



Thematic Fact Sheet

RESOURCE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE



POLICY BRIEF

Strengthening Community Resilience and Livelihoods for forest fringe and mining-affected landscapes in Asutifi North District (AND) and Atwima Mponua District (AMD).

RESCONI . AUGUST 2026.

ABOUT THIS FACTS SHEET

Illegal mining, unsustainable logging and illegal forest exploitation have degraded forests, farmlands and rivers in Ghana's cocoa-growing districts — severely affecting women, youth and smallholder farmers. This brief translates the findings of RESCONI's field study into recommendations for restoring degraded landscapes and strengthening the resilience and livelihoods of forest-fringe and mining-affected communities. A total of 528 respondents were surveyed across 20 communities in two political districts.

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BACKGROUND

Farming, mining and forestry together contribute more than 20% of Ghana's GDP, but in Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua Districts these sectors now compete destructively for the same land. Farming remains the dominant livelihood — over 90% of surveyed households engage in smallholder subsistence farming and cocoa farming. Notwithstanding, illegal small-scale mining (galamsey) is expanding into these farmlands and forest reserves, degrading soils, polluting rivers and shrinking the resource base that communities depend on.

The RESCONI study report titled 'Support to Promote Community Resilience and Rights in Competing Land Use for Mining, Agriculture and Forest Utilization in Ghana - Final Study Report (2023)' combined household surveys, community group work, remote-sensing land-cover analysis (1990–2021) and laboratory water testing to document these impacts and the coping strategies communities are already using. This brief translates those findings into recommendations for restoring degraded landscapes and strengthening resilience and livelihoods, with particular attention to women and youth. It is expected that this study will provide pointers into policy directions for the project districts at the sub-national levels.

KEY MESSAGE

Illegal mining, unsustainable logging and illegal forest exploitation have degraded forests, farmlands and rivers in Ghana's cocoa-growing districts, severely affecting women, youth and smallholder farmers. From a field survey of 528 respondents across 20 communities in Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua Districts, and laboratory water-quality analysis undertaken from 2023 to 2024 by Resource Conservation Initiative, the evidence in brief is as follows:

94–99%

report forest cover has declined over 30 years

34–59%

decline in closed and open forest cover in both districts

12–30%

of community land given to third parties diverted to illegal mining

6,000%

River Desiri turbidity above the WHO threshold, linked to galamsey

0

female respondents in either district farming more than 10 acres

20–39

the age group most under-represented among active farmers

Community-led restoration — increasing indigenous economic trees on cocoa farmlands, private smallholder plantations and livelihood diversification such as beekeeping — already exists at small scale. Government, donors and NGOs should **fund, formalise and scale these community solutions**, backed by inclusive decision-making and an enabling environment, including resolution of tree ownership.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

1. Environmental degradation is undermining livelihoods

- Closed forest cover fell by **34%** (AND) and **48%** (AMD) between 1990 and 2021; open forest cover fell by **59%** and **43%** respectively — driven by illegal logging, galamsey, poor land management and agricultural expansion.
- Water sampled from River Desiri in the Tano Offin Forest Reserve — downstream of galamsey activity — showed turbidity **6,000% above** WHO limits, with lead and chromium concentrations **280%** and **240%** above safe thresholds, compared with a clean control stream nearby. This poses direct health risks to downstream water users.
- Between **12%** (AND) and **30%** (AMD) of community lands are conveyed to third parties have been converted from farming to illegal small-scale mining, threatening cocoa yields and food security in landscapes already prone to erratic rainfall and rising temperatures.

