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# Making knowledge work for people and forests

Tropenbos International  
Network Strategy  
2023-2027



An aerial photograph showing a vast tropical landscape. The majority of the area is covered in dense, lush green forest. Interspersed within the forest are several rectangular patches of cleared land, appearing as lighter brown or tan colors, which are likely used for agriculture. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down on the terrain.

By 2030, we will double our impact. We want to improve the governance and management of at least 20 million hectares of tropical forested landscapes. This will benefit the livelihoods of at least five million people, while also contributing to global climate and biodiversity objectives.



An aerial photograph of a vast, dense tropical forest. The canopy is a mix of various shades of green, with some darker patches indicating deeper forest or different tree species. A white, rounded rectangular text box is positioned on the right side of the image, containing text about Tropenbos International. The forest extends to the horizon under a clear sky.

### WHY WE EXIST — For thriving and climate-resilient landscapes

Tropical forests are vital for life on earth. Yet they are under enormous pressure. Unsustainable land-use practices are rapidly transforming landscapes, leaving them devoid of forests and trees. This has lasting effects on biodiversity, the climate, and the more than 1 billion people who rely on forests for their livelihoods. Tropenbos International aims to reverse this trend. We envision a future with thriving and climate-resilient landscapes across the dry and humid tropics. In those landscapes, land is used sustainably, and local communities exercise their rights and participate equitably in decision-making concerning the future of the places they inhabit.

### OUR PURPOSE — Making knowledge work for people and forests

All too often, decisions that affect forested landscapes are made without involving the people who live there, and with limited knowledge of the long-term consequences for people, biodiversity and the climate. This is a great risk. We therefore combine diverse knowledge systems to develop and apply locally owned, evidence-based solutions for thriving and climate-resilient landscapes. We seek to establish more inclusive and equitable governance and management of forests and trees in three impact areas: participatory forest and landscape restoration; community forest management and conservation; and diversified production systems. Across these impact areas, we pay particular attention to gender equality and youth engagement, financial capacities and linkages, and locally responsive policies. These themes support progress in each impact area.

### WHO WE ARE — A global network of local organizations

Over the last 30 years, we have evolved into a global network of partners across the dry and humid tropics, with a secretariat in the Netherlands. Each partner is deeply embedded in one or more landscapes, with a long history of working with stakeholders to develop locally owned solutions to landscape-specific challenges. Moreover, each partner has well-established relationships with local and national governments, which allow them to use this landscape experience to inform regulations and policies. As a network, we learn from each other. Together — and in partnership with other organizations and networks — we contribute to better international policies and practices that affect landscapes.





## Vision and mission

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TBI **envisions** a future in which local people equitably benefit from the sustainable use of forests in thriving and climate resilient landscapes.

