



30 Conservation Agreements Signed: *First step towards the restoration of Anjouan forests*

Forests play a vital role in climate regulation, preservation of biodiversity and protection of water resources. Over the past thirty years, Anjouan lost 80% of its forests. This is one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world. Aware of these issues, the NGO Dahari has launched a new approach for the Comoros, consisting of signing individual conservation agreements with local farmers. These agreements commit farmers not to cut down native trees and to fallow their plots located in forest areas. In exchange for this commitment, farmers receive monetary transfers, calculated according to the size of the plot preserved during the duration of the contract.

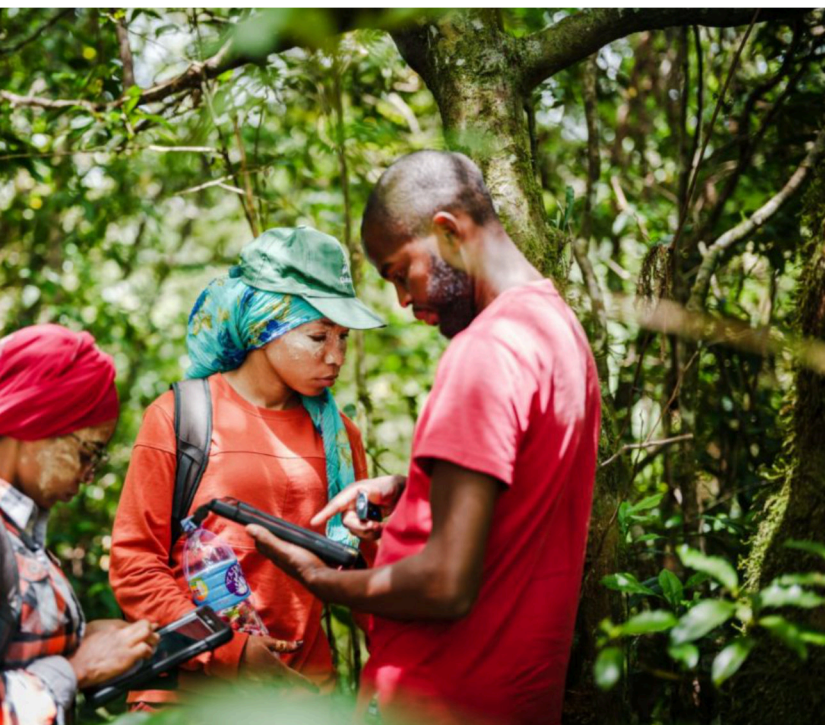
Farmer Selection Process

Individual meetings and focus groups were held in the village of Adda with 32 farmers out of the 135 identified in the forest areas targeted for the first agreements. During these meetings, we collected information on their perceptions of forest conservation and collected their recommendations on the steps and conditions for success for the implementation of the agreements.



Mr. Abdou Mohamed, community mobilizer at Mont Tringui National Park, gives us these impressions:

“This new approach to conserving existing forests will have more impact than carrying out reforestation. Because reforestation campaigns require good monitoring and a lot of maintenance and forest trees grow very slowly. On the other hand, with this Dahari approach, land owners located in forest areas voluntarily agreed to abandon their fields to support forest conservation. There is therefore great hope that the large trees will remain and with natural regeneration, the forest will return to its former state, for the greatest benefit of the population.”



