



Defending the forest while ensuring your safety

SECURITY BROCHURE FOR COMMUNITY FOREST MONITORING 2026

Introduction

This brochure sets out a safety protocol for independent and community observers undertaking missions in the forests of the Congo Basin.

It was developed through close collaboration between **Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK)** and its partners, and it draws on the practical experience of field observers who use ForestLink. Its aim is to provide information on potential risks and precautions to help ensure safety during missions, while recognising that the list of recommendations cannot be exhaustive.

We extend our sincere thanks to our partners from the **Republic of Congo**, **Cameroon** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo**: *Comptoir Juridique Junior (CJJ)*, *Ecosystèmes et Développement (ECODEV)*, *Forêts et Développement rural (FODER)*, *Groupe d'action pour sauver l'homme et son environnement (GASHE)* and *Réseau pour la Conservation et la Réhabilitation des Écosystèmes Forestiers (Réseau CREF)*, for their valuable contribution to proofing and revising this brochure.

**RAINFOREST
FOUNDATION UK**

Rainforest Foundation UK is honoured to accompany and support its partners in this shared effort to strengthen the safety of observers in the field.



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Partners:



ForestLink enables communities to transmit highly accurate, low-cost alerts of illegal forest activities in real time, even in remote areas.

1. Preparation

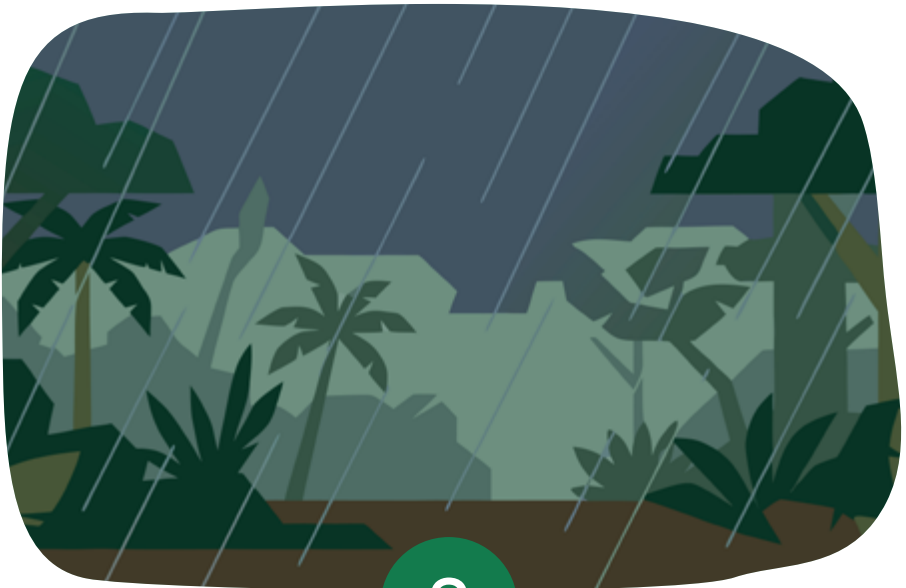
Anticipating risks before a forest mission

Before setting off on a mission in the forest, take time to anticipate potential risks. Ask people you trust for advice and ask yourself the right questions.

Caution is essential.

Weather

Check the weather forecast in advance. Consider whether conditions make travel unsafe.



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In these circumstances, is it wise to proceed with the mission?

1. Preparation

Political context

In the event of demonstrations, political campaigns, social conflicts or instability, avoid any problematic situations.

If you are unsure or unfamiliar with the socio-political context, contact the relevant authorities or civil society organisations for advice.



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In these circumstances, is it wise to proceed with the mission?

1. Preparation

Socio-economic context

Identifying potential threats

Before leaving, assess the environment in which you will be working:



Are there any people you may meet in the area that you are observing?



Are there companies operating nearby and could they pose a risk?



Are local authorities in your village aware of your mission and do they support forest monitoring?



Are there people in the community you may meet who may oppose monitoring activities? Can this be managed safely?

