

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, slender trees and a thick canopy of green leaves, serving as the background for the title and subtitle.

Promoting Biodiversity Net Gain in the Eastern Region of Ghana

Lessons and recommendations for
the future

Photo: W. Hagemeijer (2022)

Civil society, governments and the private sector are in strong agreement that conservation and development need to go hand in hand. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) promotes the mitigation hierarchy approach with a net gain target for biodiversity in all landscape planning. By applying IUCN's Review Protocol on biodiversity net gain at different sites, both Newmont Corporation (Newmont) and IUCN are on a journey to explore the challenges and opportunities of scaling up such approaches across the private sector.

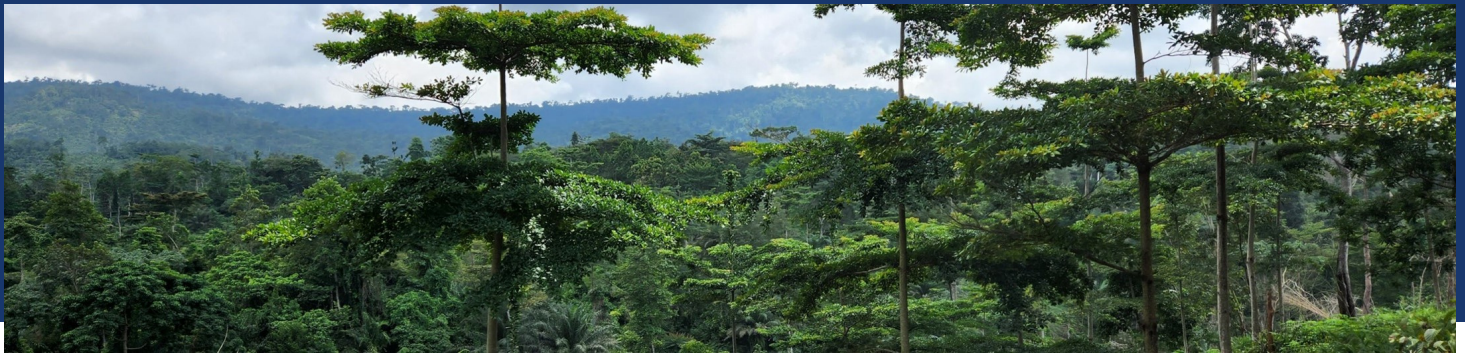


Photo: W. Hagemeyer (2022)

IUCN – Newmont Collaboration

IUCN, a recognised global authority on biodiversity, and Newmont, a global mining company, have established a collaborative agreement to help the company meet its global targets to achieve no net loss in key biodiversity values and net gains where possible. As part of the agreement, Newmont asked IUCN – including representatives of IUCN Member organisations and its expert commissions – to conduct independent reviews at select Newmont mine sites using the IUCN Biodiversity Net Gain Review Protocol. This protocol aims to help transform their operations to meet today's widely accepted global goals for biodiversity and sustainable development.

The overall objective of the collaborative agreement is to review biodiversity management approaches, projects and lessons learned from Newmont's experience in integrating biodiversity commitments into its operations. This includes applying the mitigation hierarchy to meet the goals and providing recommendations for improving and highlighting the expertise to support the global conservation community.

An IUCN-led review team visited other Newmont sites during the collaborative agreement, including Nevada (USA) in 2018 and Boddington in Western Australia in 2019. The group of experts first shared its findings with the company. Still, the goal is for the broader mining industry and IUCN Members to benefit from the insights and exchange, thereby supporting the design and implementation of enhanced biodiversity conservation programmes.

Newmont's Biodiversity Approach and Commitments

Since 2014, Newmont has committed to integrate biodiversity and ecosystem considerations into its business. Newmont's Biodiversity Management Standard outlines the company's approach to managing and mitigating biodiversity risks, achieving no net loss and providing net gain, when possible, of key biodiversity values. The Standard is being applied to all of its new projects and expansions. Newmont requires that all of its operating sites conduct biodiversity risk assessments. The assessments are used to develop biodiversity action plans, which provide strategic direction for conserving species of concern, minimising disturbances and restoring disturbed habitat.

