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Thematic Fact Sheet

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DEFORESTATION & FOREST DEGRADATION FACT SHEET

Thirty Years of Disappearing Forest

What has been lost in Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua, what communities say is causing it, and what they are already living with as a result

RESCONI . AUGUST 2026.

ABOUT THIS FACT SHEET

Every figure in this fact sheet is drawn from the RESCONI final study report, *Support to Promote Community Resilience and Rights in Competing Land Use for Mining, Agriculture and Forest Utilization in Ghana* (November 2023), and is referenced to the section, table or figure it came from. Two independent lines of evidence are used together: a satellite-derived land cover change analysis comparing six land classes across both districts in 1990 and 2021, produced for RESCONI by Statera Company Limited; and a survey of 528 respondents across 20 communities on what they have observed, what they believe is causing it, and what they are experiencing as a result. Charts have been redrawn from the report's own tables and figures.

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1. What thirty years took

The satellite record and the community record agree. Between 1990 and 2021 both districts lost between a third and three-fifths of each forest class — and 95 to 99 per cent of residents say so too.

−48.1%	−59.4%	94–99%	97%	34 / 288
closed forest, Atwima Mponua	open forest, Asutifi North	of residents confirm the loss	are aware of the importance of forests	forest reserves nationally where illegal mining is rife

Source: *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Tables 2.1 and 2.2, p. 43; Figures 2.14 and 2.15, p. 34; Section 4.1.*

KEY FACTS

- Closed forest fell **48.1%** in Atwima Mponua and **34.2%** in Asutifi North between 1990 and 2021.
- Open forest fell **42.6%** and **59.4%** respectively — the steeper loss in the *degraded* class, which is the early-warning category.
- Cropland rose **more than thirtyfold** in both districts over the same period.
- **94.55%** of respondents in Asutifi North and **98.65%** in Atwima Mponua confirm forest cover has dwindled over thirty years.
- Dwindling *benefits* from forests were confirmed by **93.2%** and **97.7%** respectively.
- **Illegal logging** is named the leading cause (22.64%), followed by **galamsey** (16.98%).
- Illegal mining is rife in **34 of Ghana's 288** forest reserves across **7 of 16** regions; **4,726 hectares** of reserve have been degraded nationally.

What the community record says

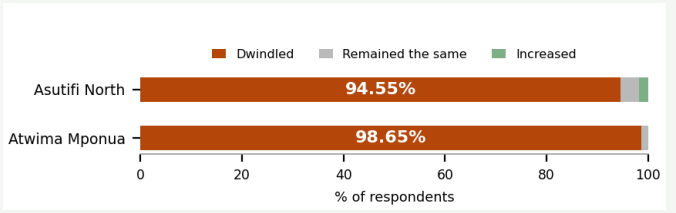

Figure 1. *Whether forest cover and its benefits have dwindled over the past thirty years.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.15, p. 34.*

Awareness is not the missing ingredient. An estimated **97%** of respondents were aware of the importance of forests, with only 1% unaware. People know what the forest does and they know it is going — which places the problem squarely with the incentives and enforcement around them, not with understanding.

What the satellite record says

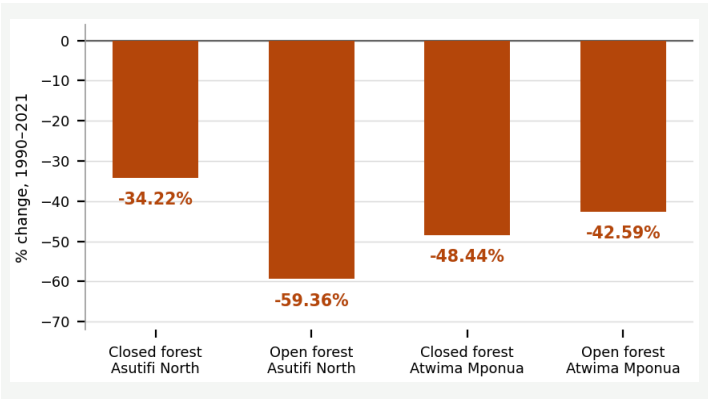

Figure 2. *Change in forest cover by class, 1990–2021.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 2.6.1; Tables 2.1 and 2.2, p. 43.*

Land rarely moves from closed forest to farmland in one step — it usually passes through open forest on the way. That makes open forest an early-warning class rather than a stable one. In Asutifi North it fell furthest of all, by **59.4%**, which suggests conversion is running ahead of what the closed-forest figure alone would show. Grassland expanded in both districts (**+56.6%** and **+ 61.2%**) — that is degraded forest transitioning to open cover, not ecological recovery.