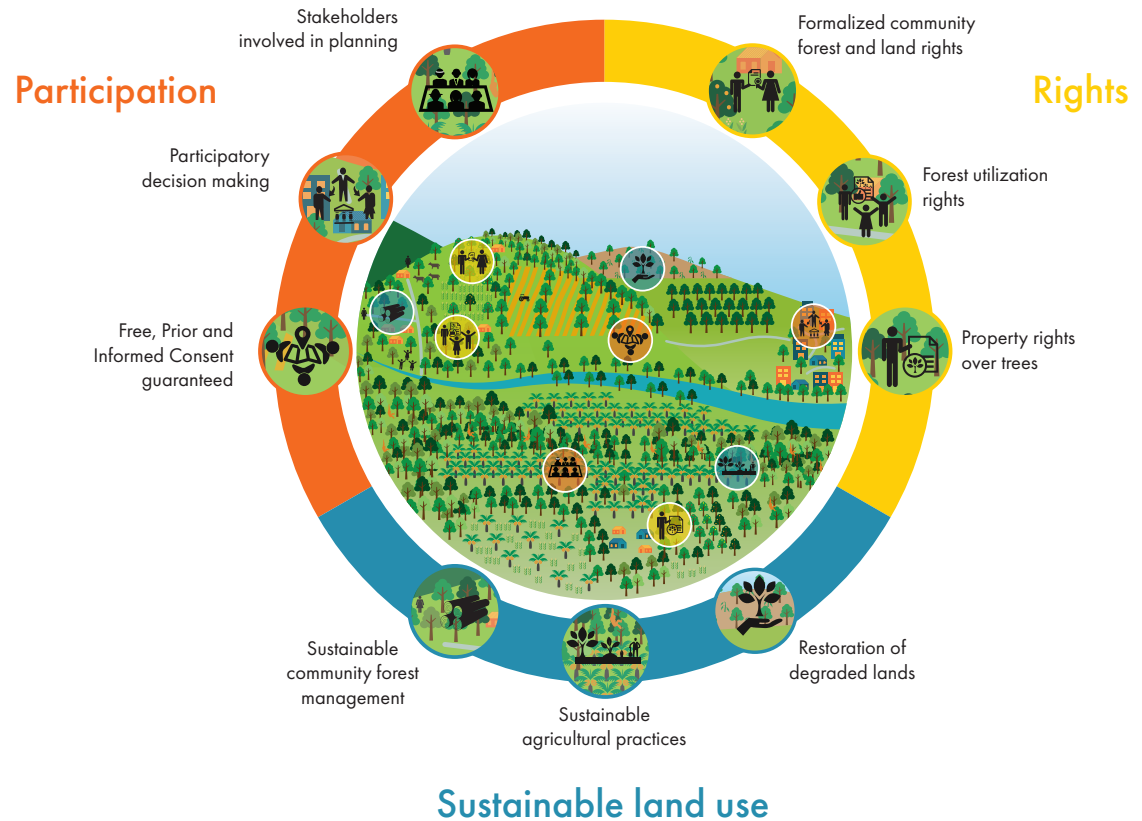
It is our **mission** to make knowledge work for people and forests – to help develop and apply locally-owned, evidence-based solutions that improve the inclusive and equitable governance and management of forested landscapes in the tropics, for the benefit of local sustainable development, biodiversity and our climate.

*By 2030, we will double our impact. We want to improve the governance and management of at least 20 million hectares of tropical forested landscapes. This will benefit the livelihoods of at least five million people, while also contributing to global climate and biodiversity objectives.*

## How we envision a thriving and climate resilient landscapes

In thriving and climate resilient landscapes:

- land is used **sustainably** in order to support livelihoods, protect natural resources, and mitigate and adapt to climate change;
- local communities exercise clear **rights** over land and forests;
- local communities **participate** equitably in decision making about the landscape where they live.

