Partnerships for Forests

Enhancing inclusive business models

A global overview of nature-based businesses supported by Partnerships for Forests

March 2024

Photo Project Archive

Introduction

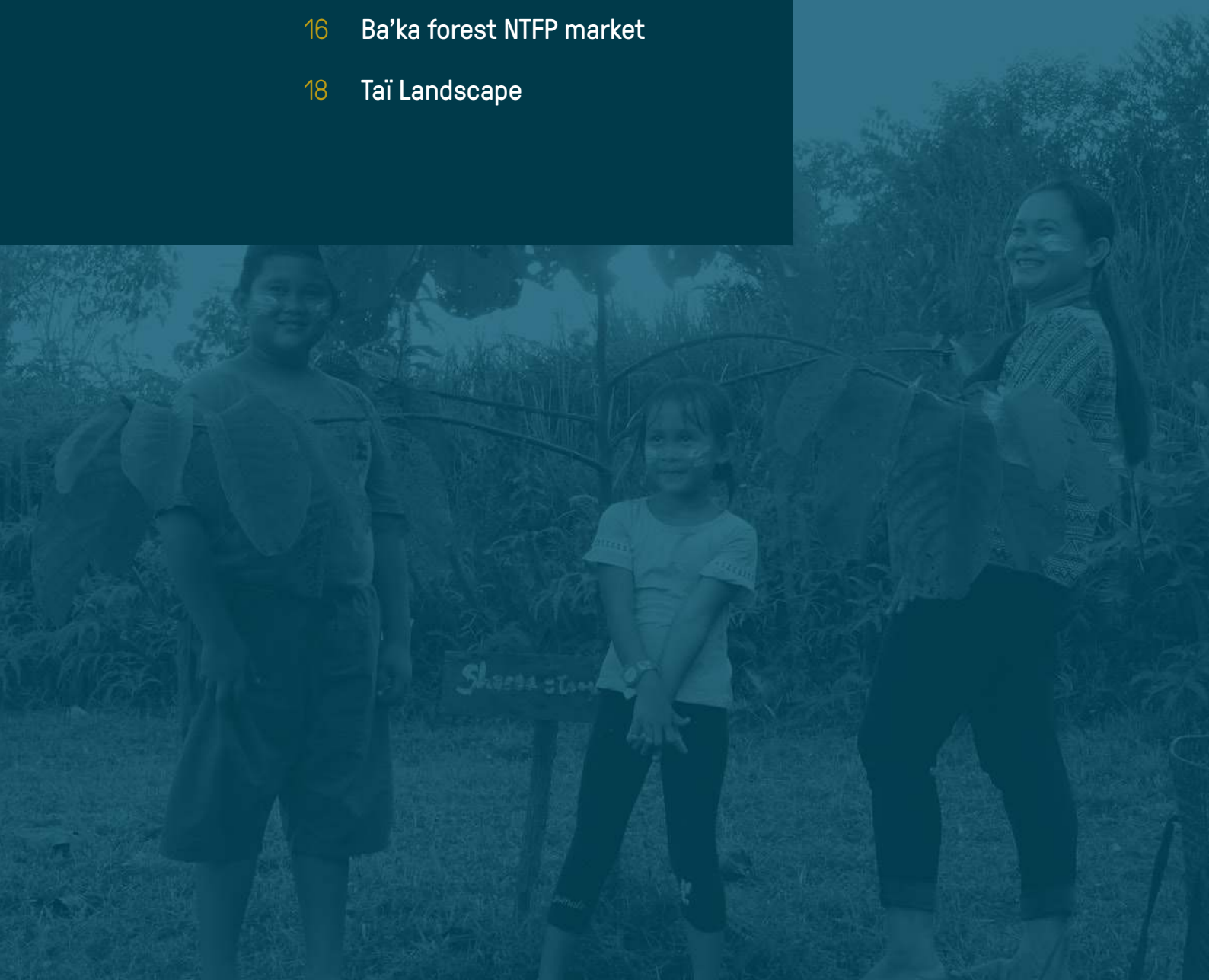
Partnerships for Forests (P4F) is a programme funded by the United Kingdom Government through the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). The eight-year, £120 million programme is part of the UK's International Climate Finance commitment to support the Paris Agreement. P4F is delivered by Palladium and Systemiq and operates in Central, East, and West Africa, South East Asia, and Latin America.

To measure the achievement of intended impacts, the programme employs a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) methodology. This methodology includes a set of goals of indicators that must be verified by both local and global teams. The results are subsequently validated by an independent external consultancy to ensure their veracity.

The programme's MEL approach utilises both qualitative indicators, such as stakeholder engagement or enhanced biodiversity (captured in case studies), and quantitative indicators, such as beneficiaries or private capital mobilised. These indicators and evidence are analysed and considered by a MEL Committee within P4F, which includes cross-regional MEL professionals who actively seek learning and improvement opportunities within the program. The committee has also identified and implemented opportunities to improve Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in the programme.

The methodology for this case study was developed by the MEL Committee and features inclusive business models that inherently deliver social utility, with the potential to inspire other businesses to adopt more inclusive practices. During MEL Committee meetings, MEL officers from each region highlight two projects with strong GESI components. These projects promote the inclusion and empowerment of smallholders, indigenous communities, and women.

