Promoting community forest governance for resilient ecosystems, livelihoods and food systems in Mali

Project impact summary July 2025

Funded by the UK Government
through Darwin Initiative

TREE AID

UK International Development
Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

DARWIN INITIATIVE

Project details

Timeline: Nov 2021 - Oct 2024

Region: Tominian Cercle in Segou

Communes: Yasso, Tominian, Benena, Diora, Mandiakuy, and Sanekuy

Participants: 9,934 people from 8,479 households

Funder: The Darwin Initiative - £345,755

Partner: Sahel Eco
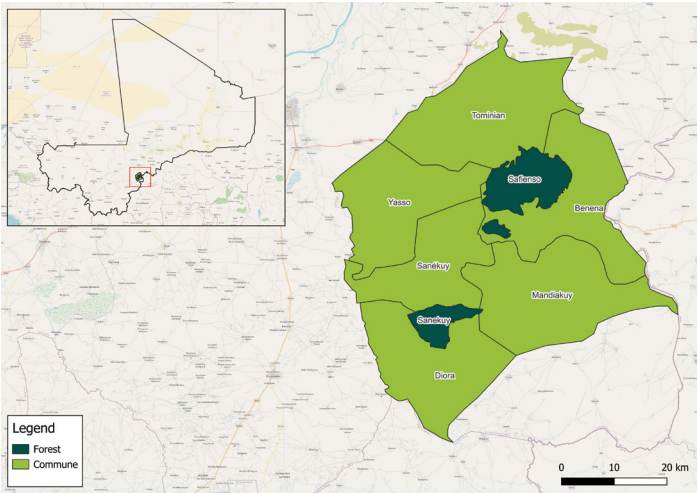
Context

The Ségou region of Mali faces severe deforestation and desertification due to poverty, climate change, and population growth. These pressures, compounded by a fragile socio-political context, have degraded ecosystems, reduced agricultural productivity, and threatened food security. With few alternatives, local communities often resort to unsustainable practices, further degrading the land, and deepening their vulnerability.

What did we do?

Strengthened community-based forest management
to reduce pressure on natural resources

Restored degraded agricultural lands
by promoting agroforestry systems and sustainable land management practices

Supported the development of women-led village tree enterprises (VTEs)
to improve and secure livelihoods

Our community-based forest governance model (figure 1) was at the heart of the project. It ensures that local people have secure access and control over natural resources, to be able to self-determine forest resource management conservation. This ensures that forest management leads to more sustainable livelihoods and improved food security.

Learning Adoption Consolidation

1. Degraded forest sites are identified and selected with communities for restoration through local forest governance

2. Consensus is built on restoration processes for forest sites by bringing local stakeholders together through consultations, village visits and discussions

3. Local governance structures are created and tasked with overseeing environmental stewardship

4. Forest sites are delimited, mapped and assessed to decide on management techniques

5. Forest management plans are developed and rules and regulations for resource use are agreed between authorities and local governance structures

6. Local governance structures negotiate and grant access rights and permissions to community members for forest resource use

7. Continued restoration, environmental stewardship, and reinvesting of income generated from access to resources helps local forest governance to become self-sustaining

Figure 1: Stages of local forest governance approach

Source: Localising forest governance to scale nature-based climate solutions, ensure long-term ecosystem restoration and build community resilience in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (www.treeaid.org/forest-gov-bf/)

Impacts

Tree Aid's socio-economic data is collected through the Rural Household Multi-Indicator Survey (RHoMIS), a well recognised peer-reviewed survey designed for farming communities living in poverty and food insecurity that gathers data on agricultural practices, livelihoods, food security and dietary diversity. For this project, a baseline survey was conducted in 2022 with 326 submissions, and a project endline survey in 2024 with 389 submissions.

Improved community-based forest governance

4
contracts signed between the state, local authorities, and forestry cooperatives, recognising the right of the cooperatives to manage forest sites

43,710
hectares across six communes now covered by forest management plans, developed with communities and chiefs and agreed by the governor

2
community-level forest management brigades created to manage both forests, with women comprising 40% of members

80.3%
of households perceived forest governance as strong
compared to 11.96% at baseline

How do we measure forest governance?

Our forest governance module in the RHoMIS survey measures community awareness, access, and control over forest resources. It gathers feedback on forest use, permissions, management tools, training, community engagement, and protections, as well as whether the forest meets local needs. Responses are aggregated into an overall forest governance score, assessing accessibility and benefits. Tree Aid defines 'strong' governance as above 60%, while baseline data shows communities typically score around 40% before interventions.

Ecosystem restoration

104,662
trees planted across 563 hectares

10,825
hectares of agricultural land benefitting from restoration activities

10%
increase in production potential* in each forest
*the sustainable capacity of the forest to provide goods and services

35.5%
increase in tree density in Safienso forest
from 17 to 23 trees per hectare over the course of the project **(Figure 2)**

21%
increase in tree density in Sanekuy forest
from 14 to 17 trees per hectare over the course of the project **(Figure 3)**