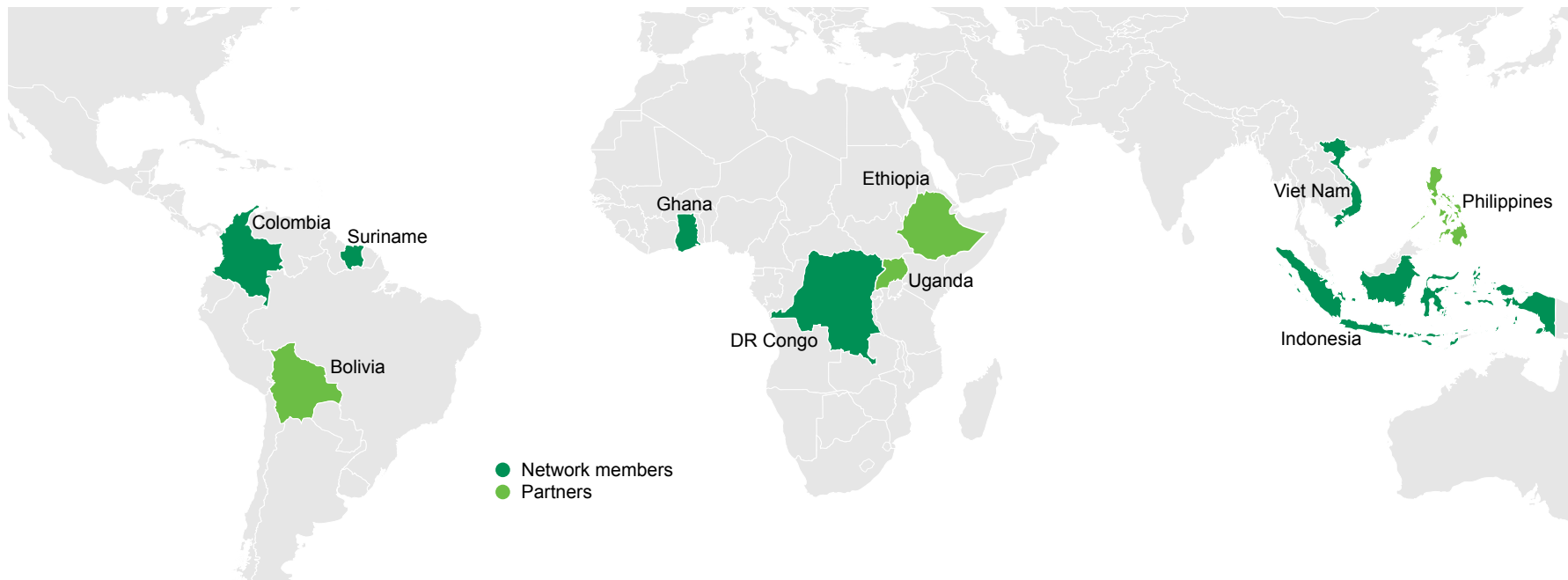


## WHERE WE WORK

### In frontier landscapes around the world

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We work in forested and woodland areas in Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia and Suriname), Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda) and Southeast Asia (Indonesia, the Philippines and Viet Nam). We focus on landscapes at the frontier between forests and agriculture. It is in these frontier landscapes where the local and global challenges of poverty, climate change and biodiversity loss converge, and where solutions need to be found.





A man in a light-colored shirt and dark pants is standing in a lush green forest. He is holding a machete and cutting a large, round, orange gourd that is hanging from a tree branch. The background is filled with dense tropical foliage and trees.

## WHO WE WORK WITH

### Local leadership for global impact

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Within landscapes, Tropenbos International partner organizations work in close association with the people who depend on forests for their livelihoods, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, small businesses and smallholder farmers. Their leadership is crucial to achieve lasting change.

Creating thriving and climate resilient landscapes that fulfill the needs of local communities also requires close engagement with a range of stakeholders whose actions and decisions influence landscapes: businesses, researchers, civil society organisations, decision makers and other key stakeholders in and around forested landscapes, at the local, national and international level.

At the same time, Tropenbos International works in international partnerships, to connect the realities of forest dependent communities with those of the global community. Together we aim to improve delivery of global public goods such as climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation.



### A global network of local organisations

Tropenbos International members form a global network of local organisations that are deeply embedded within landscapes. This provides an unparalleled position to form connections between local and global realities.

### Frontier landscapes

Our focus is on developing locally owned solutions for sustainable development in frontier landscapes, which face a unique set of challenges for people and forests.

### People and forests in thriving landscapes

Tropenbos International focuses on the people who live and work where forests and trees are at stake – working towards a future where communities can equitably benefit from the sustainable use of forests. Our starting point is the rights and interests of the people who depend on forests for their livelihoods, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, small businesses and smallholder farmers.

### Knowledge and collaborative learning

Knowledge is at the heart of Tropenbos International's work. We create, collect and analyse evidence from diverse knowledge systems and engage stakeholders in evidence-based dialogue and collaborative learning in order to drive transformative change towards thriving and climate resilient landscapes.

### Scaling through knowledge sharing and partnerships

We scale up our impact by influencing and forming partnerships with others, utilising our strong relationships and understanding of change processes. We bring diverse knowledge and experiences forward in order to influence global discourses, and we work within landscapes to interpret how global developments can impact the situation on the ground. We form partnerships with other organisations that have the reach or the expertise to scale up our impact.



## Tropenbos International's unique contribution

We deliver practical, locally owned solutions for transformative change towards thriving and climate resilient landscapes using a collaborative approach that integrates different knowledge systems, interests and rights.

Our approach involves engaging stakeholders in evidence-based dialogue to inform and bolster inclusive and equitable governance, sustainable practices and responsible business and finance, while strengthening their capacities and facilitating collaborative learning to spur collective action.



## What we deliver

Evidence of locally owned solutions for thriving and resilient landscapes and ways to scale them.

Increased capacity, collaborative learning and broad engagement in collective action.

Relevant and evidence-based knowledge to inform decision makers and landscape stakeholders.

Policy recommendations for local, national and international action.



## WHAT WE DO

### Six steps to lasting change

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The landscape approach is our starting point. We facilitate evidence-based dialogue, collaborative learning and collective action among landscape stakeholders. From there, we inform and influence policies and practices at a range of levels. We work closely with communities, civil society organizations, researchers, businesses, and governments.

Our approach centers on landscapes and landscape actors, as this is where change needs to happen. We engage in international policy, product value chains and global financing arrangements, as far as this is instrumental in achieving landscape level impacts.