Cases



Lush

Uganda
Sector: NTFPs

About the project

In 2013, Lush, a cosmetics company that holds a commitment to ethical sourcing and sustainable practices, partnered with Alumalum, an agricultural development organisation based in Gulu district, northern Uganda. This collaboration led to the formal establishment of Alumalum as a subsidiary legal enterprise in 2015. Alumalum began its operations by working with 150 farmers across the Gulu, Omoro, Amuru, and Nwoya districts in Northern Uganda. From 2016, Lush has pledged to procure 100% of its sesame and moringa raw material requirements from Alumalum, while also facilitating partnerships with other private sector companies interested in sourcing ingredients from Alumalum.

Notably, Alumalum has gone beyond off-taking agreements with Lush, by initiating pilot activities aimed at transitioning farmers from subsistence farming to a diversified agroforestry model. Through its Partner Farmers Programme, launched in 2018, Alumalum promotes an agroforestry and reforestation system that diversifies agricultural production, mitigating environmental and social risks. Alumalum provides training on regenerative farming, raises awareness about the benefits of agroforestry, and supplies seedlings, while Lush guarantees a market and premium prices for raw materials sourced through agroforestry.

This initiative effectively combats deforestation and reduces pressure on natural forests for timber and charcoal production by integrating trees into farmlands – ultimately reducing carbon emissions. Additionally, it enhances soil quality through education on organic fertilizer usage and promotes intercropping practices. Alumalum has also undertaken significant tree planting efforts and provided education on establishing tree nurseries. The organisation promotes gender balance by increasing women's involvement in lead farming roles and advocating for female land ownership.

P4F supported this initiative in 2020 by enhancing the Partner Farmer Programme and expanding the product portfolio. Technical support was provided to refine Alumalum's business plan, incorporate additional commodities like cocoa and vanilla, and scale up suppliers engaged from 150 to 829 farmers. Alumalum conducted agronomy studies to assess the viability of its agroforestry model and make technical recommendations for improving productivity.

Photo: Project Archive

Processing studies were also conducted to identify market access and quality parameters for new commodities. This support has enabled the project to expand its reach and impact significantly, benefiting both farmers and the environment.

About the target group

Social and economic challenges in the region include low agricultural productivity due to limited access to modern farming technologies. Conflict and displacement also had a significant impact on agricultural development. The long-lasting Lord's Resistance Army insurgency displaced millions of people, destroyed infrastructure, and disrupted agricultural activities, leading to food insecurity, and reduced agricultural production.

How the project supported the target group

Before the partnership, Alumalum planted shade trees, seedlings, and vines in the demonstration plots for growing cocoa and vanilla (in addition to sesame and moringa), while providing its partner farmers with the seedlings from its nursery for shade trees needed to introduce these novel commodities into the farmers' plots. P4F supported Alumalum to conduct an agronomy study to assess the viability of its existing agroforestry model and to make technical recommendations to improve the productivity of the new target commodities – cocoa and vanilla – in the agroforestry system. Farmers also had a high demand for charcoal, firewood, and timber – which contributed to deforestation – and the fast-growing shade trees could also be used for household fuel or charcoal to harvest in the future, after the cocoa and vanilla trees have matured, thus not harming the forest as it respects the cycle and maintain the forest.

The support also scaled up Alumalum's agroforestry project from 150 farmers to 829 farmers through the incorporation of Collaborative Forest Management (CFM)[1] groups. The additional farmers received training on good agronomic practices, agricultural inputs such as tree planting materials, and access to the market for farmers' produce especially oil seeds crops like sesame, sunflower, moringa, and cocoa. The support also strengthened the capacity of Alumalum field staff, farm leaders and management, with additional knowledge on agronomic practices and post-harvest handling techniques of cocoa to produce high-quality organic cocoa beans.

By supporting farmers with alternative income sources and necessities (e.g. fuel), the partnership with Alumalum and Lush, and the Collaborative Forest Management mechanism have strengthened the vulnerable communities after the armed conflicts.

Photo: Project Archive

[1] CFM groups are a group of communities arranged by the government of Uganda's National Forestry Authority to manage and benefit from Central Forest Reserves. The groups commit to regulating forest use, by patrolling the forest, and are allowed to benefit from activities within the forest reserve, such as beekeeping, collecting non-timber forest products, and developing tree plantations in degraded areas.

UGACOF

Uganda
Sector: Coffee

About the project

UGACOF, the Ugandan subsidiary of Swiss multinational coffee trader Sucafina, is a leading coffee processor and exporter, working mainly in Western Uganda near the Rwenzori Mountains. The main drivers of deforestation in the region are related to subsistence farming, logging for wood products and expansion of urbanisation. In addition, the area is threatened by land degradation due to forest encroachment, climate change effects, like increased weather variability with longer periods with no rain and soil erosion. The social challenges are at the household and farm levels, including unequal opportunities for women, living income gaps, and limited access to finance for farmers.

UGACOF sells Rainforest Alliance certified coffee, a standard that indicates that rigorous economic, social, and environmental sustainability standards are met. P4F supported UGACOF in three main pillars: i) scaling-up best practices for regenerative agriculture at the landscape level; ii) defining and implementing low-carbon farming strategies that create a sustainable business case for farmers; iii) rolling out services that promote gender inclusivity across the value chain and improving household incomes.

