

Promoting stakeholder exchange in Madagascar

Potential solutions to local development problems often lack integration with wider conceptual reflections. The global biodiversity hotspot of north-eastern Madagascar is a case in point. Finding little exchange and cooperation among regional stakeholders active in conservation and development, CDE and ESAPP’s Malagasy partners initiated the “Stakeholder Platform Madagascar”.

Sustainable development challenge

Speed is often crucial in addressing urgent development problems, especially at the local level. Implementation of possible solutions may falter, however, if these are not integrated with wider conceptual reflections on development issues. In turn, such reflections, by academics, development partners, and policymakers, may lack grounding in concrete contexts. There is thus a need to bring together conceptual reflection with implementation: mutual enrichment of thought and practice will enhance the relevance and efficiency of development research and interventions.

The north-eastern escarpment of Madagascar is a global hotspot of biodiversity, threatened by deforestation resulting from local subsistence farming practices (Myers et al. 2000; McConnell 2002). Efforts to protect remaining forests have focused on implementing alternatives to shifting cultivation (Kremen et al. 1998; Pollini 2009; Freudenberger 2010). However, most interventions were implemented on a case-by-case basis without integration with wider conceptual reflections. This – and the lack of exchange and cooperation among stakeholders from different sectors and scales – hinders creation of integrative strategies for development.

ESAPP’s response

ESAPP employed a dual programme structure to ensure that the projects it implemented also took into account sustainability implications. The dual structure comprised a “basic mandate” and “priority action projects”. The basic mandate component served to steer demand-driven project implementation according to overarching sustainability principles, promote exchange of experiences and capacity building, help establish scientific foundations, and develop databases and tools. Priority action projects addressed development issues identified by partner organizations through concrete implementation support.

ESAPP’s scientific knowledge on north-eastern Madagascar was generated at the regional level and complemented with targeted local-level interventions. Through region-wide surveys and analysis, ESAPP documented land cover change and its impacts on protected areas, as well as interventions in the field of land governance. At the same time, local-level reforestation activities and strengthening of community institutions contributed to more sustainable land management near protected areas. ESAPP’s dual approach helped the integration of scientific and development activities at different levels.



Main messages

- ESAPP’s dual approach accommodating top-down conceptual requirements of sustainable development and bottom-up priorities of local partners improves consistency between local and global approaches for sustainability.
- While local priority action projects allow partner organizations to answer urgent demands from local communities, the basic mandate ensures that these projects adhere to overarching sustainability principles.
- In north-eastern Madagascar ESAPP’s regional online database provides improved transparency and visibility of local realities and interventions, and facilitates planning of future interventions shaped into a strategy or management plan.
- However, there is a risk that, once established, such a tool will not be actively used and updated. To avoid this, a sense of ownership has to develop among a user community. This can be supported through personal exchange and contact.



ESAPP researchers on their way to a study village. (Photo: Julie Zähringer)



Top: Vanilla is the “green gold” of north-eastern Madagascar. It is planted by smallholders in biodiversity-rich agroforestry systems in the shade of large trees. Vanilla production is very labour-intensive, as the flowers have to be pollinated by hand. Flowers may only last for a single day, requiring farmers to walk to their often faraway fields every day. After harvest the pods are boiled and dried for three to four months. The high labour investments make vanilla a very high-value crop. However, farmers have to deal with extreme price fluctuations, a high risk of theft, and pests and diseases. They sell the vanilla to middlemen who visit the remote villages on foot. These middlemen are employed by wholesale merchants in the few large towns, who in turn sell to the exporting companies. In recent years the vanilla market has become increasingly dominated by Chinese traders, reportedly resulting in decreased quality. (Photo: Julie Zähringer)

Bottom: Accessibility is a major challenge in north-eastern Madagascar. National road no. 5, the only road connecting the city of Maroantsetra with the rest of the country, is in a very bad state and interrupted by numerous rivers flowing into the Indian Ocean. This makes it time-consuming and costly to transport goods and people. Where no bridges and ferries are available, cars have to cross on makeshift rafts. (Photo: Julie Zähringer)

The project story

ESAPP’s Malagasy partners had been active in the country’s north-east for a number of years. Projects within ESAPP focused on assessment and mitigation of forest degradation, modelling carbon stocks in various forest types, monitoring and evaluating the impacts of conservation measures, and implementing participatory approaches towards land use planning in and around protected areas. The experiences gathered were exchanged with ESAPP partners in other countries during annual workshops, and fed into the overall conceptual discussion at the programme level. One important conclusion of this discussion was that there is very little exchange and cooperation among stakeholders active in conservation and development in Madagascar’s north-east. In response, the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at the University of Bern and ESAPP’s Malagasy partners initiated the “Stakeholder Platform Madagascar”, an open-access online database (<http://spm.esapp.info>) promoting information exchange between stakeholders involved in land governance at different decision-making levels.