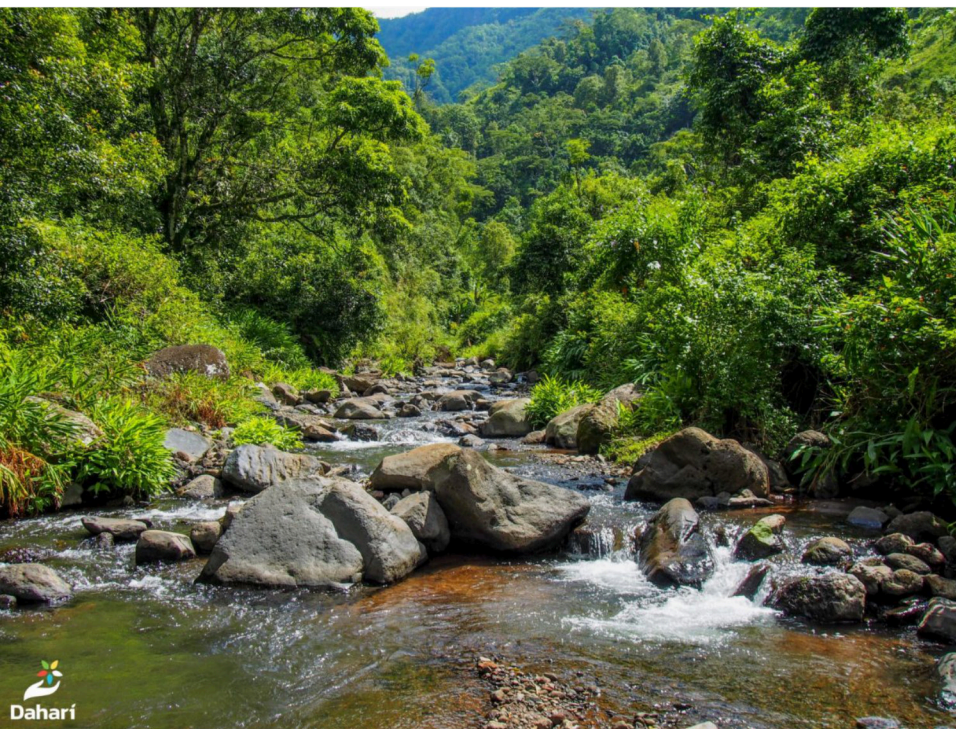
The selection of plots for conservation agreements is based on strict social and ecological criteria:

- Socio-environmental surveys are carried out in the villages with the owners of plots located in forest areas at high risk of clearing in the next three years. Consequently, we selected these plots to launch this pilot phase.
- Evaluation visit: our Forests program team evaluates plots by taking geographic coordinates, measurements of the plot. It also assesses vegetation and the presence of native trees.
- Explanatory discussions: with farmers to explain the terms of the agreement, the expected benefits and the associated responsibilities.

Protecting biodiversity and Water Resources

Conservation agreements aim to significantly reduce deforestation and protect local species. They help maintain healthy forest ecosystems. In these contracts, it is prohibited to cut down native trees and clear forest plots.

Consequently, preserved forests act as reservoirs of biodiversity, sheltering numerous plant and animal species. In addition, it is the forest that ensures the availability of water for local communities.



These agreements also support Dahari's work on protection of the Livingstone flying fox (*Pteropus livingstonii*). This large dark bat is only present on Anjouan and Mohéli. Its natural habitat (the Comorian cloud forests) is very threatened.

Mr. Naouirou Abdou, gives his opinion on the protection of ecosystems:

“I agreed to make my plot available in accordance with the agreements proposed by Dahari, to conserve the forest and maintain the rivers which are disappearing due to tree cutting. I also send a message to all forest operators: show maturity and contribute to the conservation of the forest, because it is our lives that are in danger. In Nyumakele region, we suffer greatly to get water just because we light a lot of fires and cut down trees. »



Livingstone's Fruit Bat at Northumberland Zoo

In the long term...

The signing of these first 30 individual conservation agreements marks an important step for the protection of Anjouan's forests. By 2027, we plan to sign a total of 1000 contracts with the objective of conserving 1000 hectares of Anjouan forests. Furthermore, this complementary approach contributes to the efforts of the Comorian government and national parks in forest conservation.



Dahari, Comoros National Parks and Comorian communities work together to preserve Comoros ecosystems. Each agreement signed is a victory for the forest, its species and dependent communities. For this initiative to thrive, it is essential to support long-term conservation efforts. We must also encourage and involve other farmers to join this vital movement.

The Livingstone's Fruit bat is the 3rd largest species of bat in the world and is currently listed by the IUCN Red List as a critically endangered species, endemic to just two of the four Comoros Islands. This species is currently at risk of imminent extinction due to habitat destruction. Their wild populations are currently estimated at around 1,200 individuals. While in captivity, there are just over 100 individuals held in European Zoos as part of a captive breeding programme.