



Story of Change

Civil society organisations are collaborating to safeguard forest reserves in Ghana

Abena Woode, David Young, Mustapha Seidu, Mercy Owusu-Ansah, Doreen Asumah Yeboah, and Daniel Kofi Abu

In response to threats to Ghana's forest reserves, CSOs in the natural resource and environment sector have rallied together to help conserve and protect remaining forests. A central part of their strategy has been the formation of the Civil Society-led Independent Forest Monitoring (CSIFM) platform to coordinate the implementation of independent forest monitoring, lead advocacy, and engage the Forestry Commission and other stakeholders to address identified challenges in forest management.

In 2019, the CSIFM platform was formally [launched](#) by Musah Abu-Juan, Forest Technical Director of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, to harmonize efforts on forest monitoring, to spearhead independent monitoring of Ghana's forest sector, and to contribute the energy and determination of civil society to sector reforms, advocacy and capacity building.

According to Abena Woode, the capacity building expert at NDF, it was necessary to form the CSIFM platform, in order to improve collaboration on forest monitoring to lead to a broader base, create synergy between individual organizations, and build a united front when it comes to advocacy and efforts to influence national policy. The Ghana CSIFM platform includes NDF, Tropenbos Ghana, Civic Response, EcoCare Ghana, Rural Development and Youth Association, Rainforest Alliance, and Friends of the Earth Ghana, and remains open to organizations interested in achieving the objectives of independent forest monitoring.





A log abandoned after being cut illegally. Photo by: NDF

During the launch of the CSIFM platform in 2019, Mercy Owusu Ansah, Executive Director of Tropenbos Ghana, stated that the CSIFM would complement the Forestry Commission's enforcement efforts by providing the Commission with information on infractions for necessary corrective actions to be taken. In an interview for this article with Obed Owusu-Addai, the lead campaigner for EcoCare Ghana, he stated that "NDF and Tropenbos Ghana have been very influential in getting the Forestry Commission to collaborate with CSOs". Adding to that, he further acknowledged that the relationship with the Forestry Commission has improved considerably over the past three years with the latter requiring their district and regional managers to sign onto the CSIFM platform.

It is unprecedented to have government officials in a CSO platform, so this demonstrates the level of trust and cooperation that has been built. Attah Owusu, Technical Director in the Forest Commission, observed that this group of CSOs have supported the objectives of the Commission and the Ghana Wildlife Bill (2020). He reiterated that the ownership of Ghana's forests is vested in its people, and that the Forestry Commission only manages it on their behalf, "therefore collaborating with CSOs on forest monitoring is a step in the right direction."

In 2009, under FLEGT, Ghana and the European Union signed a VPA, to ensure that Ghana produces only legal timber for both the international and local market. In efforts to fully implement this commitment, all parties have increasingly recognized the importance of independent forest monitoring led by civil society. CSOs aim to incorporate the views of diverse stakeholders and promote participation in Ghana's FLEGT process. Tropenbos Ghana and NDF have supported this, by creating a dialogue between all parties to air issues such as social responsibility agreements, royalties and other payments, forest protection, and export of only

legal timber to European countries. "Ultimately, our initiative is to support the Forestry Commission, CSOs and communities, among others, to ensure sustainable management of forest resources and to ensure community dwellers benefit from the proceeds arising from the exploitation of forest resources", said Ms Woode.

The CSIFM concept had been previously piloted in Ghana by different CSOs and in various forms since 2010. Between 2010 and 2013, Civic Response, Friends of the Earth Ghana, the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development and Care International formed a consortium to undertake a different form of forest governance monitoring. They developed [Transparency Scorecards](#), which provided the Forestry Commission with feedback on the perceptions of forest stakeholders on public availability of information as a pillar in good forest governance. More recently, Friends of the Earth Ghana, the Working Group on Forest Certification, NDF and National Forestry Forum-Ghana, have all piloted one or another form of community-based forest monitoring in the last five years.

According to Elvis Oppong Mensah of Civic Response, before the formation the CSIFM platform, the Forestry Commission and CSOs working on forest monitoring were always at loggerheads. However, with the platform, a consensus has been built between the Commission and CSO roles in forest management, such as collaboration in the training and capacity building of Forest Service Division officials on forest monitoring. He observed: "to avoid duplication of effort in efforts on forest monitoring, CSOs such as Tropenbos Ghana consult Civic Response before selecting their project communities for monitoring", due to the collaboration that has been created among partner organizations on the CSIFM platform.

In 2017 Tropenbos Ghana and NDF consulted with other organizations working on forest monitoring and agreed to establish a the CSIFM platform, signing a memorandum of understanding with the Forestry Commission. CBOs and CSOs have had capacity built to conduct control and verification missions with the Forestry Commission, to examine the evidence collected to establish the authenticity of any reported infraction, and for the necessary corrective steps to be taken.

The formation of the CSIFM platform has also increased collaboration among CSOs, making them indispensable actors in forest management. This will go a long way to ensure forests are protected and managed more sustainably. Through the coordination of organizations in the CSIFM platform, they are able to ensure effective coverage of work and reach more forest fringe communities, thus guaranteeing a wider proportion of Ghana's dwindling forest reserves are safeguarded.

This story of change has been produced by [Tropenbos Ghana](#) and [Nature and Development Foundation](#) under the framework of the EU financed programme Strengthening the capacity of non-state actors to improve FLEGT-VPA and REDD+ processes in Western Africa funded by the European Union.

The opinions and views expressed in this story of change are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the opinions and views of the European Union or Tropenbos International.

Issue date: May, 2021

Photo cover: IFM verification mission - forest cleared for cocoa plantations. Photo by: NDF — EU NSA Project