**Understand:** We gather and analyze evidence about landscape challenges and their solutions, by combining local and scientific knowledge.



**Show what works:** We co-create, test and demonstrate locally owned solutions, such as equitable governance arrangements, and innovative business models and financial mechanisms.



**Enable stakeholders:** We strengthen local stakeholders' capacity for sustainable practices, equitable governance, and better landscape management.



**Connect:** We connect stakeholders within and beyond landscapes, to facilitate dialogue, learning, collaboration and collective action.



**Influence:** We influence governments and companies to adopt policies and practices that support thriving and climate-resilient landscapes.



**Leverage:** We form partnerships with other organizations that complement our capacities, and help us scale up solutions for thriving and climate-resilient landscapes.





## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### Key impact areas

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By 2030, we will double our impact. We want to improve the governance and management of at least 20 million hectares of tropical forested landscapes. This will benefit the livelihoods of at least five million people, while also contributing to global climate and biodiversity objectives.

We seek to realize this objective using an integrated landscape approach in three interrelated impact areas, each of which contributes to locally owned solutions for sustainable management of forests and trees in frontier landscapes.

#### The landscape approach

An integrated landscape approach underpins all of TBI's work. Landscape approaches have the potential to become a priority implementation mechanism that connects local and global ambitions to realise integrated climate, conservation and development goals, and are applicable to a wide range of natural resource governance and management challenges, such as peatland restoration, fire management and others.

#### We will:

- *provide proof of concept of integrated landscape approaches as described in this strategy, and promote their adoption by communities, businesses, civil society and decision-makers.*





## Community forest management and conservation

It is our ambition that by 2030, internal governance measures and policies instituted by governments have firmly established inclusiveness and equitability in the governance and management of community managed forests and community-led conservation initiatives.

### We will:

- promote recognized access to land and resources by communities, support internal governance strengthening efforts, and promote effective participation in decision making processes;
- work with local communities and smallholders to develop locally owned solutions to manage forests, food crops and trees according to their rights, aspirations and needs.







## Participatory forest and landscape restoration

It is our ambition that by 2030, global restoration efforts have embraced bottom-up participatory productive restoration models, and that at least 50% of actual restoration results from bottom-up restoration initiatives. We want to see wide-scale landscape restoration deliver improved livelihoods and economic opportunities for local communities around the tropics.

### We will:

- *collaborate with communities to develop bottom-up restoration initiatives in degraded forest and dry land areas, and demonstrate their effectiveness.*





## Diversified production systems

It is our ambition that by 2030, production models for agrocommodities and forest products no longer drive deforestation and biodiversity loss, and provide food security and diversified livelihoods for smallholders. Agroforestry and other diversified production models can help to meet these goals, producing sustainable commodities for the market while delivering climate and biodiversity services.

In 'forest risk' agrocommodity producing landscapes we will:

- *together with communities and stakeholders, support the development of smallholder models that prevent deforestation, integrate trees on farms (agroforestry) and in the landscape, and safeguard food security;*
- *influence the development of policies that incentivise the establishment of landscape-wide standards for sustainable and inclusive commodity production, in particular cocoa, palm oil, coffee and timber.*





# Common themes

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Three thematic areas cut across each of the impact areas, as each of them provide important conditions for progress: gender and youth, local financial capacities and linkages, and locally responsive policies.

## Gender and youth

For any intervention to be sustainable in the long term it is imperative that young people and people of all genders can participate on equal terms in the design and implementation of climate resilient landscape solutions. These solutions should reflect their interests, and they should be able to share equitably in the benefits.

### We will:

- *mainstream gender-responsive and gender transformative action in all our activities and programmes;*
- *carry out specific youth strategies in each of our programmes.*

## Local financial capacities and linkages

It is increasingly recognized that a greater amount of public and private finance must flow into landscapes and landscape approaches, in order to meet the many ambitious international climate and biodiversity targets that have been set. More must also be done to ensure finance reaches the grass-roots level. Patterns of investment are crucial in steering decisions that have strong effects on landscapes and their people. It is our ambition that more of these funds end up in the hands of local people who pursue climate resilient agroforestry systems for food production, restoration and community forestry, so that their businesses can compete in the market on equal terms. This requires that both global and local financial institutions across tropical landscapes offer a variety of suitable financial products that stimulate smallholder driven and climate resilient forest and tree-based businesses.