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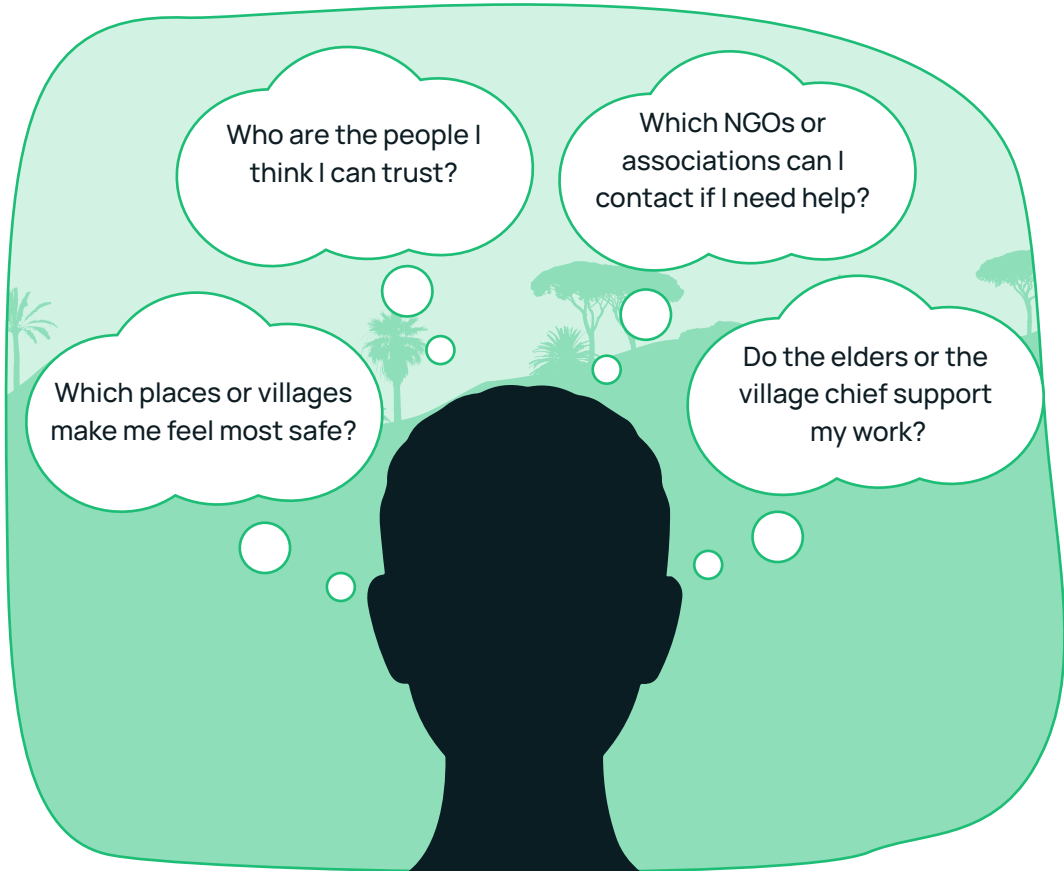
In these circumstances, is it wise to proceed with the mission?

1. Preparation

Socio-economic context

Identifying the people who support you and your safe places

Identify people and places that can support your safety.



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In these circumstances, is it wise to proceed with the mission?

1. Preparation

Before going on a mission, make sure you are prepared

Do you have everything you need with you to ensure your safety and the success of your mission?

An observer who is well-prepared reduces risks and unexpected difficulties.



Advice

Always carry some extra money in case of unforeseen situations.

For example, if you need to hire an additional motorbike, do you have enough cash? Or if you need to take a faster boat instead of a pirogue, have you budgeted enough money?

1. Preparation

Specific risks and precautions

Consider risks linked to your personal situation and take appropriate precautions.

Gender: As an independent female observer, what specific risks might you be exposed to? How can you avoid these risks?

***Example:** gender-based sexual violence.*

***Precaution:** always travel in a group, preferably with other women.*

Indigenous populations: as a member of an Indigenous community, what specific risks might you be exposed to? How can you avoid these risks?

***Example:** threat of racist violence.*

***Precaution:** travel in groups and protect the identity of your village.*

Your family: as you have a family to support, what specific risks might you and your family face? How can you avoid these risks?

