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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

## Taboos as Informal Institution of Local Resource Management in Ghana

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### Abstract

Taboos are good examples of informal institutions, where traditional local norms rather than official rules define and regulate the actions of people. They are mostly self-complied, out of fear of misfortunes that are believed to befall people who flout them. This attribute sets them apart from other informal local norms and gives them unique natural resource conservation potential. But the potential role of taboos in natural resource management and nature conservation is threatened by decline in their ability to influence local practice as local communities transform. Some taboos have lost or are losing their influence on practice in contemporary communities. The societal transformations that have been alleged to affect compliance with taboos include formal education, adoption of foreign religion and in-country migration. Nevertheless, some natural resource management taboos have survived societal transformation and continue to influence local practice. The literature on the subject does not explain why some resource management taboos have lost their influence on practice in contemporary local communities while others in the same contexts continue to influence local practice. This knowledge is vital for defining the role of taboos in contemporary natural resource management and nature conservation.

Based on study of wildlife, forest, water and land taboos in three Ghanaian communities, the paper discusses why some resource management taboos have lost their influence on practice in contemporary local communities and why others continue to influence practice. The data was collected through review of available reports, interviews, focus group discussions and personal observation. Institutions, institutional change and institutional compliance constitute the theoretical background. The findings indicate that the adoption of foreign religion (Christianity) has indeed reduced compliance with local resource management taboos. However, formal education and in-country migration have had no noticeable impact on compliance with the resource management taboos. Other reasons that explain compliance or non-compliance with the resource management taboos are local importance of the resources they protect and compliance or non-compliance by others.

**Keywords:** Compliance, Ghana, informal institutions, local resource management, taboos