About the target group

A baseline study conducted with the smallholders in the region, found that work is done mostly by women (87%) and farms are mostly male owned (70%). Finance and credit reached more men than women, and there was a strong perception that access to resources and decision making were tilted in favour of men. The region typically experienced low yield and income from coffee growing, often caused by poor on-farm management practices such as coffee agronomy, soil nutrition management, soil, and water conservation. High production costs lowered profitability for farmers, with high expenditure on inputs like fertilisers, labour costs (weeding, picking), pest and disease management, and mulching materials.

Photo: Envato

This intervention prioritised empowering smallholders and positioning agroforestry as a viable business opportunity, particularly for marginalised groups such as women and youth.

How the project supported the target group

UGACOF has established contracts with 2500 coffee suppliers, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of both producers and the company. These agreements have led to a 20% increase in income for all 2500 farmers by selling processed coffee rather than dried Ugandan Arabica Coffee (DRUGAR), reducing the existing living income gap from 42% to 32%. By purchasing unwashed fresh cherry coffee, UGACOF assumes all processing costs and associated risks.

Access to inputs such as fertiliser and seedlings, as well as infrastructure like Coffee Washing Stations (CWS), has reduced production costs for farmers and provided technical assistance at the two CWS. Additionally, 2756 farmers received training on gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, focusing on equal access and opportunities and removing barriers to discrimination. They also participated in capacity building on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and regenerative agriculture.

The introduction of a capacity building component to the community, known as the gender action learning system, aims to improve household planning and income distribution. Notably, there has been an observed increase in women's participation, with 30% of women attending each capacity building training, compared to almost none previously. This initiative is complemented by the incorporation of an Environmental and Social Management (ESM) system, which forms the foundation for designing gender-specific services. UGACOF actively monitors the progress of these interventions through the CorpIn system. CorpIn is a traceability software, which ensured more than 40% of UGAFOF's purchased coffee is traceable to farmer level, with an aim of reaching 100% by 2025. It also tracked gender-disaggregated information of training participants, farmer production details, revenues, and loan applications and repayments.

The establishment of the Landscape Governance Committee has proven effective in promoting participatory decision-making. These committees act as intermediaries between UGACOF's farmers and local government, coordinating the implementation of regenerative agriculture systems, disseminating best practices, and ensuring alignment with regulatory bylaws and ordinances. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed between UGACOF and the District Local Government have led to the establishment of Landscape Governance Committees, tasked with monitoring the performance of agroforestry practices, conducting farmer trainings, and promoting gender inclusivity and livelihood improvement.

Photo: Envato

She Leads

Brazil
Sector: NTFPs

About the project

She Leads is a needs-based leadership programme with and for women in the bioeconomy sector in Brazil. It began with a global benchmarking study that aimed to map all available initiatives, including programmes, materials, and courses, etc. that could address the specific needs of the target group. The main challenges faced by women in the bioeconomy sector have to do with gender bias and discrimination; limited access to resources including funding, technology, and specialised training; limited land rights; the need to balance multiple roles, and a lack of networking opportunities. The study analysed 104 initiatives and found a gap existed for business programmes that can work with the realities faced by women working in the bioeconomy in Brazil's rural areas, considering the competencies needed in those environments. Shortcomings included a lack of examples that female rural business leaders could apply in their businesses, that the language is not accessible, and design aspects that made engagement with content difficult.

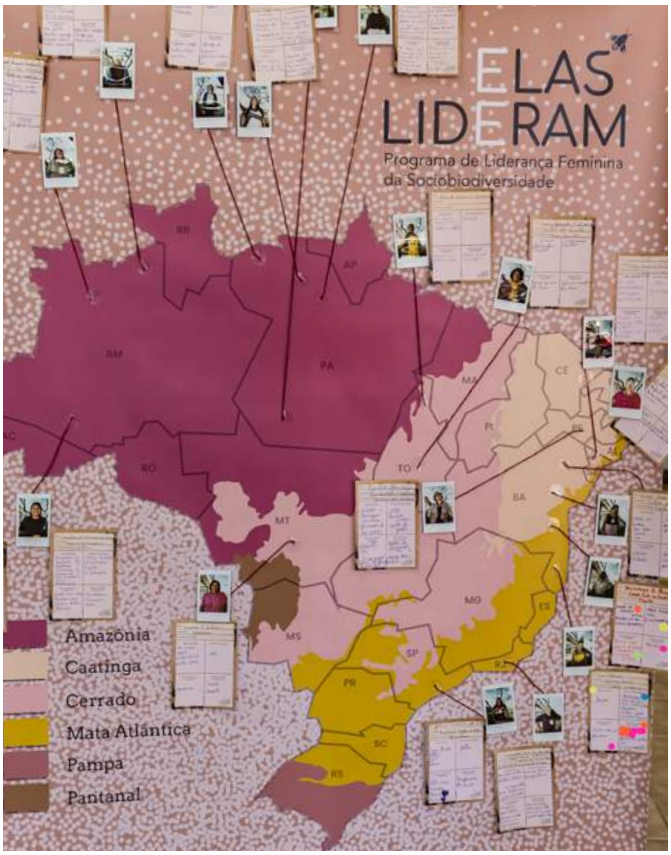


Photo: Fred Rahal

The next step was to conduct interviews with 71 female leaders of socio-bioeconomy businesses or initiatives in Brazil. Those leaders came from across the country and were carefully selected to be representative of the population. The objective was to map the needs of those leaders, considering the competencies identified in the benchmark study. During this phase, the leaders were guided through a set of questions that made them think about their personal and professional goals and desires.