***Example:** threat of violence against your children.*

***Precaution:** protect the identity of your family.*



**How can you avoid these risks?
What precautions should you take?**

1. Preparation

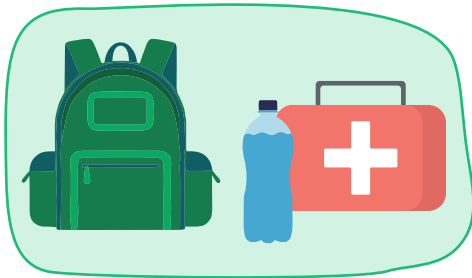
Before setting off on a mission in the forest



Plan the location and length of your mission.



Make sure your phone is fully charged and working properly.



Check that your equipment is complete and in good condition, and pack supplies (water, food and a first aid kit).



Inform a colleague or a family member of your itinerary and expected time of return.



Keep important and emergency numbers written on paper, in a notebook or saved in your phone, using the safest method to ensure they do not fall into the wrong hands.

1. Preparation

Take a well-equipped first-aid kit containing:



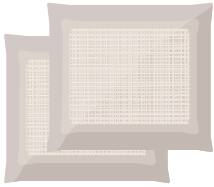
Antiseptic



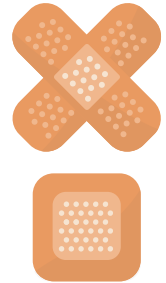
Bandages



Antiseptic wipes



Sterile compresses



Plasters

Conclusion

If a mission presents an unjustified or significant risk, err on the side of caution. Reserve the right to refuse any activity that endangers your life or that of your loved ones.

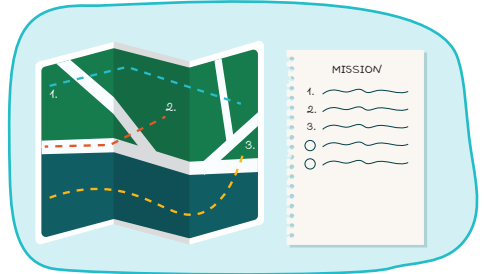
Your safety always comes first.

2. Action

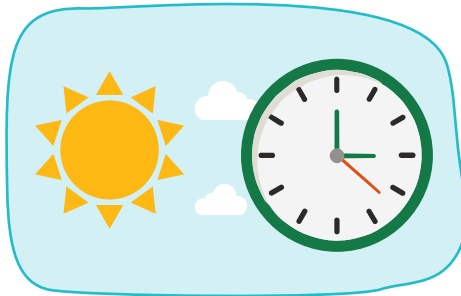
Never go on a mission alone.



Travel in a small group without children.



Vary your routes and itineraries.



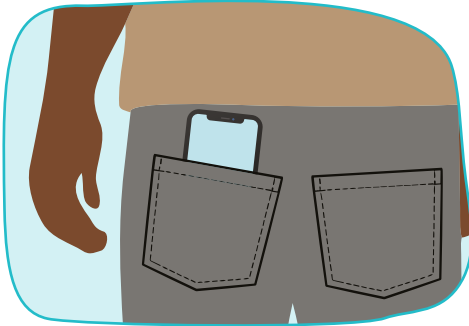
Choose times when there are fewer people in the forest, such as early morning, market day or Sunday.

**Being alone increases risk.
Working as a group makes everyone safer.**

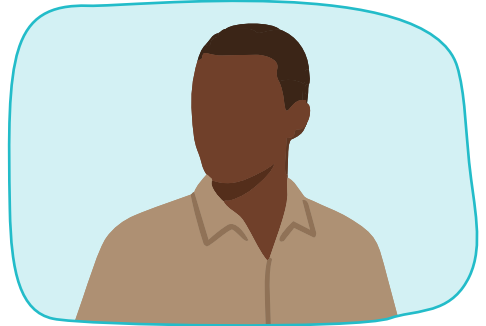
2. Action

Discretion in the field

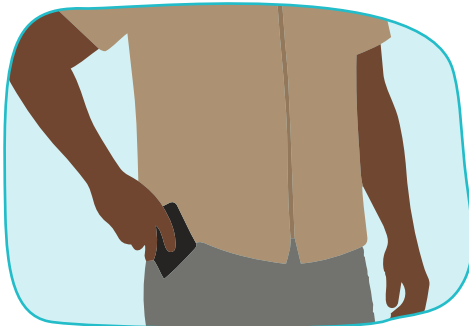
During your mission in the forest:



always keep your phone in your pocket or in a plastic bag to protect it from the weather when you are on the move;



before using your phone for ForestLink, check there is no one around you and that you can safely take it out;



after using your phone, put it back in your pocket immediately to ensure that no one takes it from you;



