seed madagascar
sustainable environment, education & development

A Concept Note for

# THE ALA PROGRAMME: PHASE IV

## *In-Situ Endangered Lemur Conservation through Reforestation and Community Engagement in the Sainte Luce Littoral Forest*

May 2026

Cover Image – Native planting in formerly burned area expanding from Corridor 1

# 1. Introduction

SEED Madagascar (SEED) is currently seeking *£152,184* for the next two-year phase of the Ala Programme, aiming to support *long-term endangered lemur conservation through the expansion of forest corridors and promotion of sustainable forest management in Sainte Luce, Madagascar*. The Ala Programme is a long-term conservation and reforestation effort in the Sainte Luce littoral forest (SLLF) centred on increasing habitat connectivity for endangered lemurs. The upcoming phase of this programme will focus on *increasing forest connectivity and empowering local management* through the continued expansion and improvement of the S8 corridors and capacity-strengthening of community-based management frameworks to maintain long term conservation.

# 2. Context

Littoral forests are among Madagascar's most threatened ecosystems; less than 10% of original littoral forest cover remains, mostly in the form of small, fragmented parcels, and only 1.5% of these remaining forests are in protected areas.[1] The Sainte Luce Littoral Forest (SLLF) in the Anosy region of southeastern Madagascar is one such remaining parcel, consisting of 1,000ha of fragmented forest classified as an IUCN Category V Protected Area.[a] The SLLF hosts four species of endangered lemur and 40 rare plant species found only in the Anosy region.[2] In addition, Sainte Luce is threatened by industrial-scale mining operations, climate change, high community reliance on forest products, and burning forests for agriculture. These pressures are only set to intensify when planned mining operations begin clearing large areas of nearby unprotected forest as early as 2033, severely jeopardising the area's highly endemic biodiversity.[3]

The Ala Programme (*Ala* meaning 'forest' in Malagasy) was established in 2019 to improve the health of the SLLF through targeted planting of forest corridors. It operates in the protected but degraded area known as S8, which consists of five fragments of remnant forest separated by swaths of cleared and burned land. This fragmentation is particularly harmful for the three threatened lemur species that cannot traverse the open ground created by deforestation: the Anosy mouse lemur (*Microcebus tanosi*), the Southern woolly lemur (*Avahi meridionalis*), and the Thomas' dwarf lemur (*Cheirogaleus thomasi*). The spatial barriers created by forest fragmentation result in genetically isolated sub-populations, increased mortality, and an elevated risk of extinction in these species.[4]

In previous phases, SEED planted five forest corridors of fast-growing *Acacia mangium* as well as native seedlings, which have since grown to form a mostly closed canopy and were first seen being used by endangered lemurs in 2024. The programme has supported a suite of community engagement activities, including training and equipping firefighting agents, raising awareness of forest threats, and coordinating activities among regional reforestation actors. The upcoming, two-year phase will focus on improving the function and resilience of the S8 corridors through expanded planting and improved techniques as well as promoting sustainable forest use through strong, locally led management frameworks and a reduced reliance on forest resources.

[a] An IUCN Category V Protected Area is an "area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value." These areas typically contain human settlements that are integral parts of the landscape. https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/30018

# 3. Outcomes & Activities

Objective: Improved ecological function of the SLLF through landscape restoration in S8 and sustainable forest management in Sainte Luce

**Outcome One**

Improved forest connectivity in S8 through the expansion of existing corridors with the establishment of native trees

**Outcome Two**

Sustainable, community-based forest management in Sainte Luce through an effective, transparent, and independent COBA[b]

*Figure 1 – Community members planting at a reforestation site in February 2026*

## OUTCOME ONE: Expanding Reforestation in S8

**Forest Restoration and Reforestation**

SEED plans to plant 30,000 native seedlings during Ala Phase IV, increasing the currently reforested area in S8 by two thirds. These seedlings will be planted in favourable areas adjacent to existing corridors, ensuring the long-term survival of forest connectivity even in the face of localised shocks. Planting practices have been refined through knowledge sharing with other regional reforestation actors and targeted experiments in the SLLF, and the upcoming round of planting will benefit from the most up-to-date techniques, including targeted mulching, consistent weeding, and adaptive watering. This planting will employ hundreds of community members through partnerships with traditional rights holders, who recently formed a reforestation cooperative with the support of

[b] COBA stands for Communaté de base and is a community-based natural resource management structure present in small communities across Madagascar.

the Ala Programme. Continued partnerships and trainings with these community leaders will ensure that reforestation maintains community support and that the benefits of the planting effort are equitably distributed.