The project started with a region-wide survey providing an overview of stakeholders and their activities in land governance. Researchers then developed an online relational and spatially explicit database, and entered interview data into it. The database includes a map of the region with the intervention zones of different activities. The stakeholders connected to these activities are linked to a table and their details can be accessed. Information on 55 activities and 94 stakeholders was available in the database upon closing the project in December 2014. About 40 per cent of the inventoried activities deal with conservation, other common sectors being agriculture and tourism. The stakeholders inventoried are mainly of Malagasy origin, followed by US and Swiss stakeholders. The most prominent Swiss stakeholder is Zurich Zoo, which financially supports the Masoala National Park. International NGOs are the most common type of stakeholder inventoried, followed by international enterprises and foundations.

In 2014, the database was presented to local stakeholders and the regional administration in a two-day workshop on challenges and available tools for improved land governance. At the workshop, numerous participants emphasized the need for a regional land governance scheme. This should encompass measures such as securing land tenure and land rights, improving agricultural extension services, fostering investments into on-site processing industries, providing capacity building for decision-makers at different levels, improving the quality and availability of agricultural and population data, as well as negotiating equitable benefit sharing agreements between the state and local communities in the context of, timber production under the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) scheme, and ecotourism initiatives.

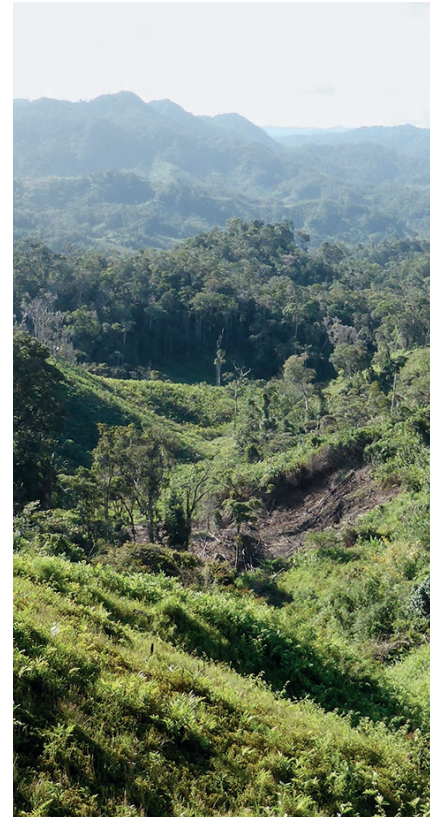
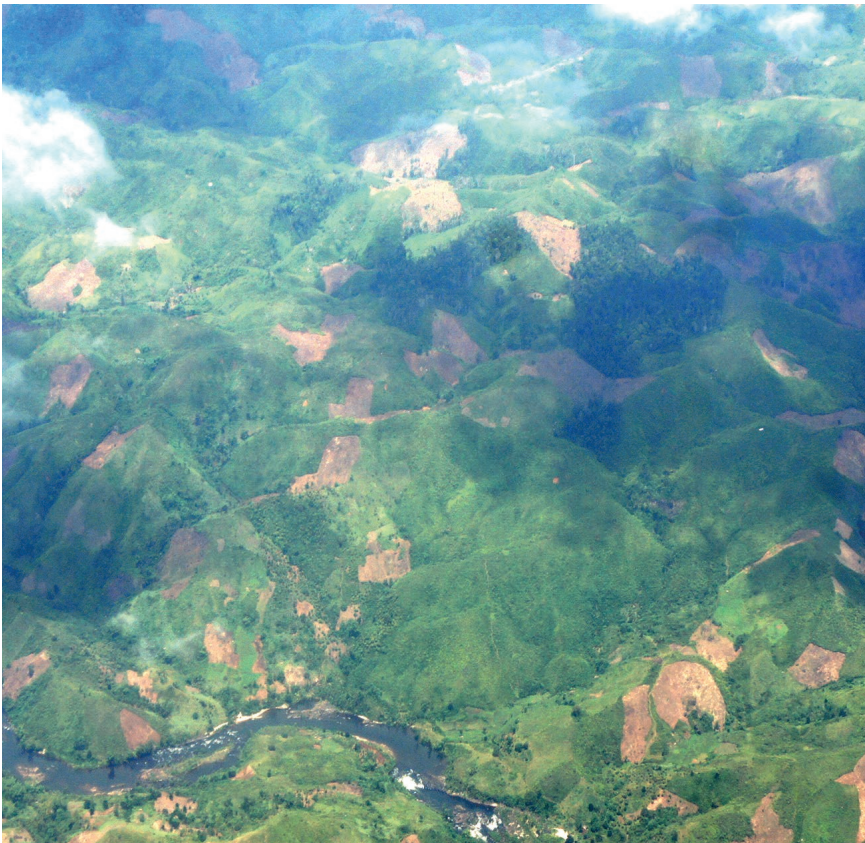


