RAINFOREST FOUNDATION UK

SECURING LANDS, SUSTAINING LIVES



COMMUNITY-BASED REAL-TIME MONITORING

IN THE CONGO BASIN AND AMAZON RAINFORESTS

FEBRUARY 2017

FORESTLINK

BACKGROUND

In 2015, Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK), in collaboration with its partner organisation in Cameroon, Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER), successfully developed and tested a ground-breaking new system, ForestLink. Building on the success of our MappingForRights programme in the Congo Basin, ForestLink was created as a tool to enable communities anywhere in the world to capture and transmit accurately geo-referenced reports of forest illegalities to authorities and other stakeholders in real-time – even in areas where there is no mobile or internet connectivity.

Information on illegal activity can be collected using a tablet computer or smartphone and then transmitted to an online database via a satellite modem in as little as 20 seconds, for around the same cost as a standard text message. This technology has the potential to transform how forests are governed and monitored, making the location and type of reported infractions much more visible and thus leading to more effective forest protection.

We are now testing and developing ForestLink in real-life enforcement situations in four countries: Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana and Peru, initially supporting some 32 communities and training more than 80 community observers.

INTRODUCTION



The project seeks to:

EMPOWER COMMUNITIES TO MANAGE AND PROTECT FORESTS AND INCREASE THE BENEFITS THEY RECEIVE FROM THIS BY:

- Reducing logging illegalities in targeted areas;
- Increasing logging companies' compliance with social responsibility agreements;
- Building forest communities' capacity to advocate and lobby for their rights;
- Supporting territorial monitoring and defence where communities do have land rights;
- Strengthening community and civil society participation in forest management processes.

PROVIDE POLICY MAKERS AND AUTHORITIES WITH THE INFORMATION NEEDED TO MORE EFFICIENTLY CONTROL FORESTRY ACTIVITIES BY:

- Making patterns of law enforcement more transparent and open to scrutiny;
- Improving the detection of forest illegalities;
- Allowing for more targeted, cost-effective monitoring;
- Sharing best practice with others involved in forest monitoring and control.

RATIONALE



Illegal logging is one of the leading causes of deforestation in the world's rainforests. It occurs in every type of forest, on every continent, threatening nature, wildlife and the livelihoods of the many people worldwide who depend upon forests for survival.

To date, the potential role of forest people in fighting deforestation caused by illegal logging and other activities like mining has been largely overlooked. Independent Forest Monitoring has usually relied on expert groups, usually based abroad or in capital cities. These programmes can be costly and fail to transfer or devolve monitoring skills or resources to local people. Overall, they have not succeeded in bringing about structural improvements in forest governance.

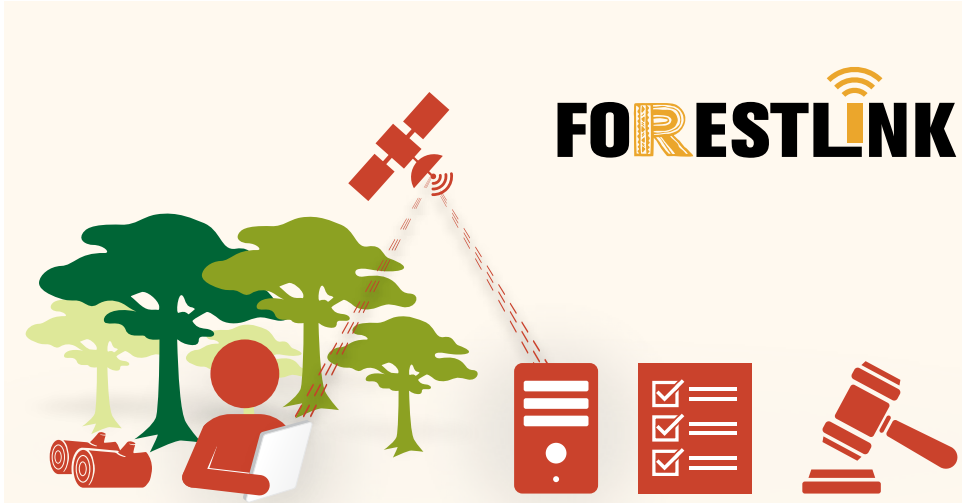
National and local authorities often lack the means and mechanisms needed to supervise and control extractive industries' operations, and local communities lack the means and resources to alert authorities to illegalities. ForestLink offers an innovative new tool with the power to address illegal deforestation while increasing the representation and engagement of local communities.

HOW IT WORKS

The ForestLink system uses a bespoke user-friendly app to allow members of local communities to report any illegal activity they witness in real-time. Downloadable onto most Android devices, the app can easily be customised to community needs; it can use an icon-based system, for example, so that people who are unable to read can participate and report on a range of incidents.

Alerts are sent by trained community monitors via satellite connection to a unique database where non-governmental organisations, indigenous peoples' organisations or government enforcement agencies can access and analyse the data. This then prompts visits to the location of the reported incident to verify it, so that necessary enforcement measures can be taken.





CAMEROON

Approximately 40 per cent of Cameroon is forested. Yet more than three million hectares of Cameroon's forests have been cleared since 1990 – an area approximately the size of Belgium.

Cameroon has participated in numerous international and national processes in recent years, such as the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement, Government and Trade (FLEGT) programme. Despite the country's efforts to promote sustainable forest management, however, much remains to be done.

Working with our local partner FODER, we are selecting and training monitors from six communities, and advocacy leaders in the Littoral and East regions of Cameroon, to test and use real-time monitoring technology. Close cooperation between civil society, government agencies and local communities will help ensure that law enforcement officials can use data collected to take action immediately.