**Improving Nursery Infrastructure and Practices**

The upcoming phase will also focus on improvements to the Ala Nursery. The installation of a new well will ensure reliable water access year-round in the nursery, mitigating seasonal water shortages that have been the main cause of nursery mortality. The previous Ala phase established a vermicompost system to turn waste from the SEED Conservation Research Programme (SCRP) camp into fertiliser for use in the nursery and this phase will continue operating this system to generate compost and promote seedling growth. During this phase, the Ala Team will also bring in national experts in reforestation practices to give training to nursery staff, building on the inter-organisational relationships established during cross-visits in Phase III. The end of the two-year phase will also mark a complete transition from collecting wild-set seedlings (young trees that germinate naturally in existing forests) to growing from seeds. This transition will bring the Ala Nursery in line with international best practices and reduce harvest pressure on existing forest, while the slow multi-year transition will ensure that annual seedling output remains high.

**Ecosystem Protection and Fire Prevention**

In addition to planting efforts, the next phase will redouble its focus on fire prevention, which will be especially important as fire threats driven by climate change continue to intensify. This will include continued training and equipping of community fire agents who monitor the forest during the dry season and organise local responses to fires. It will also involve the annual maintenance of firebreaks to protect both planted corridors and the S8 forest as a whole. The goal of these activities will be zero trees lost to wildfire in S8 for the entire duration of the phase. The Ala Team has established new bimonthly meetings with regional fire prevention actors to facilitate this effort; this renewed relationship will enable the programme to better coordinate fire prevention activities in the coming years.

**Research, Monitoring, and Knowledge Sharing**

Finally, the restoration programme will be carefully monitored to continuously improve nursery, planting, and maintenance techniques in this unique ecosystem. In 2026, the Ala Team established six experimental plots to scientifically record the success of nine key species and three potential soil amendments, the first experiment of its kind in the SLLF. Results from this research will inform future planting, and additional experiments are planned to be conducted and shared with relevant actors over the next three years, increasing reforestation knowledge not only for the Ala Programme but for the wider restoration community in southeastern Madagascar. The Ala Team will also continue working closely with SEED's Sainte Luce Conservation Research Programme (SCRP) to monitor lemur movements through frequent ecological surveys and camera traps, generating valuable data on the effectiveness of the programme's efforts.

*Figure 2 – SEED staff delivering training in planting techniques in January 2026*

## OUTCOME TWO: Promoting Sustainable Forest Management in Sainte Luce

**Awareness Raising, Education, and Coordination**

Laying the groundwork for fair and effective long-term forest management rooted in the Sainte Luce community will be a central element to Ala Phase IV. Surveys and focus groups conducted at the end of Phase III have shown that basic agreement on forest rules and management responsibilities is lacking in the six communities bordering the SLLF, so the first step of this process will be a full review and compilation of the current forest rules, including national and regional laws as well as local environmental directives known as *dinas*. The roles and responsibilities of each forest management body will also be codified through collaborative meetings with local committees and subsequently shared with both key actors and wider communities to establish a shared knowledge base from which to implement further capacity strengthening. These activities will occur alongside sensitisation sessions raising awareness of the importance of forest conservation which the Ala Team already runs in these communities.

**Capacity Strengthening of COBA**

The *Communauté de Base*, or COBA, is a community-led natural resource management model that has been shown to lead to strong conservation outcomes elsewhere in Madagascar.[6] While COBAs exist in the SLLF, studies from Phase III show that their capacity is extremely low. Phase IV will focus on building these COBAs into active, independent organisations that can effectively govern the forest without the need for external involvement.

The first step of this process will be to facilitate elections for COBA members, which will include co-developing an election procedure and running public engagement sessions to raise awareness of the election process. To do this, the Ala Team will draw from expertise built by SEED's Oratsimba Programme, a long-running project that has established effective Marine Management Committees to govern lobster fisheries around Sainte Luce, to educate COBA members and the wider community in election procedures, hold transparent elections, and train new members in organisational procedures. Following this, the Ala Team will train COBA members in data collection skills and facilitate regular forest monitoring and roadside surveys to enforce harvesting rules. In the first year, these will be partially funded by SEED, but in the second year this responsibility will transition to the COBAs as they generate revenue from permits and fines. This will be accompanied by an organisational financial plan and financial management and budgeting training for COBA members in collaboration with SEED's Project Miarina, which focuses on building financial resilience in rural communities. During this process, SEED will also coordinate with other relevant actors such as FIMPIA (*Fikambanana Mpiaro ny Ambatoatsinana*, the local organisation established and funded by the mining company QMM that patrols the protected areas)and DREDD (*Direction Régionale de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable*, the national ministry in charge of protected forests) to ensure that COBA's increased activities complement those of other organisations. By the end of the two-year period, the Ala Programme aims to have supplied the SLLF COBAs with the skills and resources required to control illegal deforestation in the long term. SEED's cross-sectoral experience in strengthening local capacity and deep involvement in the Sainte Luce community make it uniquely positioned to deliver this goal.

