday, Jan. 26 2013 and noticed that the felling of palm trees was taking place. He quickly inquired from Mr S. Akanue whether permission was sought from the Authorities. Mr. S. Akanue responded that Mr. A. Abdulai said the palm wine tapper could go ahead with the felling of the palm trees.

Mr. Agbeley confirmed that he was given GHC 10.00 by Mr. A. Abdulai as a token from the palm wine tapper. He also admitted his fault of bringing in the palm wine tapper to identify the palm trees.

### MR. SYLVANUS AKANUE

Mr. Akanue informed the committee that he was at the security point recently when an old man came looking for Mr. G. Agbeley. He acknowledged, he did direct him to Mr. G. Agbeley. He later saw that Mr. G. Agbeley was going round the compound with the old man. According to Mr. Akanue, he queried Mr. G. Agbeley why he was conducting the man round the compound without any knowledge of the security. Mr. G. Agbeley apologized for not informing him earlier but explained to him that it was Mr. A. Abdulai who asked him to look for someone to pull down the palm trees and that the man he was conducting round was the palm wine tapper. Mr. Akanue said he later asked Mr. A. Abdulai whether he had obtained permission from the Administration to carry out such activity. Mr. A. Abdulai in return told him that he would inform the appropriate authorities later.

Mr. Akanue told the committee he received GHC 70.00 from Mr. Moses Ahedor for the sale of the palm trees on Jan. 25, 2013. He said he handed over the money to Mr. A. Abdulai and he was later given GHC 15.00.

Mr. Akanue confirmed to the committee that he did not record Mr. Moses Ahedor's visit to the yard and subsequent events leading to uprooting of the palm trees in the occurrence book. He admitted that he did not act right in protecting the Institute's property for the very reason he was employed. He also admitted his mistake by benefiting from the money paid for the palm trees.

### MR. SAMUEL QUAYE

Mr. Quaye told the committee that it was during the Directorship of Dr. Paa Nii Johnson, when he was then working as a Labourer on the grounds that, they complained of the overgrown nature of the palm trees which made it difficult to harvest the fruits when they are ripe. It was during the organization of the Renaissance day that it came to light that they had to pull down the palm trees. According to Mr. Quaye, they could not get anybody to carry out the uprooting at that time.

Mr Quaye said Mr. G. Agbeley came across someone selling palm wine near the main gate on Jan. 22, 2013 and he (Mr. G. Agbeley) arranged with him (the one selling the palm wine) to come and inspect the palm trees for sale. The man selling the palm wine went round with Mr. G. Agbeley and they identified 24 palm trees for sale according to Mr. Quaye. When Mr. Moses

Ahedor came to buy the palm trees, they (Mr. Quaye, Mr. A. Abdulai, Mr. Moses Ahedor) identified only ten palm trees for sale. Mr. Ahedor, Mr. A.. Abdulai and Mr. Quaye then negotiated the price per palm tree because Mr. Moses Ahedor did not agree to the earlier idea of sharing the palm wine on daily basis proposed by Mr. A. Abdulai and Mr. Quaye. A total of GHC 70.00 was then agreed for payment for the ten palm trees according to Mr. Quaye. The money was later paid to Mr. S. Akanue of which he was given an amount of GHC 15.00 by Mr. A. Abdulai.

Mr. Quaye admitted that it would have been appropriate if they sought approval from the current Director before uprooting the palm trees instead of relying on the information they communicated to the former Director, Dr. Paa Nii Johnson.

**MR. MOSES AHEDOR (Palm wine tapper)**

Mr. Mosses Ahedor told the committee he is a pensioner who taps palm wine to earn some money. He narrated that one of his customers informed him that an organization wanted to get rid of some palm trees in their premises. He came to the Institute, inspected the palm trees in the company of Mr. A. Abdulai and Mr. S. Quaye, negotiated and paid GHC 70.00 for ten (10) palm trees. He paid the money to Mr. S. Akanui on January 25, 2013 because Mr. A. Abdulai was not available.

