



seed **madagascar**

sustainable environment, education & development

## CONSERVATION PROGRAMME STRATEGY



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# The Conservation Programme Strategy

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## Introduction

SEED Madagascar (SEED) has been conducting conservation research and community-based conservation actions in the littoral forest fragments of the Anosy region for almost 20 years.



The area has high levels of biodiversity, and locally endemic species are still being discovered. The work is implemented against a backdrop of continuing forest fragmentation, pressure on natural resources and the constant threat of planned large-scale mining. SEED believes that community conservation initiatives are as important as biodiversity research for the long-term conservation of the region's natural resources.

The aims of SEED Madagascar's Conservation Research Programme (SCRP) are to understand the importance and use of the littoral forest and surrounding habitats; extend scientific knowledge of the ecology and population trends of the native flora and fauna; and to highlight the importance of biodiversity, conservation and protection in the area. The programme uses an approach that integrates research, practical conservation, education and community engagement.

Identifying long term goals for each of SEED's programmes will provide a roadmap for our vision and guide the development of shorter-term projects more strategically over a longer time frame. This brings greater stability; long term impact focused goals; longer time frames over which results can be measured; and allows for multi-year funding applications. With a commitment to increasing knowledge on the biodiversity in Sainte Luce continued fauna and flora research will remain a priority for SEED, and emerging both internal and external learnings will support the development of novel studies.



This is SEED's Conservation Programme Strategy, the outcome of the strategic planning process undertaken with the Conservation Programme between February and July 2020. The timeframe for the plan is five years.

The strategic planning process was facilitated by O'Toole, M., with input from Englefield, E., Trouwloon, D., Bass, L., Jacobs, M., Andriamboavonjy, L., Ambler, S., Roberts, S., Savage, J., Rabetany, O., Caspersz-Loney, J., Antilahy, J. and Strang, K. The process report and final strategy documents were finalised by Englefield, E., Trouwloon, D., Bass, L. and O'Toole, M.

## Vision and Mission

SEED's vision is:

*A healthy, thriving ecosystem*

The mission of SEED's Conservation Programme is:

*to conserve the biodiversity, and sustainably manage natural resources, of the Sainte Luce ecosystem in a way that engages and benefits local communities*



## Key Strategic Areas

To achieve the vision and mission, SEED will work on five key strategic areas over the next five years:

- (1) Research,
- (2) Conservation Actions,
- (3) Sustainable Management of Natural Resources,
- (4) Community Engagement and Partnership,
- (5) Learning, Dissemination and Advocacy.

## (1) Research

*SEED will produce an internationally recognised body of research that informs the SEED Conservation Programme.*

SEED employs an evidence-based approach to project and Programme development, which is firmly rooted in research and learning. All work done under the Conservation Programme should be underpinned by biodiversity conservation research.

The Programme's research will be aimed at generating a better understanding of the state of biodiversity in the region, as well as the effectiveness of different conservation methodologies in the local context. To achieve this, research will not be limited to natural science disciplines, such as biology and ecology, but will, where relevant, encompass socio-economic and cultural research. Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices studies can be instrumental in determining current natural resource use patterns as well as informing the feasibility of certain conservation methodologies in the local context. Similarly, understanding different stakeholders and their interests are a crucial aspect of engaging stakeholders in SEED's Conservation Programme, thereby increasing its chances for success.



SEED's Conservation Research Committee will review research proposals against clear assessment criteria and research priorities and will safeguard the quality and relevance of SEED's biodiversity research. The assessment criteria and research priorities will be informed by the vision and mission of SEED and its Conservation Programme.

Collaborating with national and international research partners and outsourcing work to external experts when required enables the Programme to pursue its mission as efficiently as possible. Engaging local communities in research will be an essential element to create ownership of biodiversity conservation challenges within the local communities with which SEED works.