The methodology of the programme was developed based on the insights from the benchmark study and the interviews with the leaders. To test it, a pilot workshop took place in Sao Paulo, where 22 leaders from the interviews were invited for three days of activities. Following the event, a network of leaders was created, designed to be a space where participants can learn from each other, share their achievements, and feel supported.

Final adjustments were made to the programme design, considering both the pilot experience and conversations with potential investors in the socio-bioeconomy sector that could implement the solution at scale.

About the target group

Women play a key role in fostering sustainable practices in local and Indigenous communities in Brazil. The dependence that many communities have on natural resources and surrounding environments to provide food and medicine serves as a strong incentive to preserve and protect those resources. However, women face particular challenges in engaging in these practices.

Female leaders in the bioeconomy sector face at least two types of discrimination: due to their gender and to their location. The first of these can see women in rural areas given a lack of recognition for their skills and work. Often,

their contributions are perceived as assisting their husbands or families, rather than being of independent value. This social invisibility can be caused by a lack of territorial access, work, and access to markets and resources, as well as cultural beliefs regarding the role of women. These factors can make women more vulnerable, dependent on men, and undervalued, and can impact self-esteem. Women who are Black or Indigenous may face additional prejudices that can result in social exclusion, limited opportunities, economic disparities, or mental ill health.

The She Leads interviews with female leaders showed that 77% of the leaders had experienced prejudice or discrimination, especially based on their gender, and 56% felt overwhelmed by the number of tasks and responsibilities they had.

How the project supported the target group

The She Leads programme highlights the importance of the female leaders in the bioeconomy, supporting them to address challenges they face in their work. It impacts both the female leaders and the attitudes and environment in the broader bioeconomy ecosystem.

The participants of the pilot completed a self-assessment with quantitative evaluation questions at the beginning of the workshop. This included grading the leaders' perceptions of their abilities in specific leadership criteria. At the conclusion of the event, the women were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire with the same set of questions to capture any shift in their perceptions of their abilities. They used a scale of 1 to 10 to rate themselves on the criteria. While the grades were relatively high before the workshop, there was an average increase on all points analysed. The aspect with the largest improvement is availability of tools needed for personal development, which received the lowest score at the start of the workshop, indicating participants' initial lack of confidence in this area. The second largest increase was seen in motivation for personal and professional development. Part of this may be explained by the frequently mentioned point that being recognised as an important leader for their business and communities and meeting other women like them made the female leaders feel powerful and eager to bring learning back to their communities[2].

The proposal for the complete training cycle aims at achieving a group of 200 female leaders by the end of the fourth year. Teçá Impacto[3], the implementation partner of the project, is looking for organisations that could host the programme and achieve this projected impact.

Photo: Fred Rahal

[2] She Leads - A needs-based leadership programme with and for women in the bioeconomy sector. 2024. Partnerships for Forests.

[3] https://www.tecaimpacto.com.br/

Superfoods for Forest Protection

Peru
Sector: NTFPs

About the project

One of the largest multinational beverage companies in Peru, AJE Group, made a commitment to the Environment Ministry to protect forests through their expertise in the beverage sector. As part of this, the company has launched a new brand to focus on sustainable products – Amarumayu – derived from the Quechua indigenous language meaning 'serpent river'. Amarumayu produces nutritious juices called Bio Amayu, made with sustainable harvests of the Amazonian fruits camu camu and aguaje. Both fruits are abundant in the Loreto region. P4F supported Amarumayu to train local people in the sustainable harvest of these fruits. Local communities' production and governance capacities were also strengthened, to ensure wider benefits for community and forest protection, as well as increased increasing traceability and harvesting capacities. The initial pilot in eight communities of Loreto was a success, and with P4F support, this project scaled to work with an additional 19 communities.

Frutama Company, a local enterprise that processes the fruit and turns it into pulp was another key stakeholder involved in the project. They received support to strength their processing capacities and respond to AJE's demand in terms of quantity and quality of the fruit.

About the target group

The project centred around 22 communities within Loreto, strategically located in national and regional protected areas, and other zones rich in biodiversity. Some of the communities involved were located inside the National Reserves of Allpahuayo Mishana, Pacaya Samira and Pucacuro, while others were in the Regional Protected area Tamishahu- Thuayo. Two other zones worked in did not have an environmental protection structure: Datem del Marañón, and Kukama Lukamira. This geographic selection aimed to integrate forest protection, local communities and indigenous groups livelihoods and groups interested in

Photo: Project Archive

participating in the project. Overall, 315 people benefitted through human, financial, and social capital aspects during the project. Out of the 303 people benefiting from the project, 22% are women who hold formal membership in the established associations.

How the project supported the target group

Through a series of training sessions and workshops, the 22 communities received information on pre-and post-harvest processes for sustainably harvesting aguaje and camu camu. Comprehensive guidance was provided on scaling palm trees in a sustainable manner, utilising the provided harvesting toolkit, discerning the optimal moment for fruit harvest based on maturity and size considerations, and the intricacies of post-harvest processes, including cleaning, drying, packaging, and record-keeping.

