

BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN GHANA'S SUI RIVER LANDSCAPE

An Integrated Landscape Management Approach



Photo: Giuseppe Cipriani

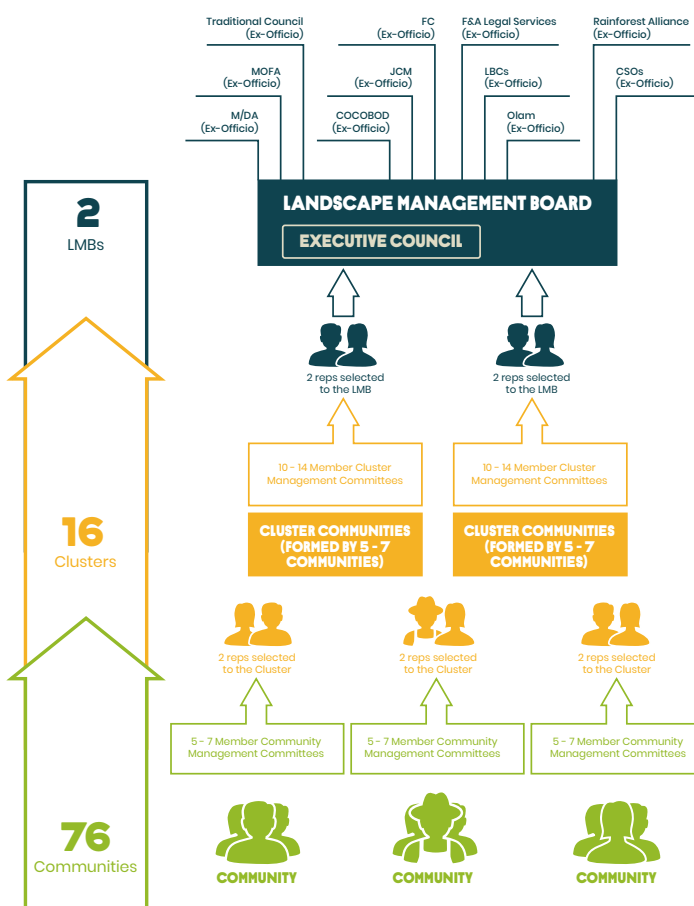
The Sui River landscape in the Western North region of Ghana spans 244,000 hectares—including five forest reserves—and is one of West Africa's most important cocoa-growing areas.

However, the practice of clearing local forests to make room for cropland is accelerating deforestation across the region, threatening the very ecosystems that local communities depend upon for their livelihoods. Due to poor land management and aging trees, per-hectare cocoa production has decreased, and climate change is bringing further challenges—from unpredictable weather patterns to increased outbreaks of pests and diseases. To help farmers tackle these urgent issues head-on, the Rainforest Alliance has teamed up with global agribusiness Olam Ghana and Partnership for Forests (P4F), a program funded by the UK government to support deforestation-free production of tropical commodities.

Landscape Management Boards

The Rainforest Alliance's Integrated Landscape Management approach supports rural communities to build self-sustaining, long-term, dynamic landscape partnerships with all land users—farmers, forest enterprises, local leaders, companies, and governments—to tackle complex, interconnected challenges. An integral part of this approach is the establishment of participatory governance structures known as Landscape Management Boards (LMBs). Such boards have proven to be effective tools when tackling multiple, and closely inter-related issues, such as deforestation, climate change, and rural poverty. LMBs facilitate engagement with different stakeholders across a landscape, while ensuring that local communities are front and center. For example, capacity building support is provided to promote community leadership and oversight of activities and decision-making.

In Sui River, we supported the creation of two legally registered LMBs recognized by the Ghanaian Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources. They currently have jurisdiction within the corridors around Sui River, Suhuma, Tano Ehuru, Tano Suhien and Santomang in the Western North Region of Ghana. Activities include restoration, tree registration, promotion of climate-smart agriculture practices, and natural resource management of mosaic land.



Climate-Smart Agriculture and Diversifying Rural Livelihoods

Farmers in the Sui River landscape were trained in climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices to help mitigate the effects of increasingly severe weather patterns. This has equipped farmers with the skills to implement techniques such as shade tree management, soil conservation, water management, and increasing resilience through livelihood diversification. CSA techniques help farmers adapt to and prepare for impacts in their specific contexts in order to preserve—and improve—their livelihoods. Initially, a total of 2,600 farmers were trained in CSA



Trainings have been conducted in vegetable farming, as well as beekeeping, snail farming, and piggyery.



A degraded area selected for restoration actions using native tree species.

techniques, but the approach has since enjoyed widespread uptake by other farmers across the wider community. According to one sample survey, around 4,000 farmers have adopted CSA practices and report better productivity as a result.

Under the umbrella of climate-smart agriculture, farmers were supported to increase resilience by diversifying their income streams. Of course, embarking on new business ventures requires technical expertise and start-up capital, two factors that usually act as a hindrance to many smallholder farmers. To support farmers and sustain the activities of the LMB governance structure, we trained more than 80 people in beekeeping, snail farming, vegetable farming and piggyery. Start-up capital has been supplied to 58 individuals.

Restoration Actions

To help restore degraded areas, shade trees were distributed to farmers. Between 2018 and 2021, over 200,000 seedlings (from seven native tree varieties) were raised by partners and community nurseries. These trees have been planted on fallow lands and cocoa farms to protect against adverse effects of climate change. To support those responsible for these forests and farms, the technical capacity of the LMBs and local communities was expanded, allowing them to lead the way in restoration activities and subsequent management of the restored areas. All told, 45 farmers and 19 nursery workers from six communities were trained in tree nursery management.



Tree registration has allowed farmers to secure proof of ownership.

Tree Registration Activities

Registering trees to legally claim them is an important goal for cocoa farmers, but the complexity of the tree tenure system and land ownership rights in Ghana pose a significant challenge. The capacity of 16 local tree registration enumerators was increased in the Western North region, directly leading to the registration of 1,000 trees. This tree registration exercise has allowed Sui River farmers to secure proof of ownership and has reduced persistent issues, including crop damage from tree felling and non-remission of benefits by timber contractors/merchants. As part of our landscape activities, we also collaborated with the Resource Management Support Centre (RMSC) to improve the registration process.

In Ghana, we have seen firsthand that an Integrated Landscape Management approach is key to improving farmer livelihoods, stopping deforestation, and protecting the overall landscape. A major success of our work around the Sui River is the establishment of the two community governance structures (LMBs) that coordinate responses to pertinent environmental issues within the Western North Region. The Rainforest Alliance and its partners have now adapted and expanded our scope to occupy the entire Western

Zone B Hotspot Intervention Area of Ghana. These activities are sponsored by the European Union under the "Landscape and Environmental Agility across the Nation" (LEAN) project.

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The Rainforest Alliance is creating a more sustainable world by using social and market forces to protect nature and improve the lives of farmers and forest communities.

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