Source: *Report Section 2.6.1; Tables 2.1 and 2.2, p. 43.*

Where the hectares went

Land class	1990 (ha)	2021 (ha)	Change
Atwima Mponua District			
Close forest	77,561.80	40,222.64	**−48.1%**
Open forest	99,709.50	57,247.96	**−42.6%**
Cropland	1,379.50	73,696.35	+5,242%
Grassland	9,181.90	14,377.10	+56.6%
Asutifi North District			
Close forest	42,262.70	27,800.10	**−34.2%**
Open forest	38,276.70	15,556.70	**−59.4%**
Cropland	743.20	27,105.70	+3,547%
Grassland	12,005.80	19,348.40	+61.2%

Table 1. *Land use trend analysis. Total district area is constant across both time points,so every hectare gained by one class is a hectare lost by another.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Tables 2.1 and 2.2, p. 43.*

2. What is causing it, and what it is causing

Two of the three leading causes named by communities are illegal activities. The fourth is the state's own capacity to stop them.

Why the forest is going

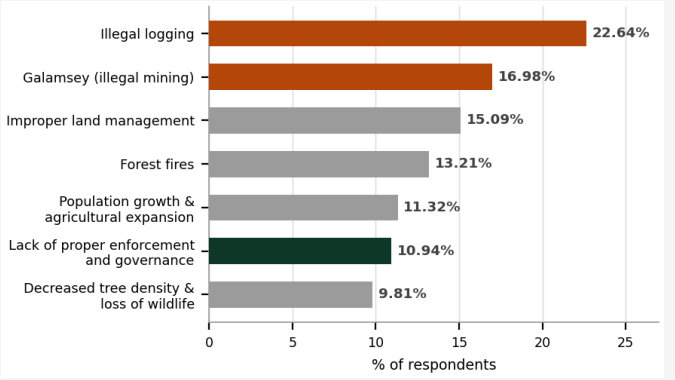

Figure 3. *Reasons given for dwindling forest cover. Weak enforcement shown in dark green.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.16, p. 35.*

Asked to rank the factors instead, respondents in Asutifi North put **illegal logging** first at 87.44%, then weak law enforcement (23.60%) and illegal mining (23.26%). In Atwima Mponua illegal logging again led, followed by **illegal mining at 40.57%** and weak law enforcement (22.95%).

Agricultural expansion here includes **cocoa farm expansion** specifically. **Poverty**, charcoal burning and settlement expansion were also cited, particularly in Atwima Mponua, though all three ranked below the leading causes — the pressure comes mostly from commercial extraction and farm expansion rather than household fuel use

10.94%

named **lack of proper enforcement and governance** as a direct cause of dwindling forest cover — ranking it above the loss of tree density and wildlife itself. **Communities are naming the regulatory gap as a driver, not just a background condition.**

The other pressures the report records

Beyond the ranked causes, the report identifies three structural conditions that keep the pressure on: **land conflicts and tenure insecurity**; **unsustainable resource extraction**; and **limited value addition and market access**, which leaves communities unable to realise the economic potential of forest products.