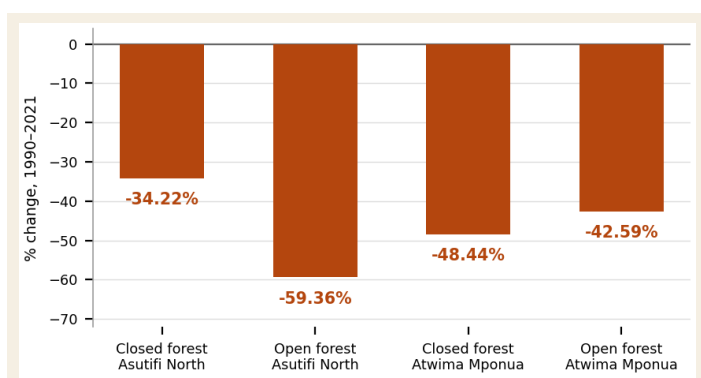


Figure 1. Change in forest cover, 1990–2021, from the remote-sensing land-cover analysis.

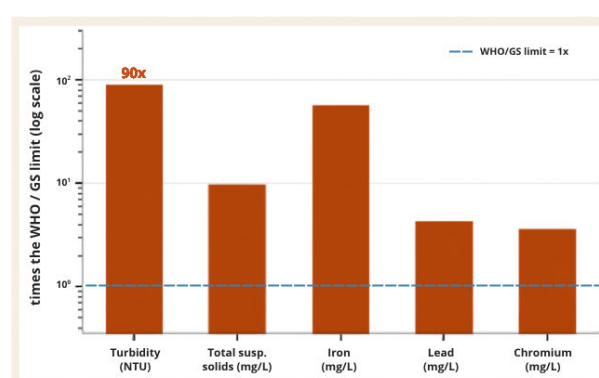


Figure 2. Worst reading in River Desiri for each parameter, as a multiple of the WHO/GS limit for potable water.

2. Women and youth carry a disproportionate burden

- **No female respondent in either district farms more than 10 acres** — women's landholdings are systematically smaller, limiting their economic resilience to land loss and price shocks.
- Women and migrants were found to have lower awareness of forest and land-use regulations than better-resourced community members, weakening their ability to participate in and contest land-use decisions.
- Active farming is concentrated in the **40–59** age group; young people aged **20–39** are disengaging from agriculture — a trend linked to limited land access, poor returns, and the pull of illegal mining as an alternative income source.

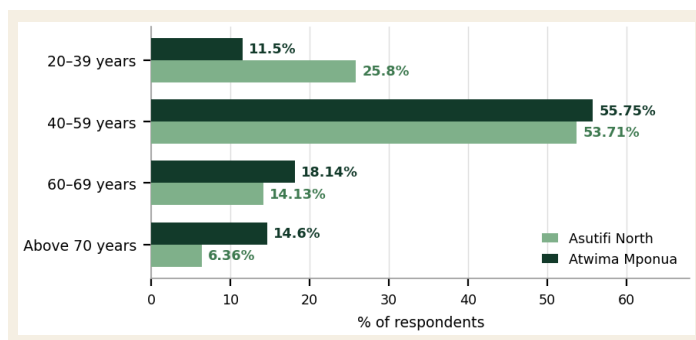


Figure 3. Age distribution of active farming and mining respondents. Youth participation is thinnest in Atwima Mponua.

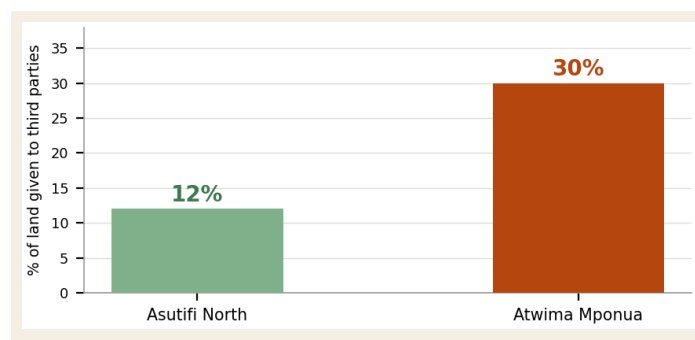


Figure 4. Share of community land given to third parties that is used for illegal small-scale mining.