## **(2) Conservation Actions**

*SEED will identify and implement complementary actions that promote ecosystem health and respond to current and emergent threats*



Conservation actions are at the core of SEED's Conservation Programme. While conservation measures can be implemented proactively, certain elements of biodiversity conservation are often reactionary by nature – requiring responses to threats in a way that seeks to maintain or enhance (some aspects of) biological diversity. As the exact nature of the threats that will emerge over the coming five years is difficult to predict, the strategies that will be required to address these threats are also difficult to formulate. The suitability of each strategy will ultimately depend on emerging situations, ongoing research, and learnings from this and other programmes.

In addition, anthropogenic pressures on biodiversity in the region are likely to persist. Because of this, the strategic outcome is phrased as a situation in which biodiversity is actively being conserved, rather than a situation in which biodiversity has been fully conserved.

## **(3) Sustainable Management of Natural Resources**

*SEED will support communities to use natural resources in a way that fulfils their needs whilst maintaining viable ecosystems.*

The Conservation Programme works in areas where local communities depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods. Community members are therefore incredibly vulnerable to the consequences of biodiversity loss on the one hand and exclusionary conservation practices on the other. Management is considered to be sustainable when local needs are fulfilled in a way that maintains viable ecosystems.

Some aspects of current natural resource use, such as charcoal production, hunting, slash-and-burn agriculture and subsistence and commercial logging are considered to be unsustainable. Success in this strategic area therefore requires significant community buy-in

and behavioural change. SEED will work with communities in a number of ways including raising awareness of conservation issues within communities, sharing knowledge with and building the capacity of community governance structures, supporting communities in monitoring their resource use, and supporting communities in finding alternative livelihoods.

#### **(4) Community Engagement and Partnership**

*SEED will work to ensure communities are empowered and well-informed to participate and lead in all aspects of effective conservation.*

Local community members will be supported to take on larger roles and more responsibilities in conservation efforts. This requires that community members are involved in all aspects of the Conservation Programme, and the growth of their skills, knowledge and experience is prioritised so they are able to become leaders.



Supporting open dialogue is essential to empower and engage different stakeholders. Community engagement can operate at numerous levels, such as working with key leaders, collaboration with existing community groups and establishing new governance structures. SEED will use specific strategies for increasing community engagement as best appropriate, including information sessions, feedback sessions, conservation awareness raising events, and cross visits between different communities. SEED will increase the visibility of community governance structures to external audiences and will prioritise inclusivity. Local communities are not homogenous entities and socio-economic characteristics such as age, gender and occupation shape individuals' abilities to participate in biodiversity conservation debates.

#### **(5) Learning, Dissemination and Advocacy**

*SEED will ensure all learning informs internal and external best practice.*

Ensuring adequate learning from ongoing projects within the Conservation Programme while retaining and applying past learnings is an important component of SEED's evidence-based approach to Programme and project development.

SEED has two decades of experience in conserving biodiversity around Sainte Luce. Through trial and error, national and international staff have developed a better understanding of what works and what does not work in this local context. Yet, because of the organisation's high turnover rate - particularly within the international team - learning is not always retained, and so strategies are required to address information leakage at project, Programme and organisation level.



Going beyond learning, SEED understands the importance of disseminating programme learnings to local, regional and international audiences. It is not enough to share successes; the Conservation Programme will actively share the lessons it has learnt. Local communities deserve to be reported back to, especially when they have played an active role in research as research assistants, translators or participants. This enables communities to better understand biodiversity conservation and natural resource management and will empower communities in their responses to local biodiversity challenges. Disseminating programme learnings to conservation practitioners, policy drivers and academics working on similar issues in similar contexts fosters collaborations and ensures that the wheel does not have to be reinvented twice. Learning should be disseminated to regional and international audiences through various channels, such as peer reviewed papers, SEED's social media channels, blogs, and workshops.

Finally, some situations may require taking a position of advocacy. This may either involve SEED advocating for a specific issue, or SEED amplifying the voices of community members advocating for an issue.