### We will:

- *contribute to mechanisms that increase investment in smallholder driven sustainable agrocommodity production models, forest and landscape restoration and community forest management;*
- *work with the financial sector to design innovative and locally adapted financial mechanisms that remove barriers and increase smallholder access to finance.*

## Locally responsive policies

We aim for national and international policy frameworks that have positive impacts on climate resilient landscapes and reflect the needs and interests of local people, such as next generation Nationally Determined Contributions, biodiversity policies and SDGs. In particular, it is our ambition that these policies have duly recognized locally led landscape approaches as valid strategies to achieve climate, biodiversity and development goals, and have operationalised strategies in support of such approaches.

### We will:

- *engage decision makers to propose and evaluate policies and regulatory action that support practical solutions for transformative change towards thriving and climate resilient landscapes, locally, nationally and internationally;*
- *partner with advocacy NGOs, science for policy institutes and networks to influence selected international policy making processes with a significant potential impact on landscapes.*





Tropenbos International in action

## **Sustainable community forest management in indigenous territories, Bolivia**

Since the 1990s, Bolivia's Indigenous people have had formal rights to large parts of the country's forests. The 1996 Forestry Law allowed for commercial logging of timber from these forests. In response, Indigenous communities started to strengthen their technical capacities for timber harvesting and forest management planning. However, the 1996 law allowed only the use of large-scale industrial technologies for logging, processing and transportation. This greatly limited Indigenous people's opportunities to engage in commercial forest management.

The Instituto Boliviano de Investigación Forestal (IBIF), TBI's partner in Bolivia, evaluated traditional forms of community forest management, coupled with affordable and easy-to-use technologies. Based on this work, they lobbied the Ministry of the Environment and Water for modifications to the Forestry Law. This campaign resulted in a new decree that allows the use of low-cost technologies, such as chainsaws with portable attachments, within forest management areas. This reduced local communities' dependence on commercial timber companies and increased their ability to earn income locally, while reducing negative environmental impacts.

Alongside its research and lobby activities, IBIF has been giving training courses and workshops in indigenous territories; for example, to increase the capacity of women and youth to develop forest-related business proposals. They have helped transfer traditional forest management knowledge from older to younger generations, and provided leadership courses to young people, empowering them to participate in the governance and sustainable management of indigenous territories.





Tropenbos International in action

## Participatory productive restoration in the Solano landscape, Colombia

Large areas of the Solano landscape in the Colombian Amazon are degraded, mainly due to cattle ranching by local peasants. The forests within indigenous territories are relatively well preserved, but peasants often encroach on these areas, leading to conflicts with Indigenous people. We have been bringing together Indigenous people and peasants to find solutions and establish intercultural agreements for managing the territories. These agreements are mostly related to the care of water bodies, the use and conservation of trees, and the restoration of degraded areas.

The restoration initiatives that we support are based on the concept of participatory productive restoration. Rather than conventional, government-led restoration — which uses only a few fast-growing tree species — the participatory approach is led by the local communities themselves, and uses up to 40 species. All species are native to the area, and are identified based on Indigenous people's intricate understanding of the forest and the needs of the communities. The trees can be used for a wide range of purposes. They decrease people's vulnerability to the effects of climate change, and contribute to a healthier and more resilient ecosystem.

We have enabled families — from both indigenous and peasant communities — to start restoring degraded lands, while decreasing social tensions along the way. We then used successful examples of this participatory productive restoration to show others that it works. As a result, the approach has been included in the programmes of other civil society organizations working in similar contexts, as well as in the spatial plans of the Solano municipal government. This is providing the leverage needed to achieve impact at larger scales. Participatory productive restoration has started taking root as a locally owned solution for thriving and climate-resilient landscapes.





Tropenbos International in action

## Community forest management in DR Congo

Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) has the largest forest area in Africa, but deforestation rates have doubled during the last decade. Chiefs and local elites have been finding ways to sell off large tracts of forest to external parties, without consulting the local communities that depend on those forests. Young people have been moving to cities in desperate attempts to make a living.

In response to these challenges, we have been supporting local communities by enabling them to apply for community forest concessions. These concessions give a community the formal right to sustainably exploit forest resources on their own terms. All decisions regarding forest management are made by democratically elected community forest committees, and are in line with a sustainable forest management plan. Community forest concessions have proven to be an effective local solution to prevent deforestation by external actors.