The initiative extended its focus beyond harvesting, and promoted holistic development and empowerment of the communities, with consultants hired to work on these areas. Women's empowerment and gender equality was also promoted through targeted training delivered to women, community associations, and the whole community on gender equality and women's rights. A concerted effort was made to catalyse women's participation, not only in the harvesting processes but also in association activities and the broader spectrum of community governance and decision-making.

Photo: Project Archive

Royal Lestari Utama

Indonesia
Sector: Rubber

About the project

Royal Lestari Utama (RLU) is a natural rubber producer, and leader in sustainable natural rubber production. The company was established in 2015 as a joint venture, and in July 2022, Michelin acquired RLU as a sole shareholder. Through its subsidiaries, RLU has developed and managed approximately 88,000 ha of Indonesian land on which natural rubber is grown.

P4F supported RLU to develop Wildlife Conservation Areas (WCAs) and the Community Partnership Programme (CPP). The CPP helped the company to better support communities in their areas of operation in a way that would improve their credibility and legitimacy amongst these communities. Historically, these populations had been resistant to engaging with corporations. Actions included: (1) creating partnerships with farmer's groups providing seedlings, TA and offtake agreements, (2) building community food security by optimising home garden security and (3) supporting communities by helping meet specific needs, such as distributing facemasks during Covid-19.

Built into the structure of these programmes was a governance policy that stipulated that all community activities under the project needed to have an audience of 30% women. The project also included the design of a women farmers group, which helped women take up community leadership and decision-making positions without explicitly shifting traditional roles in community households.

Photo: Project Archive

About the target group

In rural areas of Indonesia, many women lack access to resources such as land, technology and markets. At the community level, long working hours and household duties are barriers for women participating in social activities and public events. The reality of women where the projects are located, in Jambi Province on Sumatra and East Kalimantan Province on Borneo, are both marked by traditional gender roles, food insecurity and lack of access to infrastructure.

Traditional gender roles and cultural beliefs in the targeted communities can see women responsible for – and often limited to – household activities. At the household level, women and girls often become 'shock absorbers' when food prices rise or other crises strike, reducing their own intake of nutritious food to provide for their family members. In addition to these challenges, access to communication and infrastructure is limited. Road access is very limited, and phone signal can only be accessed from the main road that is usually far away from the communities.

How the project supported the target group

The formation of the farmer groups that led the governance of the Community Partnership Programme started with a socio-economic baseline study. The study provided an overview of the perspectives of around 800 households and the level of their interest in joining the farmer groups. After that, RLU focused on creating a closer relationship to the community. They partnered with organisations that were already on the territory to offer technical assistance, build trust and introduce the programme with the communities.

Following those initial activities, the farmers groups were designed, with each group comprising 15 members that live in the area and manage forestry activities. After its formation, each group needs to agree the division of duties, roles, and responsibilities, and create a business plan, budget, and work plan – for which they can get support from RLU. All groups then receive training on sustainable agricultural practices for integrated farming and rubber cultivation. Following the training, RLU then supports the groups with land preparation, cultivation, harvesting and acts as a buyer for the rubber harvest. Each group followed the rule of having at least 30% of woman participation in at every meeting.

The implementation of the Community Partnership Programme brought important social impacts for the region. The project was designed to prioritise enabling female farmers to secure their own food sources and empowering them to take control of economic resources. In Orang Rimba community, more than 100 farmers, 70% of them women, have been trained to establish organic farming demonstration plots that could produce around 8000 kg of food annually. RLU also had women-only farmers' groups, which helped women build their confidence and contribute to public forums. Leader of the Napal Putih women's group stated, "we even interview our husbands on how much they produce and the dynamic of the price. We also discuss together what opportunities we can pursue together, how to utilise our land and what crop to choose."

Photo: Project Archive

Illipe Nut

Indonesia
Sector: NTFPs

Photo: Project Archive

About the project

Forestwise, established in 2018, is an ethical commodity trader operating from two main hubs: the Netherlands, housing its sales office, and West Kalimantan, Indonesia, where it operates a full subsidiary factory. The company's mission is to cultivate a market for forest products, aiming to elevate the economic value of remaining forests, while providing communities with sustainable livelihoods to deter further deforestation.

In West Kalimantan, Indonesia, the Dayak people harvest the illipe fruit from the forest floor and transform the nut into a versatile butter used for cooking, candle making, and medicinal purposes. This premium butter, comparable to shea or cocoa butter, is well-suited for cosmetics and has garnered international acclaim and demand within the beauty industry.

With support from P4F, Forestwise conducted a comprehensive feasibility study on the illipe market and production potential. Subsequently, they designed and constructed a processing unit and storage facility to overcome processing limitations, further bolstering sustainable practices and community empowerment in the area.

About the target group

Despite the promising potential of illipe butter, communities encounter significant challenges in terms of supply. Firstly, irregular harvest seasons lead to fluctuating prices, making it difficult for community members to plan effectively. The control held by factories and large traders over buying prices and purchase quotas exacerbates this issue. Secondly, communities struggle to dry nuts in large quantities and process them into butter quickly enough to prevent spoilage. Failure to treat nuts immediately after drying results in rotting, diminishing their market value.