Farming inside the reserves

Encroachment runs the other way too. More than 90% of respondents farm outside protected areas, but **7.23%** of farms in Asutifi North and **5.7%** in Atwima Mponua sit *inside* forest reserves — concentrated in Agravi (24%), Obengkrom (20%) and Alhajikrom (16%) in Asutifi North, and Ahwiafutu (27.78%) and Kasotie (16.67%) in Atwima Mponua. Whether these are admitted farms under the Forest Act or illegal extensions was beyond the study's scope. *(Report Figure 2.10, p. 27.)*

What communities are living with

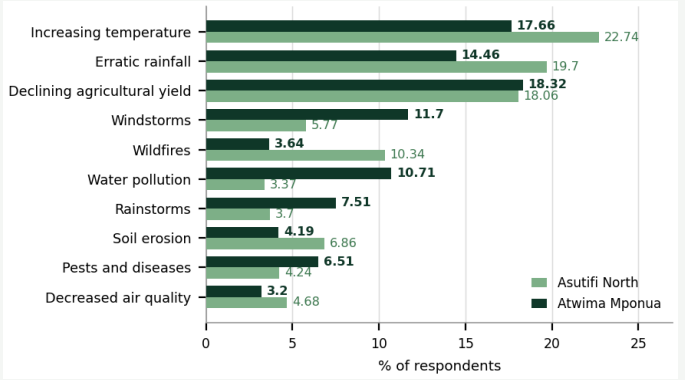

Figure 4. *Perceived effects of deforestation and forest degradation, by district.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.19, p. 37.*

The effects people report are overwhelmingly agricultural and climatic. In Asutifi North the top three are increasing temperature (22.74%), erratic rainfall (19.70%) and declining agricultural yield (18.06%). In Atwima Mponua, **declining agricultural yield leads outright** at 18.32%, followed by temperature (17.66%) and erratic rainfall (14.46%).

Water pollution ranks far higher in Atwima Mponua (10.71%) than in Asutifi North (3.37%) — the district where the Tano Offin Forest Reserve sits and mining pressure on water bodies is heaviest. Most respondents — **62.41%** in Asutifi North and **87.84%** in Atwima Mponua — perceive the effects as falling on men and women about equally.

Illegal mining compounds all of it, driving deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution and habitat destruction together, with knock-on impacts on ecosystem services and the livelihoods that depend on them.

The same landscape, thirty-one years apart

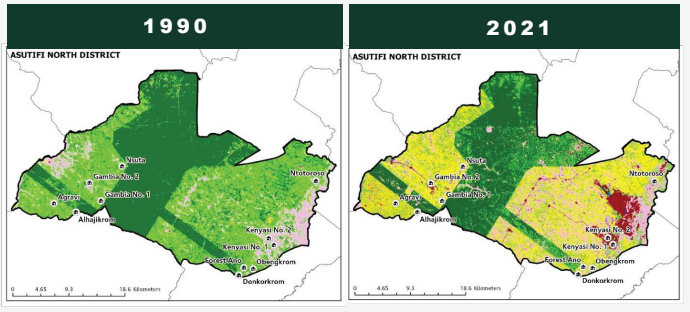

Figure 5. *Asutifi North District in 1990 and 2021. Dark green closed forest gives way to yellow cropland, and settlement in dark red expands sharply around Kenyasi No. 2.* **Source:** *RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figures 2.26 (p. 45) and 2.27 (p. 46),produced by Statera Company Limited with data from RMSC, KNUST and Ecometrica.*

3. Why it matters, and what must change

What the forest is actually for

Asked what benefits forest reserves provide, respondents in Asutifi North named **provisioning** services most often (45.42%), closely followed by **supporting** services (42.99%), then regulatory (8.41%) and cultural (2.99%). In Atwima Mponua, provisioning again led (44.38%), with regulatory services second at 33.33% and cultural at 5.83%.

Degradation is therefore not only an environmental loss. Firewood, non-timber products, game, medicine and timber are all provisioning services — a distributed household income that never appears in a wage statistic and disappears with the canopy.

The interventions exist. Most people have not heard of them.

Only **32%** of respondents in Asutifi North and **17%** in Atwima Mponua were aware of any initiative addressing deforestation and forest degradation. Put the other way, **69%** and **82%** respectively did not know of one or were unsure. Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ and community-based forest management are already operating in these districts — **the gap is reach, not provision.**

Source: RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.20, p. 38.

4,726 ha

of forest reserve degraded nationally by illegal mining, across **34 of Ghana's 288 reserves** in 7 of 16 regions. More than **12 hectares** of the Tano Offin Forest Reserve alone have been destroyed by illegal miners.