Applying for a concession involves many administrative steps, and we are influencing the provincial government to adopt procedures to accelerate the formalization of community rights. But formalizing rights is only the beginning. Poverty levels remain extremely high, especially among shifting cultivators. To improve local livelihoods, we promote cocoa-based agroforestry. We do this, among others, by connecting shifting cultivators to agroforestry farmers from other areas, so they can exchange knowledge and skills. The combination of secure rights and better income-earning opportunities is providing new hope, and giving young people a reason to stay.





Tropenbos International in action

## Sustainable cocoa agroforestry in Ghana

Ghana is one of the world's main cocoa producing countries. Cocoa is traditionally grown in agroforestry systems, where trees provide shade and protection. In recent decades, however, farmers increasingly switched to growing cocoa in monocultures; this had negative effects on long-term production levels and farmers' resilience in the face of climate change. We are trying to stop this trend, by supporting local farmers to bring back diversity.

We collect evidence to better understand and communicate the multiple benefits of cocoa agroforestry. Based on this, we enable smallholders — women farmers in particular — to develop their own locally owned solutions that support more resilient livelihoods. This includes providing training, establishing saving groups, and helping farmers to voice their concerns with companies and policy makers. Moreover, we influence the national government to develop policy incentives for sustainable, deforestation-free cocoa agroforestry and to incorporate agroforestry in its climate change plans and ambitions. While doing so, we make sure to document the lessons learned.

Nationally, we have been a stable and trusted partner for NGOs, research organizations and the government for more than 20 years. Internationally, we have been sharing our experiences with other organizations, and were able to directly inform EU legislation on deforestation-free value chains. In these ways, we have championed diversity on cocoa farms, both in Ghana and beyond.





Tropenbos International in action

## Peatland restoration for fire prevention in Ketapang, Indonesia

In Indonesia, recurring peatland fires are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, and have devastating effects on biodiversity, health and the economy. Every year, Ketapang Regency in West Kalimantan is among the worst-hit areas; it has large areas of drained peat, which is highly flammable. Seeing that the fires were becoming increasingly difficult to control, the Ketapang local government asked us to help develop a plan for fire prevention.

The most effective approach to fire prevention is to rewet the drained peatlands. However, this may decrease the productivity of existing agriculture practices, and oil palm companies and farmers were therefore not in favour of this option. To create more momentum for peatland restoration, we connected with the national Peatland and Mangrove Restoration Agency, which then designated the Ketapang peatland as a priority restoration area. We also convened a regency-level fire prevention task force, connecting government agencies, communities, companies and NGOs. Through the task force, we increased stakeholders' awareness of the benefits of rewetting peatland, and the ways in which agriculture could be adapted to the resulting humid conditions. The idea started gaining traction. Eventually, the various stakeholders embraced a joint vision for the landscape that included peatland restoration.

The joint vision became the basis for a range of activities, many of which are ongoing. We work with communities, companies and financial institutions to support a transition to peat swamp forest protection and to agricultural practices that are adapted to the humid peatland environment. Through multi-stakeholder processes, we influence the regency government's plans and regulations related to fire prevention, paying particular attention to locally owned solutions. We show that these solutions work, in order to inspire other districts to follow suit.





Tropenbos International in action

## Women-led agroforestry for the restoration of degraded lands in Viet Nam

The expansion of coffee monocultures on the slopes of the Central Highlands of Viet Nam has resulted in severe land degradation. But all is not lost. Planting trees in mixed agroforestry systems can regenerate the soil, restore the water cycle, and provide smallholders with a sustainable income. Women in communities of ethnic minorities can play a leading role in this, as they are traditionally the ones who plant and take care of trees in home gardens.

To understand the possibilities for women-led restoration, we worked with women and a local university to identify agroforestry models that are suitable to local conditions and based on the traditions of women farmers. We were then able to show the benefits of diverse agroforestry, influencing the government's agricultural department to formally endorse a land-use model that combines coffee with indigenous fruit and timber tree species. This made it possible for us to connect with extension agencies and provide joint training, focusing on female-led households. For the extension officers, this focus on women was new. It opened their eyes. Seeing how the training caught on, they decided to extend the approach to other communities as well.