**Alternative livelihood development**

In addition to reducing illegal deforestation through better management, a key strategy in promoting the long-term survival of the SLLF will be to reduce the reliance of communities on subsistence resources harvested from the forest, such as wood for cooking and palm fronds for lobster pots. Phase IV of the Ala Programme will conduct the baseline research and development needed to execute an effective project to alleviate these dependencies. In the first year, the Ala Team, in coordination with the Oratsimba Programme, will conduct a behaviour analysis of forest cutting using a COM-B framework, which identifies how specific capabilities, opportunities, and motivations shape forest cutting behaviour In the second year, the team and community representatives will use results from this analysis to co-produce a plan for promoting livelihood alternatives, which could include community plantations of key timber species, more fuel-efficient stoves, or alternative materials for making lobster pots. This plan will allow SEED to launch an effective livelihoods alternative project by the end of the phase, either as a separately funded component of the Ala Programme or as a standalone project.

## Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

The SEED Conservation Research Programme (SCRP) conducts regular ecological surveys in the Ala corridors and surrounding SLLF to gather valuable data on wildlife populations, including walking transects for herpetofauna and camera traps for lemurs. The Ala Programme uses this data, along with publicly available satellite-based imagery, to track the ecological outcomes of its reforestation efforts. In addition to this, the Ala Team collects data on planting success through dedicated experimental plots that track the growth and survival of planted seedlings spanning a range of species, planting protocols and environments. Results from these experiments are compiled in learnings reports that are then shared with the broader regional reforestation community, improving general knowledge on optimal restoration techniques.

To monitor the progress of education and capacity-strengthening efforts, a community-wide forest use survey will be conducted every six months, measuring what resources people are harvesting from where in the forest, and how the community is responding to changes in COBA's operations. Specific monitoring activities will also be conducted to measure the impact of each specific capacity-strengthening activity, such as COBA knowledge

assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of trainings and monthly COBA meeting minutes to assess the regularity of forest patrols. These activities will be integrated with a larger community-wide needs assessment currently being conducted by SEED's Environment department in Sainte Luce to holistically understand the social challenges facing conservation efforts there and the activities that can best address them.

## 4. SEED's Capacity to Deliver

SEED is an award-winning, holistic, international development charity that envisages a thriving, healthy, and sustainable Madagascar. SEED's mission is to collaborate with individuals, communities, organisations, and the government in fulfilling sustainable environment, education, and development goals in southeast Madagascar. With over 20 years' experience working with communities, SEED has contextual knowledge and relationships with key stakeholders that put the organisation in a unique position to deliver contextually appropriate programmes. To date, SEED has delivered multiple successful conservation and livelihood projects, taking an interdisciplinary approach that relies on local expertise, scientific research, and community involvement.

## 5. Summary Budget

| Category | Sub-category | Total MGA | Total GBP |
|---|---|---|---|
| Human Resources | Project staff | 217,482,500 | £41,034 |
| | Administration | 45,536,200 | £8,595 |
| Equipment, Materials, and Resources | | 23,440,444 | £4,423 |
| Activity Costs | Forest Restoration | 169,184,086 | £31,922 |
| | Capacity Strengthening | 66,447,500 | £12,537 |
| | Monitoring and Evaluation | 51,070,704 | £9,635 |
| Associated Costs | Staff Per Diems | 23,025,600 | £4,344 |
| | Accommodation | 4,428,000 | £835 |
| | Staff Transport | 58,957,400 | £11,124 |
| Communications | | 26,014,500 | £4,908 |
| Running Costs | Madagascar Running Costs | 80,657,418 | £15,218 |
| | UK Running Costs | 40,328,709 | £7,609 |
| **Total:** | | **806,573,061** | **£152,184** |

# 6. References


1. Consiglio, T., Schatz, G. E., McPherson, G., Lowry, P. P., Rabenantoandro, J., Rogers, Z. S., Rabevohitra, R. & Rabehevitra, D. (2006). Deforestation and plant diversity of Madagascar's littoral forests. Conservation Biology 20(6), 1799-1803. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2006.00562.x

2. Bollen, A. & Donati, G. (2006). Conservation Status of the Littoral Forest of South-Eastern Madagascar: A Review. *Oryx* 40: 57–66. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605306000111

3. Watson, J. E., Joseph, L. N., Fuller, R. A., James Watson, C. E., & Ana Rodrigues, E. (2010). Mining and conservation: implications for Madagascar's littoral forests. Conservation Letters, 3(4), 286–287. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-263X.2010.00124.x

4. Roberts, S. H., Rossizela, R. J., Longosoa, T. H., Strang, K., Chumrova, L., Nijman, V. & Donati, G. (2021). Population dynamics of nocturnal lemurs in littoral forest fragments: the importance of long-term monitoring. International Journal of Primatology, 42, 833-858 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10764-021-00243-1

5. Donatti, C. I., Fedele, G., Marcellino, R., Munoz, A., Prowse, M., Rabenandrasana, C. , Rakotobe, Z. L., Rakotonandrasana, J. F., Rambeloson, A. M., Ramparany, M., Sadania, C. & Velontrasina, C. (2025). Sustainable Landscapes for Eastern Madagascar – A Midterm Impact Evaluation. Environmental Challenges, 20, 101231 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envc.2025.101231