Policy pulling in two directions

The report's policy analysis finds the state's own instruments in tension. The **Forest and Wildlife Policy (2012)** commits government to reduce prospecting and mining in gazetted forest reserves as far as possible. Yet the **Environmental Protection (Mining in Forest Reserves) Regulations, 2022 (L.I. 2462)** appear to facilitate mining leases across vast portions of reserves and protected areas previously off-limits. Policies, in the report's assessment, appear to be operating in silos.

What is already working

Carbon finance. The Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme has channelled emission-reduction payments to over **240,000 farmers** in 1,400 communities across seven cocoa-producing regions — an economic incentive for keeping trees standing.

Agroforestry. Already practised in both districts, integrating trees into crop and livestock systems for shade, soil fertility and diversified income.

Community nurseries. Identified in consultations as a locally generated route into reforestation.

Source: Report Sections 2.2.7, 2.5.4 and 5.2; World Bank (2023).

What RESCONI recommends

The governance measures stop the loss; the restoration measures recover what has gone. The report asks for both at once — environmental sustainability, social inclusiveness and economic development held together.

Governance and enforcement *(Sections 5.1 & 5.2)*

- Address competing land use within a **national land use plan** binding District Assemblies, regulators, traditional authorities and the private sector.
- Harmonise the **conflicting policy instruments** governing mining in forest reserves, and strengthen **inter-agency coordination** with clearly defined roles.
- Redefine **artisanal mining permits** to require the consent of Traditional Authorities before any grant.
- Build a **web-based reporting solution** with CSOs, supported by toll-free whistleblower lines.
- Invest in **leadership and capacity for Traditional Authorities**, and deepen **collaboration across agencies, MMDAs, communities, NGOs, academia and the private sector**.

Restoration and incentives *(direct Forestry Commission and district action)*

- Adopt the **Integrated Forestry and Mining & Management Approach (IFAMMA)** to restore degraded forestland and mined-out areas to productive use.
- **Prioritise reforestation in the most degraded zones** — the areas showing the sharpest 1990–2021 declines, starting with open forest.
- Scale **community tree nurseries** and agroforestry, and expand **carbon-finance participation** through Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+.
- Develop **value addition and market access** for non-timber products, and equip communities to **monitor forest and mining operations**.
- Reward community-level **Environmental Champions**, **publicise existing initiatives** to close the awareness gap, and research **migration dynamics** linked to cocoa and mining.

SOURCES

1. Resource Conservation Initiative (RESCONI). *Support to Promote Community Resilience and Rights in Competing Land Use for Mining, Agriculture and Forest Utilization in Ghana* — Final Study Report. Kumasi: RESCONI, November 2023. Executive Summary, pp. ix–x; Sections 2.5, 2.5.1, 2.5.4, 2.6.1, 4.1, 5.1 and 5.2; Figures 2.14 and 2.15 (p. 34), 2.16 (p. 35), 2.17 (p. 35), 2.18 (p. 36), 2.19 (p. 37), 2.22 (p. 39), 2.23 (p. 40), 2.26 (p. 45) and 2.27 (p. 46); Tables 2.1 and 2.2 (p. 43).
2. Land cover change analysis (1990–2021) and land use maps produced for RESCONI by Statera Company Limited (July 2023) with data from RMSC, KNUST and Ecometrica (Forest 2020 Project), 2022. Percentage changes calculated from the hectare figures reported in Tables 2.1 and 2.2.
3. Policy instruments referenced: Forest and Wildlife Policy (2012); Minerals and Mining Policy (2014); Environmental Protection (Mining in Forest Reserves) Regulations, 2022 (L.I. 2462); Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703); Forest Act, 1927.
4. Secondary sources cited within the source report: Nyabor (2019) on destruction of the Tano Offin Forest Reserve; Arthur-Mensah (2012) and Ghana News Agency (2021) on illegal mining in forest reserves; Derkyi et al. (2013) on forest regimes and livelihoods in Tano Offin; Tscharntke et al. (2011), Waldron et al. (2012), Blaser et al. (2018) and Niether et al. (2020) on agroforestry; and World Bank (2023) on Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ payments.