By actively engaging government agencies, we managed to change their approach to extension services. This was key to leveraging impact. More needs to be done, however. We aim to increase the economic feasibility of agroforestry and integrate locally owned restoration into spatial plans and regulations. To achieve this, we are collaborating closely with universities, farmer organizations and relevant government agencies, making it a joint effort from the start. Experience has shown that this greatly increases the likelihood of success.





Tropenbos International in action

## Tribal youth engage in the governance of forests in Suriname

The Saamaka Maroons are one of six tribal peoples in Suriname. They are descendants of enslaved people of African descent who freed themselves and established communities deep in the rainforest, where they established their own territory. The national Parliament of Suriname is expected to approve a new law that provides collective land rights to all Indigenous and tribal people, including the Saamaka. This should enable them to benefit more from the sustainable management of their forests, and protect them against appropriation by outsiders.

The new law will come with responsibilities. The Saamaka tribe, which consists of 12 clans spread over 75 villages in two districts, will need to establish a legal entity and develop sustainable forest management plans. We have been supporting the Saamaka with meeting these requirements. As a first step, we facilitated a process of internal deliberations, in order to develop a joint vision for their territory. We also started working with Saamaka youth, increasing their understanding and awareness of traditional decision-making processes, enabling them to get actively involved in the territory's governance, and developing ideas for sustainable income generation to provide economic opportunities for young people within the territory. Together with the Saamaka, we have been influencing the national government, advocating for a speedy approval of the new law. The objective is that the Saamaka themselves remain in the driver's seat, with a key role for the younger generations. After all, it is the young people who will shape the future of their territory and its forest resources.v





Tropenbos International in action

## Policy frameworks for restoration and climate action in Ethiopia and Bolivia

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We typically work from the bottom up — starting in focus landscapes. But sometimes there are opportunities to start from the top, working directly with national governments to develop policy frameworks that can leverage support for thriving and climate-resilient landscape solutions.

TBI's partner in Ethiopia, the Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA), was instrumental in the truly inclusive development of the country's first national drylands restoration strategy. Initial studies highlighted the potential contribution of dryland restoration to improving local livelihoods and mitigating climate change. Despite the ongoing armed conflict in the Tigray Region, PENHA managed to bring together key stakeholders at national and regional levels to develop a shared vision, and task teams worked tirelessly to finalize the strategy in only 18 months. The Ministry of Agriculture endorsed the strategy in 2022, and praised the TBI programme for its efforts. The strategy aligns the various government levels and sectors, and focuses attention on restoration efforts that benefit local people.

TBI's partner in Bolivia, the Instituto Boliviano de Investigación Forestal (IBIF), conducted an evaluation of the country's first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), in which the government set out its plans to achieve climate change mitigation and adaptation goals. The evaluation increased the understanding of the ways in which landscape management strategies could be integrated into the NDC. And the work did not go unnoticed. The government recognized IBIF's expertise, and requested further assistance. IBIF then became actively involved in revising the NDC, by including wildfire prevention as an explicit ambition, among other changes. In this way they were able to directly influence government policy, providing a firm basis for landscape-level initiatives.





Tropenbos International in action

## EU policies to reduce deforestation

A significant portion of global deforestation is the result of the European consumption of commodities produced in the tropics, such as soy, cocoa and palm oil. The EU has therefore been working on developing a regulation to prevent commodities sold in Europe from being produced at the expense of natural forests. This can be achieved by requiring companies to produce a due diligence statement showing that their supply chains are not contributing to the destruction of forests and are produced according to national laws, before they can sell their products on the EU market.

This EU-wide regulation can help to reduce the pressure on natural forests. But it also brings risks. To fulfil their due diligence requirements, companies may put a disproportionate burden on the smallholders that produce agrocommodities, or they may simply push smallholders out of the market. To draw attention to this risk, we connected with five other NGOs in a smallholder coalition. Together we lobbied the EU to consider the regulation's effects on smallholders, and to provide support measures in producing countries to comply with the regulation's requirements, in order to ensure a true transition on the ground. Eventually, the European Parliament adopted nearly all the ideas put forward by the coalition.

In December 2022, the European Parliament and Council reached political agreement on a final version of the regulation. Although the regulation does not include explicit requirements to protect smallholders, it does acknowledge the need for partnerships with producing countries to promote sustainable production practices through capacity building and technical assistance, among other initiatives. We continue to work with our partners in the smallholder coalition to ensure that these partnerships support a true transition toward deforestation-free value chains, while contributing to the resilient livelihoods of smallholders.





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