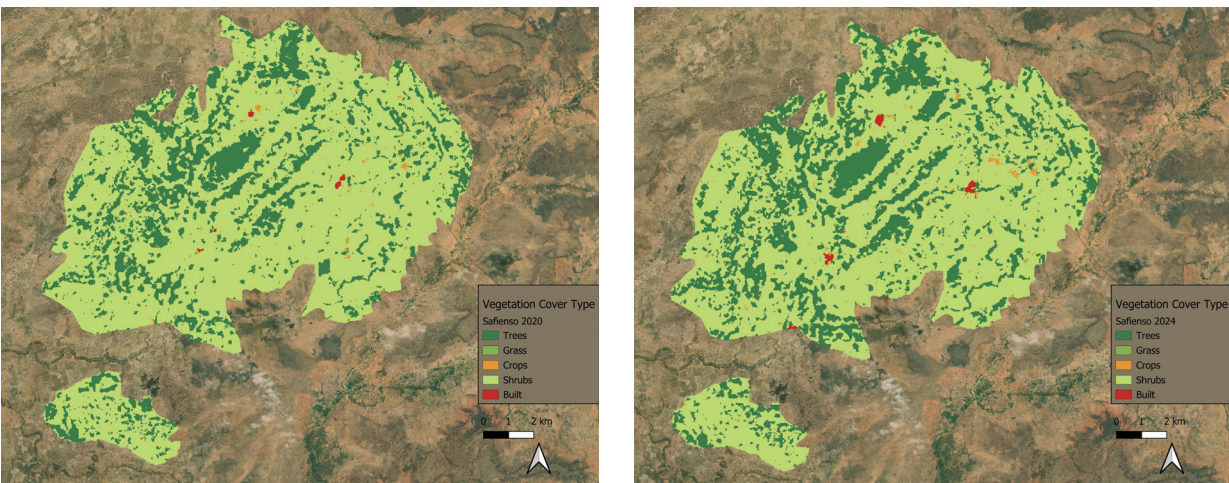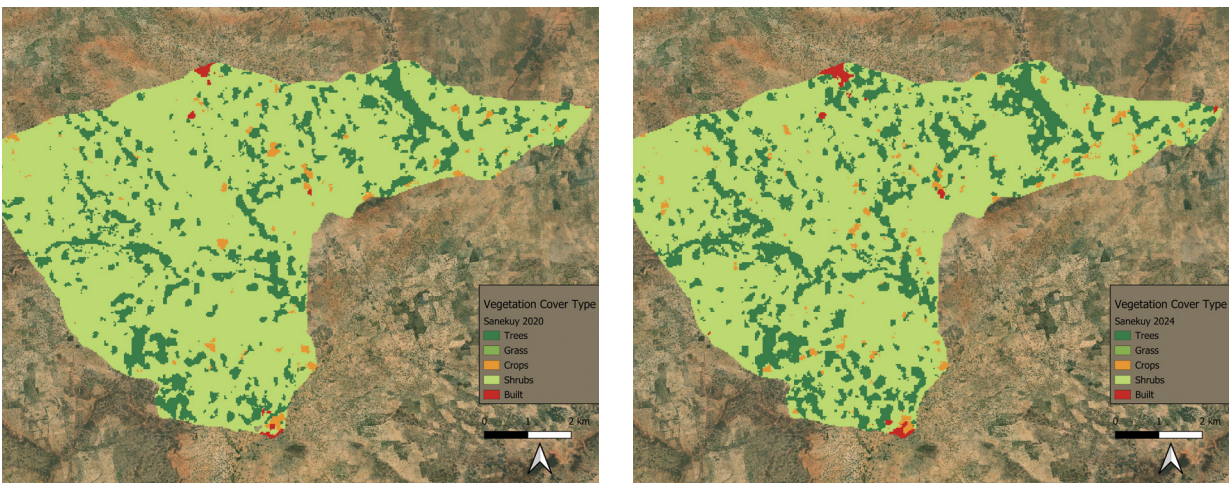**Figure 2:** Tree cover in Safienso Forest at baseline in 2020 (left) and endline in 2024 (right)

Figure 3: Tree cover in Sanekuy Forest at baseline in 2020 (left) and endline in 2024 (right)

Sustainable enterprise development

8
women-led village tree enterprise groups established to produce and sell shea butter

93%
of the 413 village tree enterprise members were women

112kg
of shea butter produced on average per group over 12 months

$642
income made from the sale of shea butter on average per group over 12 months

What are village tree enterprises?

A group of people who work together to produce commodities from non-timber forest products (NTFPs), like seeds, fruits and nuts. Together they process and sell them.

Poverty reduction and diversified incomes

386%
increase in average annual household income
from $721.67 to $3505.62

720%
increase in average annual household income from NTFPs
from $70.43 to $577.33

44%
reduction in households living below to poverty line*
from 93.25% to 49.44%

*Considering total value of activities (total of cash income and the monetary value of all homegrown crop, livestock and non-timber forest products which the household consumes)

Food security

39%
reduction in households reporting moderate or severe food insecurity
from 69.02% to 29.72%

54%
decrease in the % of households below the calorie line
from 100% to 46%

In the good season, household dietary diversity increased from 6.60 to
8.37

In the bad season, household dietary diversity increased from 3.52 to
5.69

What is dietary diversity?

Household dietary diversity tracks how many of 12 food groups a household consumes weekly. As food access worsens further from harvest, we measure both a 'good' and 'bad' season.

In Mali, the 'good season' refers to the post-harvest period (November–March) when food stocks and dietary diversity are highest. The 'bad season' is the lean period before harvest (June–September), when food stocks dwindle, prices rise, and households face the highest food insecurity.