

Case study

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The importance of stakeholder engagement for effective landscape governance in combating deforestation: the case of Rainforest Alliance and Olam working in partnership in Western Ghana

Deforestation is a pressing issue in Ghana that is closely linked to a rising population, increased demand for food, and the livelihoods and wellbeing of millions of smallholder farming households. Most measures to slow the rate of deforestation have not provided alternatives or incentives for local communities to reconsider the ways they use the forests. In addition, government-led processes have also had challenges in becoming self-sustaining and where not, resources have predominately gone to protect national parks.

The landscape management approach, developed by Rainforest Alliance, has built on the lessons and failures of forest protection to-date and is centred on being community-led, livelihoods focused, and self-sustaining in the long-term. It creates a landscape approach to tackling the issue of encroachment in Ghana's forests through the creation of Landscape Management Boards (LMBs) and generating free, prior, and informed consent from local communities. It facilitates engagement of different stakeholders in a landscape but fundamentally aims to empower community members to lead discussions and ensure members have the capacity to manage and oversee the effective functioning of the process.

This case study showcases the ways the approach has been applied in the Sefwi Wiawso, Sefwi Akontombra and Bodi districts of Ghana and namely how these communities have been brought on board and empowered to lead the process.



How deforestation in Ghana is being driven by agriculture

Cocoa is Ghana's most important agricultural commodity, accounting for roughly 57 percent of all agricultural exports and supports the livelihoods of some 2.5 million rural farmers and their households. Cocoa production predominantly takes place in the high forest zones of Ghana in the Western Region, which holds the largest area of remaining primary forest in the country and, at the same time, and accounts for over 50 percent of the country's production of cocoa beans.

Due to the competition for land, Ghana's forests, and particularly those in the Western Region, are under threat of deforestation caused by agricultural expansion. Agriculture accounts for nearly 140,000 hectares of forest lost each year in these zones, with over a quarter of this driven by cocoa production alone. This makes cocoa production the single biggest driver of deforestation in the landscape and, in turn, the key to improving the future of Ghana's forests.

Some of the principal factors driving deforestation in cocoa production has been the lack of land use planning and landscape management approaches, lack of collaboration amongst cocoa stakeholders, limited financial and technical support for sustainable cocoa production, and legal disincentives for smallholder farmers to protect trees.¹ As a starting point (and an attempt to prioritise areas at most risk), Ghana's Forestry Commission has demarcated the high forest zones into Hotspot Intervention Areas (HIA) for management through Ghana REDD+. Still, the Forestry Commission, in charge of forest reserves, has not been adequately resourced to protect forests and prevent further encroachment by farmers into these areas. In reality, the vast majority of resources from the Commission have gone to protecting national parks or forestry reserves.

The evolution of forest management over the last three decades

In Ghana, the management of forest resources have been a shared responsibility of the government and communities that live inside and nearby forest areas. During the 1990s, Ghana initiated a series of policies and programmes involving the local population in forest management to improve their incentives to protect remaining forests, particularly in high forest zones

One component of these led to the development of the Collaborative Resource Management Areas (CREMAs) by the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission. Its purpose was to address wildlife management outside protected areas and forest reserves and phase out strict conservation practices. Nonetheless, the concept evolved to become a management platform led by local communities. As part of its institutional framework, CREMAs aimed to foster local community participation and responsibility for the conservation of natural resources.

Over time, the CREMA approach became a model for decentralised forest management in Ghana—to promote natural resource conservation and livelihood diversification. Additionally, through the CREMAs, the government of Ghana was able to devolve authority to manage forest resources to local people and empower them to make decisions about forest resources. By 2017, thirty-two CREMAs had been established across Ghana with nine of them in the Western and Western North regions².

¹ The Concessions Act 1962 (Act 124) hinders farmers and landowners' ability to own naturally-occurring trees on their farms. This discourages farmers to tender naturally occurring trees.

² 1. Ellukrom Stool Land CREMA, 2. Asempanaye Stool Land CREMA, 3. Krokosue stool Land CREMA, 4. Kwamebikrom Stool Land CREMA, 5. Asuo Bia Nkyirima CREMA, 6. Juaboso District CREMA, 7. Akotombraman CREMA, 8. Aowin CREMA and 9. Boin CREMA)

Despite the notable progress made with these platforms, over time many have struggled to continue operations. Specifically, since CREMAs were set-up with relatively short-term donor funding, many of them have struggled to gain full ownership by communities and most have suffered due to the lack of economic backing while others have been lost to elite capture. Still, the idea of devolved forestry management and community participation has trickled across communities throughout Ghana and paved the way for new, similar approaches that could easily be introduced such as the landscape management approach.