3. Communities are already innovating — but at a small, unfunded scale

- Community consultations identified concrete, locally generated livelihood alternatives: **beekeeping, mushroom and snail farming, gari (cassava flakes) processing**, and community tree-nursery establishment to support reforestation.
- Formal restoration examples exist to build on — for example Ghana's Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme, which has channelled carbon-market payments to over **240,000 farmers** nationally.
- Traditional Authorities and Community Resource Management Committees are viewed favourably by residents as potential co-managers of forest and land resources, though the authority of the traditional authorities has eroded under current institutional arrangements for granting mining rights to small-scale operators and artisanal entities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

RESONI proposes a human- and environment-centred approach — reflected in the study's recommended **Integrated Forestry and Mining Management Approach (IFAMMA)** — built around five priorities.

Priority Area	Recommended Actions	Lead / Partners
1 Restore degraded lands and catchments of water bodies	Mandate reclamation of mined-out sites and buffer-zone replanting along rivers (e.g. the Desiri) under an Integrated Forestry and Mining Management Approach (IFAMMA); require reclamation bonds from permit holders; scale up community tree-nursery and reforestation schemes.	Forestry Commission, Minerals Commission, EPA, District Assemblies
2 Diversify and de-risk local livelihoods	Fund and scale alternative livelihood options identified by communities themselves — beekeeping, mushroom and snail farming, gari (cassava flakes) processing, agroforestry and cocoa intercropping — with startup capital, training and market linkages.	MoFA, COCOBOD, NGOs, Business Advisory Centres
3 Protect river systems and public health	Establish routine, published water-quality monitoring of rivers within forest reserves; enforce buffer-zone restrictions on mining near watercourses; provide safe-water alternatives to downstream communities pending remediation.	Water Resources Commission, EPA, Ghana Health Service
4 Close the gender and youth gap	Set quotas or targets for women's and youth participation in land-use and benefit-sharing decisions at community level; expand women's access to land and credit; create youth-targeted agribusiness and green-job schemes to reverse disengagement from farming.	District Assemblies, Traditional Authorities, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
5 Strengthen community-based resource governance	Formally resource and recognise Community Resource Management Committees, Traditional Authorities and CSOs as co-managers of forest and land resources; roll out a compliance-monitoring toolkit and a web-based reporting platform for illegal logging and mining.	Traditional Authorities (National and Regional House of Chiefs), CSOs, Regulatory entities such as Forestry Commission, EPA, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

Restoring forests, farmlands and rivers in Ghana's mining-affected cocoa landscapes cannot rest on enforcement alone. The evidence points to a **two-track approach**: hold mining and logging operators accountable for reclamation and water protection, while investing directly in the livelihood alternatives, land access and decision-making roles that communities — especially women and youth — have already identified for themselves.

Scaling these community-led solutions, with sustained government, traditional authority and donor backing, offers the most viable path to a resilient, equitable balance between mining, agriculture and forest utilization.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

The Resource Conservation Initiative (RESCONI) is a Ghanaian Civil Society Organisation (CSO) working towards environmental sustainability. This brief draws on RESCONI's study of competing land use for mining, agriculture and forest utilization in the Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua Districts, with laboratory analysis by the KNUST Central Laboratory. It accompanies RESCONI's thematic fact sheet series on Water Quality, Health, National Security, Food Security, Women and Gender, Deforestation and Forest Degradation, Land Use Land Cover Change, Project Fact Sheet, Policy Brief, Cocoa Farming, RESCONI Key Findings Summary, and Livelihoods.

THE FIVE ASKS, IN ONE LINE EACH



REFERENCES

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- 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.
- RESCONI Updated Water Quality Report for 2026.
- Laboratory analysis by the KNUST Central Laboratory. Land cover change analysis (1990–2021) produced by Statera Company Limited with data from RMSC, KNUST and Ecometrica (Forest 2020 Project). Reference standards: WHO guideline values; GS 175-1:2013; WRC raw water requirements.