Thirdly, limited options and access to sustainable markets pose a barrier, particularly for industrial buyers requiring consistent supplies and qualities. Farmers are often forced to sell dried fruit or oil at low prices, especially towards the end of the season.

Within the Dayak communities, the illipe tree holds sacred significance, with distinct gender roles within the value chain. Traditionally, men lead production efforts, while women harvest nuts from the forest floor and smoke-dry them, despite the health risks involved. Subsequently, men typically handle transportation and sales to traders.

To ensure communities receive optimal benefits, Forestwise directly purchases nuts from forest communities through individual farmer and collector agreements. These contracts specify agreed prices per kilogram, technical requirements, and desired nut quality, aiming to empower communities and provide fair compensation.

How the project supported the target group

Forestwise has forged agreements with 740 individuals across 32 villages in West Kalimantan. In a bid to ensure consistent nut quality, the company provided training to contractors on a more efficient process: transitioning from traditional smoking methods to soaking and sun-drying techniques. This shift significantly improved women's health, as they traditionally oversee this aspect of the value chain.

By formalising agreements with Forestwise, participation in the Illipe nut value chain serves as an additional income source for the Dayak community. Individuals can continue their existing roles and seamlessly transition into illipe harvesting when the season begins. Furthermore, the security provided by these agreements has incentivised community members to join the value chain, particularly women. Notably, these agreements also discourage middlemen, who often offer lower prices to communities and do not engage in sustainable practices.

Photo: Project Archive

Ba'ka forest NTFP market

Cameroon

Sector: NTFPs and Cocoa

About the project

The Djoum-Mintom-Ngoyla landscape in southern Cameroon spans over 600,000 hectares of dense rainforest but faces significant threats from increasing agricultural and commercial activities. This ecologically important area serves as a critical wildlife corridor within the Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (TRIDOM) protected area, encompassing Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, and Gabon. The region is inhabited by around 25,000 people from diverse ethnic groups, including the minority Indigenous group Ba'ka, many of whom face challenges such as loss of territory, discriminations, and socio-economy pressures.

The local Indigenous populations, particularly women, heavily depend on the forest for their livelihoods, primarily through collecting and selling non-timber forest products (NTFPs). However, challenges such as the absence of profitable markets, low bargaining power, and limited storage and processing facilities hindered the valorisation of NTFPs – namely Djangsang, Moabi and Bush Mango -, with limited access to markets resulting in around 60 to 75% of NTFPs used only for subsistence consumption. Even prior to the project, these products played a positive role in traditional practices, access to food, and commercial activities, contributing to the cultural preservation and way of life of traditional communities in the region.

Recognising the importance and value of NTFPs in balancing development and conservation objectives, P4F aimed to support an NFTP industry that would contribute to the protection and conservation of the landscape. This was achieved through the development of sustainable NTFP wild harvesting and cocoa processing practices. P4F supported two partners who were developing and leading projects in the region. These projects worked directly with focal groups such as women and Indigenous communities, addressing the production and trade of NTFPs.

P4F's first collaboration was with APIFED (Appui à l'autopromotion et l'insertion des femmes, des jeunes et des désœuvrés), who organised and trained communities on sustainable collection, with a specific focus on promoting women's and Indigenous people's rights. Another collaboration was with local enterprise Ecotrading, to improve market access for NTFP products. The project's overall goal was to increase household incomes andenhance community livelihoods, which would be done while promoting the value of existing forests and helping to mitigate encroachment and illegal logging.

Photo: Edouard TAMBA

About the target group

APIFED and Ecotrading conducted project activities in several communities, including Assok, Mboutokong, Ze, Zoebefam, Bemba, Nkole'nyeng, Melen Bulu, Nyabibete, Efoulan, Akom and Ba'ka. Out of the total of 25,000 people living in the region, 4000 people (~16%) belong to the Ba'ka community. A total of 285 people (61% women, 22% Ba'ka), participated in training sessions to learn how to collect, conserve, and process NTFPs in sustainable and effective ways, also including knowledge about fair measurement practices and pricing.

The local populations in the Djoum-Mintom-Ngoyla region faced various technical challenges in the exploitation of NTFPs. Although the projects were not exclusively focused on women, many women ended up taking on prominent roles. It appeared that women in the community exhibited greater resilience in dealing with the less structured exploitation of NTFPs, as they saw this activity as an opportunity to provide food and financial resources for their families, at the same time it is a source of economic autonomy for them[4].

This underscores the importance of the role of women in the production and sale of NTFPs in the region. Women made up around 8000 of the 13,500 individuals directly and indirectly impacted by the project. Collected accounts emphasise the significance of the activity for women, stressing that it serves as a vital daily source of income. This financial autonomy allows them to address challenges independently, reducing dependence on men for accessing necessary resources, particularly during the peak period of NTFP production and sales (July to January).

How the project supported the target group

APIFED concentrated on training and organizing communities, particularly Indigenous people, and women, regarding sustainable collection and processing of NTFPs through cooperatives. This initiative not only enhanced the technical skills of these communities but also facilitated more efficient natural resource management.