Introducing a community-led, participatory method to managing forest resources: the Landscape Management Approach

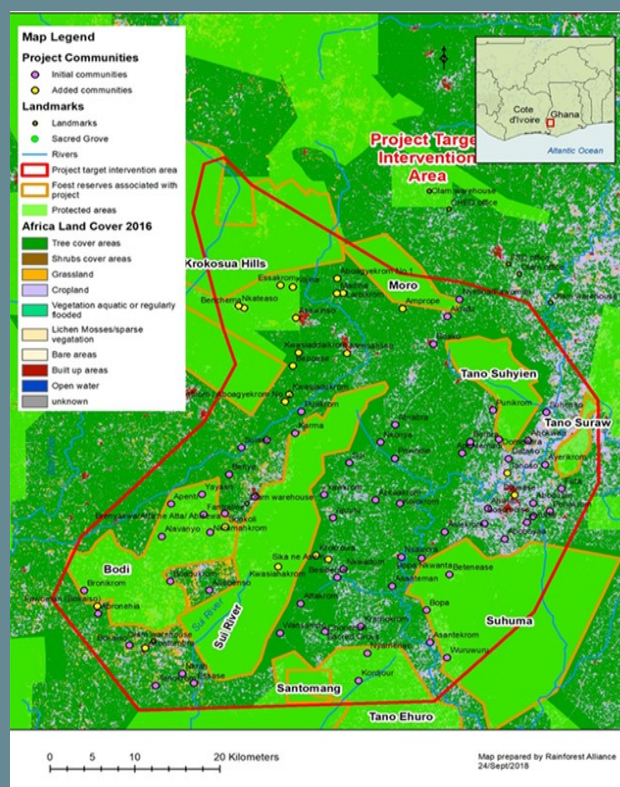
The landscape management approach was first developed by Rainforest Alliance to help landscape level management in conservation projects. Similar to the CREMAs, it is a community-led process that is designed to empower marginalised forest-based communities and allow them to better assess the value of protecting forest resources. As part of this, and dissimilarly to the CREMAs, the approach also integrates other stakeholders that may have interests in high forest zones including actors in the agriculture, forestry (and timber), and water sectors. The approach is designed to serve as the main decision-making body in managing, monitoring, and controlling forest access in production areas (situated within these zones) as well as surrounding forest reserves. With support from Rainforest Alliance, the landscape management platform works with stakeholders to coordinate, align, and reduce conflicts among their respective activities, policies, and investments all in the name of protecting landscapes and the remaining forests across Ghana.



Making landscape management work for cocoa farmers in Sefwi Wiawso, Sefwi Akontombra and Bodi

The Sefwi Wiawso-Akontombra-Bodi landscape forms part of the Western Zone B Hotspot Intervention Area (HIA) and is one of the main areas for cocoa production in Ghana. The 244,000 hectare (ha) landscape contains five forest reserves – the Sui River (33,390 ha), the Tano Ehuru (17,610 ha), Tano Suhien (8,442 ha), Suhuma (36,030 ha) and Santomang Forest (2,120 ha) reserves. With approximately 50,000 households living in the nearby region, there has been significant pressure on forest resources due to population, food, and livelihood demands leading to deforestation and the destruction of biodiversity. The increasing threat of deforestation coupled with the opportunity to intensify cocoa production (without shifting farm cultivation) proved to be a unique opportunity for Partnerships for Forests (P4F).

Figure 1
Geographical scope of the LMB
(Source: Rainforest Alliance)



Working with Olam, an existing private sector company in the area, and Rainforest Alliance, a nationally recognised non-governmental organisation, in 2017 the Rainforest Alliance/Olam Partnership for Livelihoods and Landscape Management Project was rolled out with funding support from P4F. It introduced a landscape management approach in three political districts – Sefwi Wiawso, Sefwi Akontombra and Bodi. The approach worked to set up two Landscape Management Boards (LMBs) which will define and implement a cocoa-forest landscape action plan as well as improve sustainable cocoa production for nearby smallholder farmers. The jurisdictions of the LMBs cover five forest reserves and, therefore, has the potential to protect over 100,000 ha of forests in Ghana. The establishment of the Sefwi-Wiawso and Sefwi-Akontombra-Bodi LMBs was a lengthy process that required significant effort in order to engage and bring on board all relevant stakeholders in the landscape.