Newmont's aim in the partnership with IUCN is to provide further insight into how the company can improve implementation of its biodiversity management standard and meet or exceed its commitments. Newmont understands that managing the impacts of its activities on biodiversity, critical habitats and ecosystems – at every stage of the mine lifecycle – is essential for ensuring its operations remain safe, responsible and profitable well into the future. The collaborative agreement and independent reviews led by IUCN support Newmont achieving this goal.

Independent Review – 2022 Newmont Akyem site visit

A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Review Technical Team visited the Akyem mine site in the Eastern Region of Ghana in July 2022. The site is approximately 3 kilometres west of the district capital New Abirem, 133 kilometres west of Koforidua the regional capital, and 180 kilometres northwest of Accra, the national capital.

The key objectives of the review of the Akyem operation were to:

- Review Newmont Akyem's biodiversity programmes and provide recommendations for improvement and future direction;
- Identify risks and opportunities associated with the biodiversity management activities and plans; and
- Provide a learning platform for the IUCN/Newmont relationship.

The Akyem mine operation is surrounded by forests and modified habitats in an Upper Guinean Forest landscape, a subregion of the Guinean Forests of a West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot. A small portion of Akyem's operations resides in the Ajenjua Bepo Forest Reserve - an area previously degraded by the encroachment of local subsistence farmers, intensive logging, and establishment of plantations of non-indigenous trees. Other indirect threats to biodiversity in this area include the invasion of noxious weeds and hunting.

Despite the condition of the reserve, it contains pockets of high biodiversity supporting forest species, especially on the hilltops. Several globally rare and threatened flora species are present.

With the granting of an Environmental Permit in 2008, the Newmont Akyem mine has been implementing its Biodiversity management program and advancing work related to the offset commitment. The objective is to achieve no net loss of biodiversity, which aligns with Newmont's Biodiversity Standard. The offset implementation site is within a section of the Atewa Extension Forest Reserve and the Southern Portion of the Atewa Range Forest Reserve. The biodiversity offset program is a conservation action intended to compensate for the residual, unavoidable harm to biodiversity at the Ajenjua Bepo Forest Reserve.

The Newmont personnel at the Akyem mine have established valuable external collaborations with several organizations to achieve progress to date, including with the Resource Management Support Centre (RMSC), part of the Forestry Commission, a specialist consulting company, and Conservation Alliance. IUCN is also a member of a Steering Committee that has been established with these groups to support strategic direction for the offset.

Priority Recommendations

Development of an overarching NNL or BNG strategy

- Build a stand-alone, concise, and cohesive strategy reflecting the goals and objectives of the biodiversity management work proposed and being undertaken.

Raising awareness among all relevant stakeholders on the biodiversity offset project

- Develop a campaign to raise awareness amongst the different institutions with interests in the offset to create commitment to the long-term sustainability of the offset programme.

Additional research into the survival of *Cola boxiana*

- Consider a research collaboration with the National Tree Seed Centre or other similar organization, to support research on maintaining a sustainable supply of high-quality germplasm and planting materials for reforestation projects and plantation development.

Re-evaluate the contribution of reforestation areas to the biodiversity offset

- It is recommended that Phase 2 of the reforestation area be removed from the biodiversity gain calculations. Phase 1 may be considered for inclusion after the 10-year handover period if the area is managed for a biodiversity objective. It is notable that even with the removal of Phase 2 reforestation from the NNL calculation, there remain sufficient Quality Hectares to achieve the BNG objectives.

The Akyem project has implemented in two phases the reforestation initiatives as timber offsets to meet the request of the Ghana Forestry Commission. Phase 1 covers the mine site itself and will remain under Newmont's management until the mine closure. Phase 2 is related to the reforestation of the Kweikaru area, managed by Newmont for the initial ten years. After this period, the land will be handed over to the original owners, and the trees to the Forestry Commission. Even though the areas do not currently have a biodiversity objective, it is possible to optimise the management to minimise negative impacts on biodiversity.



Summary and Path Forward

Such independent reviews help document lessons learned in the practical application of the mitigation hierarchy, and support improvement in land management and conservation approaches on a global scale. The Newmont Akyem mine has made substantial progress along its BNG journey in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy. While the recommendations made by the IUCN review technical team are not formal audit findings, their implementation will contribute to the success of the biodiversity offset project and the broader biodiversity management program.

These lessons become invaluable markers for conservation leaders and mining company biodiversity specialists to improve conservation outcomes as similar biodiversity programmes are designed and implemented.



Photo: R. Polls (2022)



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