Innovation and relevance

ESAPP's dual structure, described above, in combination with ESAPP's close links to CDE's research activities, provided several opportunities for all ESAPP partners to actively feed their field-based experiences into conceptual discussions at the programme level, compare notes with partners working in similar contexts, and jointly elaborate a strategy on how to overcome challenges. This process helped to identify the lack of exchange between development partners in north-eastern Madagascar as a systemic challenge facing sustainable development efforts in the region.

Large-scale land acquisition for the production of food and biofuels is on the increase in Eastern Africa. In north-eastern Madagascar, such investments in land are not yet very common. Nonetheless, local land use systems are increasingly linked to actors at the national and international scales, mainly through REDD+ and conventional conservation projects as well as development interventions to improve income generation. Local people's land use strategies aimed at meeting immediate livelihood needs face growing competition. In this context, the availability and exchange of information on external interventions is key to different stakeholders' negotiations on conflicting interests and objectives. It also supports decision-makers at the national and regional scales, as they can use the spatially explicit information to better steer development and land use planning.

The data platform successfully combines information from interviews with spatially explicit references in a map viewer. Different background layers such as administration, land cover, accessibility, and population density illustrate the context in which stakeholders' activities take place. Having an online and open-access platform such as this is a first in Madagascar, as is the use of crowdsourcing to collect data.



Top: Smallholders in the region grow upland rice in the traditional land use system of shifting cultivation. The vegetation is slashed and burned in order to increase nutrient availability in the soil and to give the rice seedlings a competitive advantage over weeds. The system is well adapted to the local context where farmers have to divide their labour between many different land use activities. Hillside rice is also more resistant to cyclones than irrigated rice in valley bottoms. However, maintaining soil fertility requires long fallow periods and thus a lot of land, threatening the existence of biodiversity-rich forests in the region. (Photo: Julie Zähringer)

Bottom: Shifting cultivation leaves a characteristic footprint in the landscape. Burnt plots occur together with fallow vegetation at different growth stages, leading to a small-scale mosaic landscape. This landscape is interspersed with small forest fragments that fulfil important sociocultural functions, for example as burial places, and provide villages with firewood and different plant materials for their daily needs. Villages are usually located near rivers, as this is the only source of water for the population. (Photo: Peter Messerli)



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Highlight profile

This highlight is based on the achievements of 2 ESAPP priority action projects.

Implemented during:
2012–2015

Total funds contributed by ESAPP:
CHF 118,000

Implemented by:
Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Agronomiques (ESSA), University of Antananarivo, Madagascar

In collaboration with:
Savaivo, Antananarivo, Madagascar;
Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, Switzerland

Main beneficiaries:
Local stakeholders, as well as NGOs and national and international projects active in the north-eastern part of Madagascar; national planners and decision-makers

This highlight

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Proofreading: Stefan Zach (z.a.ch GmbH)

Citation

Zähringer JG, Rajoelison LG. 2015. Promoting stakeholder exchange in Madagascar. In: Ehrensperger A, Ott C, Wiesmann U, editors. *Eastern and Southern Africa Partnership Programme: Highlights from 15 Years of Joint Action for Sustainable Development*. Bern, Switzerland: Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern, with Bern Open Publishing (BOP), pp. 107–110. <http://doi.org/10.7892/boris.72023>.

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What is ESAPP?

The Eastern and Southern Africa Partnership Programme (ESAPP) is a research implementation programme funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), coordinated by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern, Switzerland, and implemented jointly by CDE and a network of partner institutions in Eastern and Southern Africa. Launched in 1999 and completed in 2015, ESAPP implemented over 300 priority action projects in the programme region, which included Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Madagascar.

What are ESAPP Highlights?

ESAPP Highlights are a series of 24 project descriptions providing insights into ESAPP's research and implementation partnerships. Each Highlight describes a succession of demand-driven priority action projects addressing local and regional sustainability issues. The 24 Highlights are collected in a publication that includes additional background information on ESAPP (see citation above). The individual Highlights and the entire publication are also available for download on CDE's website: www.cde.unibe.ch (keyword search: "ESAPP").

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