On the demand side, Ecotrading successfully developed, improved, and facilitated market access for the commercialisation of NTFPs. Their focus was on creating branding and marketing strategies to sell these products in both domestic and international markets. This not only contributed to expanding the presence of these products in markets but also generated economic opportunities for the collector communities. The valuation and promotion of these products in the market were crucial for strengthening sustainability and empowerment initiatives for these groups.

Technical and professional training aimed to enhance skills related to the sustainable collection, conservation, and processing of NTFPs. This improved the efficiency of collection and processing, as well as empowering women to play key roles in the NTFP value chain.

As a key outcome of the technical and professional training for these traditional communities, two cooperatives were established; The Cooperative des filles Ba'ka et Bantou pour la valorisation des PFNL autor de la reserve forestière du Dja, entirely led by women (with 55% from the Ba'ka community and 44% from Bantu), located in Djoum; and the Société Coopérative des Exploitants des PFNL de Mintom. Both cooperatives serve as hubs for the production, storage, and processing of NTFPs. They also facilitated the connection between collectors and buyers who valued sustainable, careful production.

The projects also addressed awareness and gender equity issues, encouraging fair measurement and pricing practices. This ensured that women involved in the production and sale of NTFPs received adequate recognition and fair remuneration.


Photo: Edouard TAMBA

[4] Promoting gender equity and forest conservation through enhancing NTFP value chains - Lessons from the Ba'ka project in Cameroon

Taï Landscape

Côte d'Ivoire
Sector: Cocoa

About the project

The Taï Forest Collective Action Platform addressed the significant decline in forest cover in Côte d'Ivoire, which had reduced from 16 million hectares in the 1960s to 2.97 million hectares in 2021. The Taï National Park (TNP) stood as the country's largest remaining area of intact primary forest, facing threats from cocoa, oil palm, and rubber production. The project aimed to counteract deforestation by engaging local actors, overcoming challenges related to complex land tenure systems, and fostering collaboration between private companies and smallholder farmers.

The Taï Forest landscape faced heightened ecological and social pressures due to increased cocoa, oil palm, and rubber production. The complex tenure system left local farmers with limited rights over their land, leading to encroachment into protected forests and conflicts with forestry administration. These challenges created a difficult environment for private companies in the cocoa, oil palm, and rubber sectors, hindering their efforts to implement sustainability commitments and impacting the livelihoods of local communities.

Partnerships between Mondelēz, a multinational cocoa processing company, and the NGO IMPACTUM formed the backbone of the Taï Landscape Platform (TLP). The TLP aimed to create an enabling environment for conservation and restoration of agricultural hotspot areas within the San Pedro Region around the Taï Forest landscape. Through collective action, the TLP sought to align the efforts of agribusinesses, NGOs, and local communities with common principles to guide their commitment to biodiversity conservation, forest restoration, and sustainable farming.

To achieve its objectives, the TLP implemented various strategies, including regenerative agricultural activities, Environmental and Social Management Systems (ESMSs), and a payment for ecosystem services (PES) model. These measures involved capacity building for women farmers, governance systems for land use planning and stakeholder engagement, and the introduction of sustainable land use plans. The TLP successfully engaged and trained more than 3500 participants, creating green jobs, and fostering an environment that aligned with corporate sustainability targets and consumer demands for deforestation-free cocoa.

Photo: Envato

About the target group

Within this challenging landscape, the TLP implemented targeted strategies to address gender barriers and promote inclusion. More than 20 women were actively involved in establishing and managing tree nursery enterprises. These enterprises focused on producing and selling shade tree seedlings for species such as mahogany and acacia. Notably, these women-led initiatives resulted in the maintenance and management of three nursery sites with a remarkable production capacity exceeding 100,000 seedlings. These seedlings, subsequently sold to Mondelēz for distribution to farmers, significantly contributed to the restoration and agroforestry efforts in the region.

Additionally, women formed Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). Over the course of the project, these associations empowered women to make regular contributions, resulting in a shared pool capable of providing low-interest loans up to three times their contributions after three months. This financial empowerment not only supported on- and off-farm diversification but also enhanced the resilience of farming households to the impacts of climate change. Approximately 30% of the 6000 people trained by IMPACTUM were women from forest fringe communities, marking a significant stride toward gender inclusivity in environmental initiatives.

The TLP strategically concentrated efforts in the San Pedro Region, identified as a critical information hotspot area, and one characterised by significant deforestation rates. In response to this environmental urgency, the TLP collaborated with local communities, NGOs, and private companies to implement targeted conservation and restoration activities.

The quantitative impact of these initiatives was substantial. The distribution and planting of 439,000 tree seedlings played a pivotal role in restoring over 100 hectares of degraded land and more than 3000 hectares of farmland through agroforestry practices. Furthermore, the TLP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Water and Forests, trained 100 community members to be members of forest protection squads. These squads, primarily comprising young people, actively engaged in forest surveillance, signing letters of intent committing to protect and monitor forests against encroachment. This hands-on involvement demonstrated a tangible link between gender-inclusive initiatives and the environmental well-being of the hotspot area.

The TLP's commitment to addressing gender disparities and promoting inclusion resulted in quantifiable impacts on reforestation and agroforestry, as well as showcasing the crucial link between gender-inclusive initiatives and the positive transformation of a designated hotspot area facing significant environmental challenges.

