



## REAL-TIME FOREST MONITORING

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES, PREVENTING ILLEGALITIES, PROTECTING FORESTS

**FEBRUARY 2019**

# INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the 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. This system 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 with no mobile or internet connectivity.

Since its creation, ForestLink has been successfully deployed as part of RFUK's Real-Time Forest Monitoring (RTM) initiative in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana and Peru. By engaging forest and indigenous peoples in the fight against illegal logging and deforestation, RTM seeks to strengthen local involvement in forest management.

In 2018, with support from the UK Department for International Development (DfID), RFUK's RTM initiative entered a new phase. As ForestLink is expanded and scaled up to support some 100 communities across Africa and the Peruvian Amazon, RFUK and our local partners aim to institutionalise this innovative system as a leading tool in the fight against deforestation and forest illegalities.



# HOW FORESTLINK WORKS

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Downloadable onto most Android devices, the ForestLink app can easily be customised to meet community needs. 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.

## 1. Monitoring and Collection:

The *Collectaur* app allows members of local communities to report any illegal activity they witness in real-time.

## 2. Reporting:

Alerts are sent via satellite connection to a unique database, called *Monitaur*.

## 3. Database:

Civil society organisations and government enforcement agencies can access and analyse the data.

## 4. Verification:

Collected data prompts swift verification missions to the location of the reported incident.

## 5. Enforcement:

Official measures are taken by the authorities, if necessary.

## 6. Advocacy:

Follow-up activities are carried out by civil society in order to foster good governance and transparency.



MONITORING & COLLECTION > REPORTING > DATABASE > VERIFICATION > ENFORCEMENT > ADVOCACY





Having successfully deployed ForestLink in four countries, the RTM initiative is now focused on the institutionalisation and long-term sustainability of the system, as well as extending it to new areas. With this in mind, this initiative aims to:

- **Prevent** illegal activities, such as logging, in targeted areas;
- **Increase** inspection and enforcement actions in response to community-generated alerts;
- **Build** forest communities' capacity to participate in decisions that affect them and advocate for their rights;
- **Equip** local authorities with the technical support needed to integrate ForestLink into their operations;
- **Strengthen** community and civil society participation in forest management processes.

# FORESTLINK IMPACT

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In just three years since ForestLink was first deployed, the system has been at the centre of several important interventions by law enforcement agencies in Africa and the Peruvian Amazon, helping stop instances of illegal logging and illegal mining in the world's two largest rainforests. The RTM initiative has also helped to empower communities in asserting their rights. By supporting greater local engagement and dialogue with logging companies, for instance, RTM has consistently helped ensure the latter's compliance with social responsibility agreements (SRAs).

In **Cameroon**, a series of alerts sent using ForestLink led to formal investigations by the authorities, with one company found guilty of fraud. In the East and South regions, alerts from communities have led to the seizing of logging trucks carrying illegal timber.

In **Ghana**, the communities we support are reporting a 50 per cent reduction in illegal activities in their areas, and ForestLink has become the main tool used by national independent forest monitors in the country.

In **DRC**, ForestLink alerts have led to regular joint verification missions by civil society and provincial and national forestry agencies, promoting greater respect for community rights and a decline in illegal practices by loggers.

In **Peru**, ForestLink has been used to trigger several interventions with law enforcement and forestry officials. In one case alone, near Barranco Chico, over £1 million of heavy machinery and equipment used in illegal mining operations was destroyed by the police.

# CAMEROON

Approximately 40 per cent of Cameroon is forested, yet many local communities face great pressure from logging, mining and infrastructure development. This can lead to conflicts over land and resources.

RFUK is deploying ForestLink with local partner, *Forêts et Développement Rural* (FODER), which is the leading organisation of Cameroon's Standardised External Independent Monitoring System (SNOIE) network. SNOIE is a network of Cameroonian civil society organisations working together to develop stronger methods of monitoring forest infractions such as illegal logging and mining. Currently, ForestLink is being used by four SNOIE member organisations, and their deployment of the system has reportedly reduced forest illegalities by 37 per cent in many national domain forests.

ForestLink has also enabled forest community representatives to present reports of illegalities to the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT)<sup>1</sup> national steering committee, increasing the participation of community members in forest management whilst building stronger collaboration with local law enforcement.



**FOREST COVER:**  
20 million hectares

**REGIONS WE WORK IN:**  
East, South, Littoral, Centre

**PARTNERS:**  
Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER), Standardised External Independent Monitoring System (SNOIE)



*"SNOIE has changed the way independent forest monitoring is done in Cameroon, and ForestLink real-time monitoring contributes to this process."*

**Christiane Zebaze Hellow, Real-Time Monitoring Coordinator, FODER**

<sup>1</sup> The European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan is an EU initiative to address illegal logging and the social, economic and environmental implications. A Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) is a legally binding trade agreement between the EU and a timber-producing country outside the EU with the aim of ensuring that timber and timber products exported to the EU come from legal sources.

# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) hosts Africa's largest expanse of tropical forest. It is home to flora and fauna found nowhere else on the planet, and it provides food, medicine and shelter to millions of people. In 2014, it was reported that 90 per cent of logging taking place in DRC is illegal. This is a threat to communities' land and resource rights which are jeopardised by weak forest governance and poorly-resourced law enforcement.