Supporting communities to set-up a new governance structure to better manage local forest reserves

The process began with the preparation and signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the project partners – Olam, Rainforest Alliance, the Ghana Forestry Commission, Ghana Cocoa Board, Sefwi Traditional Authority and communities. This initial step was critical to help align the roles, responsibilities, interests, and expectations of the relevant stakeholders. It was also important to reach an agreement on the necessary resource commitments needed to ensure the objectives of the project are reached. Once the MoU was signed, project partners reached out to a wider group of actors for an introduction and initiated the establishment of two LMBs across the three districts.

As mentioned previously, the landscape management approach is a community-led process that also works to involve other stakeholders in the landscape. As a result, the structure of each LMB varies significantly based on the culture and customs of communities. Based on an initial scoping exercise conducted by project partners, it was determined that a three-tier structure would work for the communities in the Sefwi Wiawso, Sefwi Akontombra and Bodi districts. Applying lessons from the creation of LMBs in previous Rainforest Alliance projects, it was decided that the three-tier structure would compose of the following (all containing membership from communities):



Figure 2 A visual representation of an LMB as a three-tiered structure

Following this, a Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process was rolled out to over 100 communities across the landscape. This process involved outreach to local chiefs, opinion leaders, lead farmers and target groups in the communities. To generate interest and endorsement at the community level with a representative sample size, project partners adopted a bottom-up approach whereby (for every community) they convened participatory village-level meetings over a 90-day period to raise awareness, build communities' understanding, and respond to any queries. These meetings took various formats, including focus group discussions with target populations (e.g. women's groups, youth groups, and community leaders). Overall, the objective of this was to build consensus on the landscape-level interventions as well as an understanding of, and ultimately agreement for, the landscape management approach and process.



Figure 4 *The breakdown of the LMBs in the Sefwi Wiawso-Akontombra-Bodi*

These meetings also helped rally support and provided a platform to discuss details for establishing the LMBs, including the roles and responsibilities of communities and representatives in the governance structure. Given the sensitivity of the topic, project partners conducted a range of sensitisation activities (see Box. 1). All in all, this created enthusiasm across most of the communities and allowed local leaders to actively endorse the project. To further spread awareness and build consensus, many leaders organised their own meetings with farmers and farmer groups. Equipped with FPIC forms, leaders decided how to work with their local community to decide whether to be part of the process or not.

If communities decided they wanted to be involved, they needed to demonstrate their participation in the project and the LMB by submitting signed FPIC forms. The community then needed to elect a small group of representatives (usually between five and seven members) to act as liaison with the project team and the community. These individuals would serve as the Community Management Committee and would be re-elected as per traditional customs in their communities every three years. In the end, 76 of the 100 communities were brought into the process and were involved in the formation of the LMBs.

Following the sensitisation activities and once majority of communities had shared names of their representatives, an inception workshop was organised with project partners, the community representatives and other stakeholders such as individuals from the government and private sector. This served as a platform for building common understanding and agreement on how the LMBs should be governed. During this process Rainforest Alliance facilitated discussions of how the governance mechanism could be rolled out and how this could influence the decisions and behaviours of the different actors in the landscape. Overall, participating members emphasised the need to provide members of the LMBs with enhanced capacity to govern the landscape in accordance with the shared goals of the project (see section Improving the capacity of community representatives to manage the LMB process). The workshop also led to a consensus on the structure, processes, and organisation of the LMBs including a decision to create a constitution.

Box 1 Lessons from building consensus with community groups using FPIC methods

Since the livelihoods of most community members depend on forests, forest protection discussions can be very sensitive and should be carefully managed. In Ghana, the importance of tactful engagement was highlighted when a forest activist in Suhyen was allegedly killed in November 2019.

