

RESULTS SUMMARY

From Participation to Stewardship: Indigenous Leaders Champion Locally-Led Conservation in Southern Myanmar

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PROJECT	<i>Title:</i>	Triple Benefit Programme
	<i>Partner:</i>	WWF Myanmar
	<i>Country:</i>	Myanmar
	<i>Period:</i>	2024

CHANGE



The Indigenous leaders of an area in Southern Myanmar have shifted from being participants in conservation to becoming champions of locally-led conservation. A major milestone was the official designation and certification of a new 2,364-hectare community forest - marking the first time restoration efforts were initiated by the Indigenous leaders themselves. This change reflects a growing institutional capacity and mindset shift inspired by positive outcomes from 10 project-supported communities. Seeing the tangible ecological and social benefits of community-led forest restoration, they are committed to expanding this approach beyond the project villages. This group, supported by the project over several years, have grown into local technical champions, facilitating restoration planning and implementation with little external intervention. This transformation signals increasing stewardship and long-term sustainability for conservation efforts in their Conservation Area.

CONTEXT

Myanmar's political instability and limited state presence in ethnic-controlled areas have made local governance structures even more key to managing natural resources than ever before. The project operates in one of the Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA), where forest degradation, shifting cultivation, and extractive threats continue to pressure ecosystems. At the same time, community dependence on forests remains high for livelihoods and cultural identity. The leaders have historically supported forest protection but lacked the capacity and confidence and resources to lead restoration efforts. Over the past few years, the project helped facilitate participatory conservation models in 10 communities, serving as demonstration sites. These areas showed measurable gains in forest health and community engagement. As a result, local leaders began to view restoration as both feasible and beneficial, even within their core administrative zones.

CONTRIBUTION

The project played a catalytic role in enabling this shift by embedding long-term capacity development, technical mentoring, and a locally-led approach to restoration. A community focal point, supported in the past few years, served as a bridge between the INGO, communities, and authorities - transferring knowledge and building internal confidence. Through participatory planning, technical tools, and peer learning, the project helped them develop the ability to lead site selection, boundary demarcation, and restoration activities with minimal external input. By fostering visible success in the 10 pivot communities, the project provided a working proof of concept that convinced them of the benefits of initiating restoration in the community forest. The initiative also encouraged local ownership by positioning restoration as an internally-driven priority rather than an externally imposed requirement.

IMAGES		
	<p>Aerial view of forest landscape in the southern Myanmar. © Khun Latt / WWF Myanmar</p>	<p>Forest restoration using Assisted Natural Regeneration techniques implemented by Indigenous people. © Saw Dah Htoo / WWF Myanmar</p>

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

Key activities that contributed to this shift included community-level restoration, technical training, and sustained mentoring for community focal points. Participatory consultations with local communities and authorities were facilitated by them to initiate the new Community Forest. The project supported boundary demarcation, installation of signboards, and construction of a forest hut, demonstrating practical conservation infrastructure. Their involvement in monthly project coordination meetings and peer exchanges further deepened their technical and managerial capacities. Awareness-raising campaigns in and beyond the initial 10 communities strengthened support and visibility for conservation. The ability to lead restoration in addition to project sites is a direct outcome of these multi-layered capacity-building efforts.

LESSONS

This experience demonstrates that building genuine local leadership takes time, consistent support, and a willingness to transfer authority. Strategic investment in individuals, such as the community focal points, can catalyse wider institutional shifts. Demonstration sites remain powerful tools for influencing decision-makers when they showcase concrete results. The case also highlights that locally-led conservation is not only viable but increasingly embraced when communities and governance actors see and feel its benefits. Transitioning from externally supported to internally driven action increases sustainability, even in politically fragile settings. Long-term partnerships rooted in trust and shared learning are key enablers of this transition.

EVIDENCE

The clearest evidence of change is the official designation of a Community Forest, certified by them in November 2024. Covering 2,364 hectares, this forest lies within their territory and was not part of the original project's target area. The decision to initiate restoration here came from them based on their own planning, drawing on the project's technical training and support. Restoration is now underway with local community involvement and is being monitored independently by their team. This marks a major shift from previous years, where restoration efforts were externally led. Training and awareness-raising has been extended to additional communities, further reinforcing their role in driving conservation outcomes. These developments signal deepening institutional commitment and growing momentum for locally-led conservation.

DOMAINS

Development strategy priorities:

Insert strategy priority

Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

-

Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people's rights

-

Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights

x

Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights

-

Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

-

Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work

-

GUIDANCE NOTE

This format consists of two overall sections: on page one, the results summary communicates results to an external audience using a brief summary of what has been achieved; while page two provides an opportunity to explain the background and evidence behind the claims made as part of the summary.

Page 1: Results summary

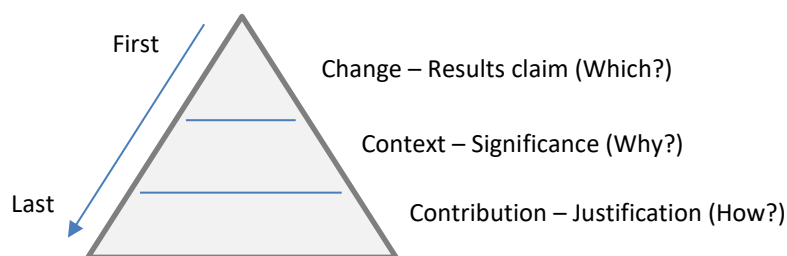
The results summary should outline of the overall change. This should be phrased in a clear and concise manner, focusing on the benefits for target groups or communities, and preferably start out by stating the overall key message as a one-line statement. It is thus important to prioritise what the key message should be and not attempt to describe every possible change that may have occurred.

Note that case studies should not describe all of the activities carried out during the implementation. Instead, it should focus on one or two key messages to be highlighted – which may also span several projects – and only outline activities to backup contributions to the highlighted change.

This can be illustrated as a “reverse funnel.” First, the “change” section introduces the overall results claim, which answers the “which.” Note that this is done before any details have been provided. Second, the “context” section outlines the problem being addressed by the project and the significance of the change. For example, by explaining “why” it benefits target groups or communities.

Finally, and lastly, the “contribution” section should provide examples to justify for “how” the intervention contributed to realising change. Note that this should focus on the plausible linkage between the change and intervention rather than describing details from activities. It is often useful to think of this as a reverse theory-of-change, i.e. “After we did X, then Y occurred, because of Z.”

Figure 1:
Reverse funnel for communication



Page 2: Additional information

The second page should provide background and evidence for project's contribution to change. It can also address technical issues that do not fit in the results summary. The section consists of the following sections:

- **Activities:** Whereas the “contribution” section on page one provides a brief summary of the project contributions to change, the “activities” section allows for more detail on the project design, organisation and underlying activities in support of the contributions made.
- **Lessons:** Describes lessons learned through the implementation. These should relate to the results claim or alternatively the project(s) as a whole. Please consider (1) novelty – i.e. whether the change represents something new – and (2) the potential to scale and/or build on lessons going ahead.
- **Evidence:** A narrative comparison between results claims and the underlying evidence. It should answer “X led to Y, because of Z,” although it does not need to be phrased this way. It is useful to include references to a few selected documents for further details. Please see guidelines for more.
- **Domains and development strategy:** Describes contributions to defined domains and the Danish development strategy. Please consider limiting the number of domains to a few selected ones.