How the project supported the target group

The collective action platform, formed through the collaboration of IMPACTUM, Olam, and Mondelēz, emerged as a dynamic force in the restoration of the Taï Forest landscape in Côte d'Ivoire. In response to the identified gender barriers and collective challenges, the project strategically focused on a comprehensive strategy to empower the target group, particularly women, and address environmental concerns simultaneously.

As part of this initiative, 20 women from diverse communities were provided with specialised training, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to establish and manage tree nursery enterprises. These enterprises became instrumental in the production and distribution of more than 100,000 shade tree seedlings. The significance of this impact extended beyond mere environmental restoration; it empowered these women economically, offering them a sustainable source of income through their active participation in the agroforestry value chain.

The proceeds generated from the sale of seedlings were strategically reinvested in financing village associations, creating a cascading effect of empowerment within the community. By fostering financial autonomy through these associations, the project successfully addressed addressing collective barriers and promoted a sustainable model of community support.

Recognising the importance of knowledge dissemination, the project extended its impact by providing comprehensive capacity-building sessions on the new forest code. This educational initiative engaged women along the entire value chain. This strategic approach aimed at fostering a holistic understanding of the forest code, empowering women with the knowledge to actively participate in decision-making processes related to forest management and conservation.

Through a combination of entrepreneurship, financial support, and knowledge dissemination, the project aimed to create a lasting impact on the lives of the women involved, their communities, and the overall ecological health of the Taï Forest landscape.

Conclusion

P4F has supported and implemented diverse and significant examples of sustainable development and inclusive business practices across Central, East, and West Africa, South East Asia, and Latin America. The programme has prioritised a rigorous MEL methodology, ensuring the veracity of its impacts and actively seeking opportunities for improvement and learning.

Throughout this exploration, several key lessons emerge, exemplified by the diverse array of projects under the P4F umbrella, especially in some aspects of concerning GESI:

i) economic empowerment, ii) gender empowerment/ balance, iii) capacity building, and iv) inclusion of indigenous communities.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

All initiatives have presented activities and strategies aimed at contributing to the economic empowerment of communities, across Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Indonesia, Brazil, and Peru. Securing the engagement of anchor companies to guarantee the purchase of a particular commodity has been key to this element. For example, community members, particularly women, in Indonesia were motivated to join the NTFP value chain after the securing of purchase agreements with Forestwise, as they could continue with their jobs and have additional income when the illipe nut season starts. This is also the case of Amarumayu in Peru, which is anchored by a major company, Aje, and negotiated agreements with 22 communities. UGACOF, meanwhile, assumed all coffee processing costs and associated risks, which provides a great support to smallholders engaged in coffee production.

GENDER EMPOWERMENT AND BALANCE

Many initiatives have engaged in activities that ensure a gender balance both in governance and in the value chain. This is the case of Lush-Alumalum partnership in northern Uganda, where women were actively encouraged to take on farming leaderships roles and land ownership, contributing to their autonomy. In the RLU project, a governance policy was established stipulating 30% attendance by women in all community activities, and TLP also saw targets established for women's participation in the value chain. The She Leads programme balanced gender empowerment with capacity building, and taught women to delegate tasks to a team and build their own self-perception as leaders.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building was key in all initiatives and is crucial for social inclusion, since it provides the means for communities to have autonomy over the activity they are engaged in. In the illipe nut value chain, a significant shift in the traditional smoking methods to soaking and sun-drying techniques was crucial to improving communities' health. In the Superfoods for Forest Protection project, the communities have received training on sustainable harvesting of aguaje and camu camu.

INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Amarumayu, Ba'ka and She Leads projects saw specific strategies and activities designed to effectively engage with Indigenous people, who can often be particularly vulnerable to discrimination, as well as the effects of climate change. By ensuring inclusion of different Indigenous communities, it is possible to recognise traditional learning and combine with business techniques to support businesses that are in accordance with natural cycles and social needs.

Social inclusion does not always come naturally in a community, or in a multi-stakeholder project. There needs to be active willingness and measures to bridge the empowerment gap that can exist for marginalised groups – and embracing this diversity is key to combatting climate change at all levels.

These P4F-supported projects underscore the importance of collaboration, inclusivity, and innovation in promoting sustainable development and forest conservation. By leveraging partnerships between governments, private sector entities, and local communities, the P4F programme exemplifies a holistic approach to addressing complex socio-environmental challenges while fostering economic growth and social equity. Through continued learning and adaptation, these initiatives offer valuable lessons for advancing inclusive business models and achieving lasting impact in forest landscapes worldwide. The integration of GESI principles across these projects can strengthen the socio-economic fabric of forest-dependent communities and bring about a more inclusive approach to conservation and development.

This case study was developed by Partnerships for Forests in Latin America, in collaboration with the Monitoring and Evaluation and External Relations and Knowledge global teams

Marcio Sztutman
Regional Director

Iara Basso
Regional Manager

Monica Souza
Results Manager

Caroline Américo
Investment Associate

Isabelle Smith
Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

Isabella Granero
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Gen McFalls
External Relations and Learning Manager

Design
Estúdio Utópika

Special thanks to the Monitoring Evaluation and Learning team

Kidist Darsema
East Africa

Michael Sasu
West and Central Africa

Irhammaula Ario
Sout East Asia

Partnerships for Forests

UK Government

Palladium
MAKE IT POSSIBLE

SYSTEMIQ