To reduce the risk of conflict, the project team took several measures in their engagements with communities. These measures built on the years of experience of Rainforest Alliance to sensitise communities and focus on communicating messages on the projects purpose, structure, and goals using a range of different mediums. In addition to the participatory meetings

across a 90-day period, the project team also designed t-shirts that were handed to “community champions” identified by project partners during meetings to help spearhead the project and garner support with members in communities. The expectation was that these individuals could informally support the communication of the project to members of the community unable to attend meetings. The team also designed nomination forms, based on FPIC principles, to facilitate the nomination of representatives for the Community Committee and later, at the Cluster and Executive Board levels. Finally, information was shared through community radio and text messages directly to farmers and households.

Designing and formalising fundamental principles on how the LMBs would be governed

Before elections could take place, it was important to first agree on a constitution. The constitution would become an important document for managing the governance structure. The development of the constitution was led by a legal expert and was conducted in a participatory manner. The RA and Olam team was assisted by staff of the Ghana Education Service and Ministry of Food and Agriculture to conduct interviews and seek the views of all sub-partners of the project. A template was designed by the project team to guide interviewers and collect responses. All participating communities were also engaged and provided feedback. A validation workshop took place to formally approve the constitution and share nominations for the seven executive positions in each LMB: Chairman, Vice Chairman, General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary, Organiser, Treasurer, and Financial Secretary.





Creating Community Management Clusters and an Executive Board in a free and fair process

Once the Community Management Committees and Cluster Management Committees (hereafter referred to as “Clusters”) were set-up and the constitution formalised, the project team could finalise the final remaining tier: the Executive Council.

To ensure effective coordination and management, the communities were zoned into clusters based on parameters such as areas with a common market, traditional set-up, customary authority of chiefs and history of community leadership, areas under one divisional chief, areas with common amenities, and proximity of communities to each other among other factors. As per the constitution, two members from each Community Management Committee were elected to be part of a Cluster. They were composed of 10-14 members depending on the number of communities involved and in total 16 Clusters were formed. With guidance from Rainforest Alliance and Olam, members self-selected a: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, General-Secretary, Treasurer, and Organiser for each Cluster.

The first elections for the Executive Board were conducted in 2018 and supervised by the Electoral Commission of Ghana to ensure procedures were free and fair. Two representatives from each Cluster were nominated to be part of the LMB Executive Board (32 members in total). Given the size of the population, two Boards were set up for the landscape area. Positions for the management of the Board were selected by election and, as per the constitution, would be held every three years would be held for three years subject to re-election.

The project provided professional advice to the LMB in decision making and supported in identifying other relevant stakeholders in the landscape. These stakeholders became “ex-officio” members of the Board – in other words, representatives that have the right to attend and participate in meetings. However, ex-officio members don’t hold the same rights in terms of decision-making including voting rights at Board meetings. The stakeholders given ex-officio membership in the two LMBs include: the Forestry Commission, COCOBOD, Traditional Council, Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), various logging companies, Rainforest Alliance, Olam, other License Buying Companies, civil society organisations, Metropolitan and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and Food and Agriculture Legal Services.

Given that all the members of the Board are rural community representatives, training on the management of the Board as well as trainings for trainers were given to its members as a way to cascade activities to local community members.



Ghana’s forest resource base is shrinking at an alarming rate which has led to decline in forest environmental quality and considerable loss in biodiversity”

Assistant Manager, Ghana Forestry Commission, in a speech given during the LMB inauguration.

Box 2 Supporting gender representation in traditionally patriarchal communities

Approaching the issue of forest resources with communities while promoting gender equality in traditionally patriarchal cultures is a sensitive balancing act, one that takes time and patience. A priority in the early phase of the project was to ensure the project team reached out to representative groups in the communities. This included providing targeted outreach to women and youth groups across the 100 communities originally proposed.

Once a majority of the communities were on-board and the constitution was formalised, the project partners started working to improve the representation of women in leadership across different levels of the LMB. This started at the Community Management Committee level where the project mandated communities to nominate at least one woman representative as a criteria to be approved to participate in the project. As a result, of the approximately 400 Community representatives, there are at least 86 women (22%). At the Cluster level, a similar rule was enforced translating to approximately 19 women representatives out of approximately 74 positions (26%). Finally, opportunities were given to women during the election of LMB executives. Out of the twelve candidates that stood for the Sefwi-Wiawso LMB Executive Council positions, four were women. Two of these were elected as Vice Chairperson and Treasurer. While for the Sefwi-Akontombra-Bodi LMB Executive Council positions, there were three female nominees of which one was elected to be the Organiser of the Board.

