Mr. Myers talk:

The Research Question
What is it?
Why is it important?
Research questions as a process
My research as it stands today
Stages of graduate school
− classes and general questions
− exploratory research
− dissertation proposal
Questions (including Peace Corps)

PhD Candidate (started 2003) hopes to be done soon. Ghana West Africa. Peace Corps in Ghana in agro-forestry.

Research questions provide a focus, narrows what you're dealing with. What exactly do you want to know about? What can you contribute to the field of anthropology? Literature review → what is something we don't know a lot about? Focus in on that.

How are people interacting with the trees?


The colonization of Ghana's Landscape Off-Reserve farms

Cash crops (coco and rubber)
subsistence horticulture
Trees owned by chiefs
Government manage trees for national interests
Concessions granted to timber operators and royalties paid to government

Reserves
Conservation of ecosystems
tree management system same as for off-reserve
Resource rich (Gold Coast) coco, timber, etc

Timber gained in value after WWII, needed to rebuild. Very valuable. Mahogany trees take 100 to 125 years to mature but can be sold for $10,000 to 12,000.
Ghana's government owns the trees. People bid on concession areas. Get rights, people come in to take down the trees, can damage other trees/ property in the process.
Slash and burn techniques for non-cash crops. Coco trees have pods cut down. Other land fallow, or slash and burn. Kasava or plantains planted.

Chiefs own trees, government manages them, chief gets a chunk of the profit when they are cut down. Guards patrol the reserves to protect the trees. People also hunt there. Fortress conservation.

Centralized Management
In theory, the centralized management of reserves was considered to benefit communities considering they were represented by chiefs; royalties are paid to chiefs and the government to be redistributed, and the government would sustainably manage these spaces to assure a continued flow of benefits.

In practice however, chiefs have increasingly aligned themselves with the state and timber operators to consolidate the benefits of maintaining timber.

Process of negotiation between powerful actors has produced:
1962 Concessions Activities
The illegal felling of trees on farmers' farmland
Community Based Forestry Management
Participatory management has become a central mechanism to re-establish local communities as primary beneficiaries of forest management with a right to share in the benefits of forest management.

Major programs
- Community Forestry Committees (CFCS)
  - Bridge community and national interests
- Community Taungya
  - Benefit sharing arrangements
- Private investment (Benefit sharing; excludes farmers)

It is assumed that resource capture and deforestation will be combated considering communities have an incentive to conserve forests now that they have representation and increased benefit flows (ie they are stakeholders).

Research Questions

A main obstacle to community conservation has been a lack of any significant legal framework to give institutional validity to back decentralized arrangements. However, places too much emphasis on these arrangements might be obscuring how incentive structures work in practice considering the many different interests and activities practiced among multiple users. It is especially important to focus on incentive structures within forest.

From January to December of 2008, he researched how forest users were negotiating the control and the use of forest related resources in and around the Jimira forest reserve.

Illegal to fell a tree in Ghana unless clearance is received.

Two days a week, market women would hire a truck to pick up the fruit to sell in a bigger city. Chainsaw operators cut the lumber where it falls. The community doesn't have private investment. Grievances, plant plantations for them but don't give them seedlings. The people know how much the trees are worth. They know where the money is going. Market for firewood.

Planting fast growing species.

Graduate School

First few years get your feet wet, get used to the program.

Pre-dissertation field work. Exploratory.

Literature review to hone in.

2008 field work.

Few years to analyze.

“There is always doubt and uncertainty. Do I have a good research question?”

“It's a process but like all processes you just have to get through it.”

Peace Corps

1998 – finished with undergrad. Wanted to find the village that wasn't influenced by modernization. Chose no preference for region. Got Ghana West Africa. Knew he was going to be off in a rural area. Going for the experience: remote, no volunteer nearby, and no electricity. Ended up with three. First time he got very sick, other volunteer in town helped him out. Read at night by electricity. Appreciated that. Town 5-7,000 people. Project: nursery manager trying to reforest the landscape. Raised the seedling. Funded for 10 years, supposed to be self-sufficient at the end of it. Demand wasn't there. Project was defunked, not really operating anymore.

In 2005, went back. Friend James helped run the nursery. James was very interested in the project. Started a tree nursery in his backyard. Still working in that tree nursery. Trained through Peace Corps in tree forestry. Proud of his experience, still selling to farmers.

Expectations: no. Take away message: even if it's just one guy, it's worthwhile. Worked out. Full of ups and downs, very trying. Two years hard to do. Stipend. Best healthcare. Other programs require you to pay.

“You get very lonely.” You can go in married. No dependents though.