RFUK is working with partner *Groupe d'Action pour Sauver l'Homme et son Environnement* (GASHE) to promote ForestLink on a national level through collaboration with the independent monitoring body, *Observatoire de la Gouvernance Forestiere* (OGF). The initiative is bringing together civil society and government agencies at multiple levels, helping direct forest monitoring agencies to illegality hotspots and allowing officials to more effectively allocate their resources. The initiative has also provided advocacy training to local communities, helping them stand up for their rights and hold companies to account.



**FOREST COVER:**  
100 million hectares

**REGIONS WE WORK IN:**  
Equateur, Tshuapa

**PARTNERS:**  
Groupe d'Action pour  
Sauver l'Homme et son  
Environnement (GASHE)



*"Illegal logging is a serious threat to forest communities in DRC. ForestLink real-time monitoring is about giving them innovative tools and advocacy support to better defend their rights and their lands."*

**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 locally and nationally in terms of timber exports. Meanwhile, logging companies often fail to fulfil their agreed social responsibilities to communities affected by logging concessions, leaving people without the land, resources or benefits they were promised.

RFUK is working with its local partner Civic Response to enhance community involvement in decision-making, while promoting transparency and accountability for logging companies. ForestLink has become the main tool used by civil society led independent forest monitoring (CSIFM). The initiative is also building stronger links to FLEGT processes and forest monitoring tools such as the Ghana Timber Transparency Portal, a centralised database on logging infractions which now draws on ForestLink alerts.

By engaging with Ghana's Forestry Commission, we are working to embed ForestLink at a national level, allowing community alerts to trigger official forest control more systematically.



**FOREST COVER:**  
5 million hectares

**REGIONS WE WORK IN:**  
Western, Eastern, Central,  
Brong Ahafo, Ashanti and  
Volta

**PARTNERS:**  
Civic Response Ghana



*"We are happy to note how far we've come with RTM within a year: a platform of CSIFM practitioners using the RFUK Forestlink platform has been established making it possible for RTM to reach out to more communities. We are particularly happy to have received the support and collaboration of the Forestry Services Division in RTM, thereby building sustainability into the process from the beginning."*

**Albert Katoko, Head of Programmes, Civic Response Ghana**



# PERU

The Peruvian Amazon is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet. Yet over the last 20 years, this vast forest has been intensively impacted by uncontrolled illegal mining and logging. Mining concessions have been granted over communities' titled lands and logging concessions over their ancestral territories, causing pollution, deforestation and severe social problems.

RFUK has partnered with *Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes* (FENAMAD), an organisation representing all indigenous communities in Madre de Dios, to stop illegal mining and logging with the help of the ForestLink system. Together, we're currently providing training and support to 10 communities across the region. So far, more than £1.2 million of illegal mining equipment has been destroyed by the authorities, thanks to multiple interventions prompted by ForestLink alerts. Communities are now going further than ever before to protect their forests, reporting illegalities outside their traditional lands, including in areas where there is little or no supervision from authorities.



**FOREST COVER:**  
74 million hectares

**REGIONS WE WORK IN:**  
Madre de Dios

**PARTNERS:** Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes (FENAMAD)



*"Communities in Madre de Dios are standing firmly against illegal mining and FENAMAD and RFUK are supporting them. Community monitors are reporting more and more mining activities using ForestLink, and the collaboration with the local authorities has proven to be very positive. Together we are stopping forest destruction in Madre de Dios."*

**Julio Cusurichi, President of FENAMAD**

# OUR APPROACH

Our collaborative approach involves bringing together key stakeholders in forest management (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 design, development and implementation. Civil society partners and government agencies receive training and support in using our real-time monitoring technology.
INTERNATIONAL LEVEL:	Our contribution to the development of best practices, in collaboration with other like-minded organisations, is working to promote rights-based approaches and further our efforts towards better-governed forests.

Going further, the latest phase of RFUK’s community-based Real-Time Forest Monitoring initiative aims to institutionalise ForestLink within national forest monitoring and control systems. Together with our partners, we are working towards the long-term sustainability of ForestLink and, thus, the long-term involvement of local people in the governance of their forests.

For more information on ForestLink and how it works, visit [www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/rtm](http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/rtm)



# TESTIMONIALS

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*"With the ForestLink system, I know that using just a mobile phone I can record an illegality anywhere in the forest. With this project I think the community will really see a change... We're not just doing it for ourselves, we're doing it for our children too."*

**Longine, community monitor, Cameroon**

*"We have never had anything like this technology in the community. You know that illegal mining is nearby, and we sometimes see miners along the river. RFUK's ForestLink system allows us to be safer. We can control our territory now and send alerts if anything happens."*

**Wilmer, community monitor, Peru**

*"The knowledge we've gained during this (real-time monitoring and advocacy) training will allow us to claim our rights peacefully."*

**Benkita, community monitor, DRC**



# FORESTLINK

## PROGRAMME PARTNERS:



## SUPPORTED BY:



And with donations from generous supporters  
and grant-making foundations.

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