One of the objectives of the project has been to promote women and youth participation in field activities. To achieve this a 3-tier, action-oriented gender and social inclusion framework has been developed as a guide to further female and youth inclusion in all project activities. It sets out to:

- 1** Promote the continued and effective participation of women and youth in the LMB. To achieve this, event participant list has been designed to monitor women and youth participation. Current data on event participant list analysed indicate an increase of 10% in women participation in project activities.
- 2** Design, schedule and implement best female-only crop and business management practice trainings. Actions to implement this section include matching female Lead Farmers with training events and making efforts to locate female Lead Farmers in towns with high numbers of female farm managers.
- 3** Develop a Gender and Youth Inclusion Framework for the LMB, which proposes concrete actions to be implemented by the LMB aimed at promoting women and youth inclusion. Each proposed action is accompanied by specific indicators and means of verification, aimed to facilitate the LMB's monitoring of progress in the implementation of these actions. The framework for the LMB was discussed and approved by the LMB on November 2019.

Reaching national level support for the landscape management approach

On 9th August 2018, the two LMBs (Sefwi-Wiawso and Sefwi-Akontombra-Bodi) were inaugurated by the Deputy Minister of the Lands and Natural Resources Ministry (Hon. Benito Owusu Bio). The elected executives committed to uphold, preserve, protect, and defend the constitution of the LMB during their tenure. The inauguration demonstrated the national-level support this process has garnered and the backing the project has received by the Government of Ghana. The event took place in the presence of key representatives of public and private institutions including the Western Regional Minister, Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Chief Executive, and Bodi Municipal Chief Executive. The occasion was chaired by the Paramount Chief of Sefwi Traditional Council (Katakyie Bumankama II).

The inauguration has led to the recognition of the LMBs both at the regional and national levels and to signal that the Boards are ready to engage with all actors in managing the landscape. Through this inaugural process, the LMB has been endorsed under the 2012 Forest and Wildlife Policy and with Ministerial consent to manage resources in forest corridor areas. However, even after Parliamentary approval of the Forest and Wildlife Bill, a landscape governance mechanism is still considered a judicial fiat and therefore the LMBs are not incorporated as a legal entity. To get around this issue, the LMBs are registered as cooperatives. This provides the leverage to operate as a legal entity and transact business.



← Executives of the Sefwi Wiawso Landscape Management Board and Ex-officio members

✓ Farmers witnessing the inauguration of LMB executives

↓ Member of Akontombra Bodi LMB casting her vote to elect executive members





Landscape management board activities to restore, manage and monitor forests in the landscape

In addition to setting-up the governance structure of the LMBs, the Rainforest Alliance/Olam Partnership for Livelihoods and Landscape Management Project has also supported activities to restore, manage, and monitor forests across the three districts. In terms of restoration efforts, the project has identified native tree species for planting and established four central nurseries to raise 50,000 tree seedlings.³ The LMBs have also seen two local companies make their own pledges to replant native forests in the area. Olam has set-up a nursery to supply tree seedlings to Asawinso and Sefwi Wiawso districts and to date has raised 23,500 tree seedlings. Additionally, John Bitar Company Limited (a logging company based in the landscape) started and committed to provide 36,000 tree seedlings every year until 2022.

To better manage the existing forests in the landscape, the LMB is registering planted trees within the corridors of selected forest reserves. The exercise will secure proof of ownership and, in doing so, encourage communities to plant more trees within the corridors given that shade trees are important for the better management of cocoa. Additionally, the initial pilot is set to register shade trees for 1,000 cocoa farmers after which farmers will have the right to decide what to do with registered trees on their farms. The Resource Management Support Centre (RMSC) is the government agency mandated to lead the tree registration process. They will provide technical support to the LMBs on the tree registration process, provide quality control, and validate data collection.

Lastly, LMBs will monitor and report forest infractions to relevant authorities. To aid this effort and provide accurate data, an MoU has been signed between the LMBs and the World Resources Institute (WRI) to use Global Forest Watch as a way to send deforestation alerts. Additionally, fourteen communities have been selected to be trained by WRI in order to collect on-the-ground data. It is expected that this mechanism will provide real time, credible data for the Ghana Forest



Government fully supports the landscape Management Area mechanism to encourage local people to integrate forest and wildlife management into their farming and land management systems as a legitimate land-use option”

Deputy Minister of Lands and Natural Resources on the occasion of the Inauguration of the Landscape Management Boards in Sefwi Area

³ *Terminalia superba*, *Terminalia ivorensis*, *Tetrapluera tetraptera*, *Mansonia altissima*, *Pericopsis elata*, *Khaya anthoteca*.