Mr. Ahedor told the committee he pulled down the palm trees on Saturday and Sunday, January 26 & 27, 2013 for tapping. He was later called by the acting Head of Administration for a discussion after which he was instructed to go ahead with the tapping but to do so outside working hours.

Mr. Ahedor regretted for buying the palm trees because he has now realized that he dealt with the wrong people.

**MR. DANIEL ASARA**

Mr. Asara told the committee he came to work on Monday, January 28, 2013 morning to find the palm trees felled. He was later informed by Mr. A. Abdulai and Mr. S. Akanui that it was the

palm wine tapper who pulled down the palm trees. He was later given GHC 15.00 by Mr. A. Abdulai. He admitted his mistake by accepting the money without inquiring whether Management was aware of the transaction.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The committee established the following facts;

1. Ten (10) palm trees on FRI compound, Okponglo, were sold to Mr. Moses Ahedor on January 25, 2013 for palm wine tapping by Mr. Abass Addulai, Mr. Samuel Quaye and Mr. Sylvanus Akanue.
2. The cost of one palm tree was GHC 7.00. The total money paid by Mr. Moses Ahedor for the ten palm trees was GHC 70.00.
3. The money was paid to Mr. Sylvanus Akanue by Mr. Moses Ahedor on January 25, 2013.
4. The money collected from the sale of the palm trees was shared among five (5) staff members by Mr. Abass Abdulai. The beneficiaries were; **Mr. Abass Abdulai - GHC 15.00, Mr. Samual Quaye - GHC 15.00, Mr. Sylvanus Akanue GHC 15.00, Mr. Godson Agbeley - GHC 10.00 and Mr. Daniel Asara - GHC 15.00.**
5. Mr. Godson Agbeley arranged for the inspection and identification of the palm trees by the palm wine tapper. He was however not involved in negotiations of the pricing and sale of the palm trees.
6. Mr. Daniel Asara benefited from the money shared from the sale of the palm trees because he was a staff working on the grounds according to Mr. Abass Abdulai.
7. There was no authorization by Director/Management for the sale and pulling down of the palm trees. The exercise was therefore carried out without permission.
8. Mr. Moses Ahedor confirmed that he bought 10 palm trees from Mr. Abass Abdulai and Mr. Samuel Quaye at GHC 70.00 and accepted the fact that he should have done due diligence before the purchase.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Per the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) **Article XV, (d), ii**, the offence committed by the staff members is a major offence i.e. **“Willful damage to or destruction of Council’s property”**. The five staff members however showed much remorse for selling the palm trees without approval by the Director. The committee recommends the following punitive measures for the staff considering their remorseful nature and the fact that this was the first time they committed such an offence.

1. Ten (10) improved palm seedlings should be acquired by the five (5) staff members involved in the sale, with their own resources and planted at designated points on FRI compound, Okponglo, to replace the felled trees. The seedlings must be nursed by the staff with proper care for a period of one year starting from the day letters are served for implementation of these recommendations. The planting and nursing should be supervised by the Estate Officer at the Directorate, FRI. Failure to replace the seedlings by the staff and nursing for one year period should attract five days suspension without salary.
2. The 5 staff members should be given final warning letters never to touch any institute property without permission.
3. The 5 Staff members should gather the ten palm trees felled, burn them and clean up the mess within ten (10) days after receiving their warning letters.
4. The Staff members investigated above and any other staff of FRI shall be reminded to obtain permission from their respective Heads or representatives before harvesting any fruit, cutting down any tree or destroying any Institute property.
5. The palm wine tapper should be made to stop the tapping immediately and prevented from entering the premises. He should be made to understand that the palm trees were sold to him without permission from the Director.



**COMMITTEE MEMBERS / SIGNATURES**

1. Mr. Gregory A Komlaga (RSA President/Convener) .....
2. Mr. Hayford Ofori (RSA Secretary/Member) .....
3. Mr. Theophilus Annan (SSA President/Member) .....
4. Mr. Michael Amoo-Gyasi (TUC Chairman/Member) .....
5. Ms. Joana Dzikunu (TUC Secretary/Member Secretary) .....