FOREST COVER:
20 million hectares

MAIN THREATS:
Land and resource-related conflicts; logging, mining and infrastructure development

REGIONS WE WORK IN:
Sanaga Maritime (Littoral Region) and Haut-Nyong (East Region)



"ForestLink provides communities and civil society with new tools to monitor changes in forest use and in their environment, to inform decision-makers in real-time so they can take action, and to contribute to the fight against illegal logging."

Rodrigue Ngonzo, Programme Manager, FODER

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

DRC hosts Africa's largest expanse of tropical forest, including roughly 60 per cent of the Congo Basin rainforest – home to flora and fauna found nowhere else on earth; a source of food, medicine and shelter to millions of people. In 2014, it was reported that close to 90 per cent of logging in DRC is illegal,* and there is little immediate prospect of state-led improvements to this situation.

Since December 2015, we have been working with our local partner GASHE (Groupe d'Action pour Sauver l'Homme et son Environnement) to introduce real-time forest monitoring and empower forest peoples in the fight against illegal logging. Supported by a formal agreement with the Provincial Ministry for the Environment, the project will target illegalities in the industrial logging sector as well as the abuse of artisanal logging permits in Équateur Province.

*Chatham House, April 2014



FOREST COVER:
100 million hectares

MAIN THREATS:
Illegal logging; threats to communities' land and resource rights, poor forest governance

REGIONS WE WORK IN:
Équateur Province



"In light of the upsurge in illegal logging, which loses the Congolese state revenue and deprives communities of their rights, the monitoring of forest operations by local communities is a potential solution to the inadequacy of current forest inspectors."

Joseph Bolongo, Real-time Monitoring Project Coordinator, GASHE

GHANA

Although progress has been made in tackling illegal logging in Ghana, it remains a considerable problem both in the domestic market and in export supply chains. Meanwhile, logging companies often fail to fulfil their agreed social responsibilities to communities affected by logging concessions, leaving people without the land, resources or rights they were promised.

Real-time monitoring will enhance community involvement in decision-making and promote increased accountability for logging companies. It will also encourage authorities to incorporate community-generated monitoring data into law enforcement efforts.

With our local partner Friends of the Earth Ghana (FoE-Gh), we are working with local communities, civil society organisations and staff from Ghana's Forestry Commission to minimise illegalities in the Goaso and Nkawie districts initially.



FOREST COVER:
4.5 million hectares

MAIN THREATS:
Logging and threats to community rights

REGIONS WE WORK IN:
Goaso (left) and Nkawie (right) Forest Districts



"Empowering communities through training and the use of technology will enable them to hold logging companies to account and ensure transparency in their operations."

Enoch Ampadu, Real-time Monitoring Project Coordinator, FoE-Gh

PERU

In Peru, indigenous lands face enormous threats from illegal logging and mining. The Madre de Dios region in the southern Peruvian Amazon is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world, but now has more than 3,000 mining concessions in operation.

We are collaborating with the Peruvian Amazon's leading indigenous peoples' organisation, AIDESEP (Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana), to support FENAMAD (Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes), which represents 36 indigenous communities in Madre de Dios. The project aims to strengthen AIDESEP's Veedurías Forestales (Forests Monitoring) programme, which recognises the importance of working with national and local enforcement authorities.

The system will also be adapted to monitor oil spills and integrated into ongoing community monitoring work in the Loreto region of the northern Peruvian Amazon, where major pollution incidents have occurred in recent years.



FOREST COVER:
74 million hectares

MAIN THREATS:
Illegal mining and logging; poor forest governance, infrastructure development and industry

REGIONS WE WORK IN:
Madre de Dios



"We have found illegal mining in areas of communities where indigenous peoples were thought to be secure – that means the threat is even bigger than expected."

Juan Carlos Lara, Real-time Monitoring Project Coordinator, FENAMAD

OUR APPROACH

Our approach differs from that of other organisations in that we recognise the link between human rights and the environment, supporting those at the frontline of rainforest protection. We do this by working with multiple stakeholders (state, private sector, international NGOs and donors) at three interlinking levels:

LOCAL LEVEL:	Tools like ForestLink enable local communities to play an active role in forest management.
NATIONAL LEVEL:	Local partner organisations are involved at every stage of ForestLink's development and implementation. Civil society partners and government agencies receive training and support in using our real-time monitoring technology.
INTERNATIONAL LEVEL:	We work to ensure that community voices are heard and are central to policy decisions, and we collaborate with like-minded organisations promoting rights-based approaches.



FORESTLINK IN THE FUTURE

ForestLink can be scaled up and adapted to monitor a huge range of forest activity; not just illegal logging but also wildlife populations, poaching, human rights abuses and more. Working closely with our local partners, we aim to develop a complete system including data collection, official verification and law enforcement, allowing for effective community-based monitoring.

Planned developments include a two-way communication system that can provide satellite deforestation alerts to community monitors for on-the-ground checks, and the piloting of mobile payment incentives. We will also support the continued technical development of the monitoring system and facilitate a 'Community of Best Practice' on community-based forest management.

More information on ForestLink and how it works can be found online at www.rainforestfoundationuk.org, where you can view the test data from our Cameroon pilot.



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FORESTLINK

PROGRAMME PARTNERS:

Foder – Forêts et Développement Rural – Pour un Monde meilleur

GASHE

FENAMAD – Federacion Nativa del Rio Madre de Dios y Afluentes

AIDESEP – Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana

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