Box 3 Leveraging the Cocoa & Forest Initiative (CFI) framework for active community involvement in landscape management

As a signatory and active member of the Cocoa & Forest Initiative, Olam has adapted its Living Landscapes Policy for this project to align with all three themes of the CFI (Forest Protection and Restoration, Sustainable Production and Farmer Livelihood and Community Engagement and Social Inclusion). The Living Landscape policy ensures that:

- Farming, restoration and other land use activities are planned and managed in such a way to maintain or enhance critical habitats, regenerate the natural capital of soil, water and natural ecosystems, and store carbon.
- Local voices play an important role in decision-making processes, whilst farms and the natural ecosystems within and around them are a source of pride, prosperity and well-being for the people who live and work there, helping to build social and human capital.
- There are shared efforts to slow, halt and eventually reverse the negative impacts of human activities, including deforestation, and land degradation.
- Landscapes are not static, but dynamic, adaptive, and resilient to change.

Through this community engagement and involvement in landscape management in the Seftwi Wiawso-Akontombra-Bodi Hotspot Intervention Area, Olam is demonstrating its commitment and response to the CFI.



Photo: IDH



Lessons on enhancing stakeholder engagement in local communities

The creation of the two LMBs in the Sefwi Wiawso-Akontombra-Bodi landscape are fundamentally designed to be a community-led process for managing, protecting, and controlling forests across a multitude of actors. It applies a landscape approach to addressing the issue but, at the end of the day, requires communities to feel empowered to take on the responsibilities and ownership of the process. This is often incredibly challenging but there are a number of lessons that can be taken away from the work undertaken by Rainforest Alliance and Olam in the areas presented here:

1. **Be considerate and sensitive to the needs of communities.** Forest protection is an incredibly sensitive issue in Ghana and considerable measures needed to be taken to create a two-way dialogue with community members, including organising regular meetings and using different channels (such as through “community champions” and local radio) to share information.
2. **Create incentives for changing people’s behaviour.** Most farming households in Ghana do not have the right financial incentives to better use forest resources. It is the expectation that by providing climate smart cocoa training, farmers will see the value of more sustainably managing their own cocoa plots as well as planting shade trees.
3. **Be flexible in the project design, timing of activities, and with financial resources.** Any approach that relies on the active participation of communities to foster their buy-in and ownership requires time and, most of all, flexibility. This may not coincide with donor frameworks and therefore managing expectations may also be vital. In this project, teams needed to be responsive to the needs of communities and adapt accordingly. This included changing the delivery of training and rotating meetings between communities to make them more accessible.
4. **Relationships and partnerships require regular and open communication.** Managing relationships is a balancing act particularly when you are making the introductions. There is the need to be transparent and clear about the project’s objectives at community level interventions. In early stages of the project, a series of one to one engagement activities were held with partner institutions to share and agree on project scope and objectives for smooth implementation. The objectives of the project were further reiterated during community gatherings with slogans adopted to ease communication
5. **Build on the progress made from previous initiatives, regardless of their success.** The LMBs had an important starting point: the CREMAs. This paved the way for helping communities understand how decentralised forest governance could work. Having this starting point saved the team significant time from the onset and allowed discussions to focus on governance structures, responsibilities, and engagement with other actors.

Further support to Landscape Management Boards and enhanced stakeholder engagement

The functioning of the LMBs and their participatory nature remain the most important and challenging tasks that the project and local stakeholders face. While many participatory approaches are tied with lengthy processes, the project has stressed the importance of being focused in its objectives and building on momentum made at each step. Despite the efforts to ensure regular, open and two-way discussions, many of the relationships established during this process have been new and therefore have taken significant time to nurture. Additionally, outreach to 100 communities required several months both to work out appropriate ways to engage a representative group as well as ensure FPIC principles were followed and communities fully understood the details of the project.

The next phase of funding will focus on improving the capacity development of local communities. The emphasis will be on developing economic incentives, delivering positive livelihood changes, and sustainable and robust forest monitoring and management within the framework of the LMBs. As monitoring of the forest improves, we will be able to measure the impact that the landscape governance approach has impacted rates of deforestation in the region.