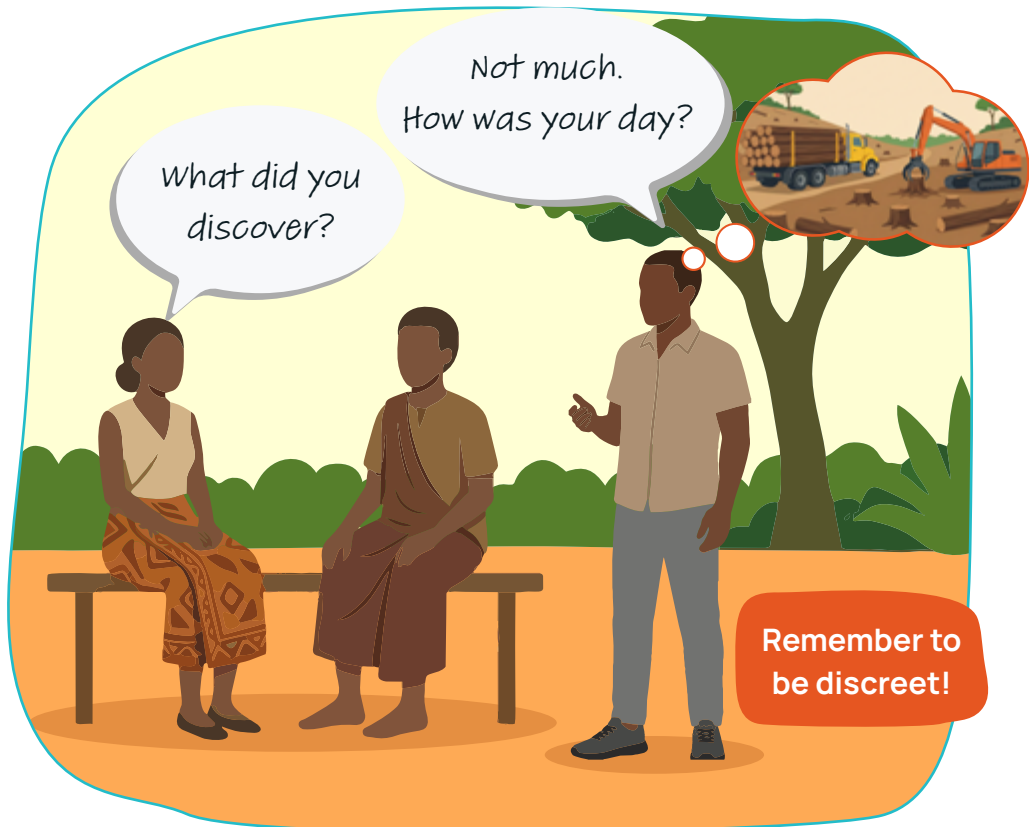
avoid using your phone for personal reasons during the mission.

Confidentiality

How to protect the information you've gathered

- Back in the village, keep the findings from your investigation to yourself.
- Remain discreet about the nature of your work and the data you have collected.
- Only share information via the ForestLink platform or directly via a phone call or a message to a trusted NGO.

Confidentiality ensures your safety. Sensitive information shared with the wrong people can jeopardise both the mission and your safety.



3. Reaction

A. Responding to an aggressor

When on a mission, be aware of potential dangers and know the safety protocol.

If something happens to you: **the priority is to stay safe!**
Do not do anything that could put you in further danger!

Here are some things you can do if you are threatened:

- hand over your equipment if asked to do so;
- obey the orders given by the people threatening you;
- do not attempt to resist or act heroically.



3. Reaction

B. React immediately after an incident

What to do in the event of an immediate threat:

- move to the nearest safe place;
- once you are safe, always call for help;
- return to a village or a secure location as soon as possible, once the danger has passed.

Know in advance which organisations or institutions to contact in an emergency.



3. Reaction

What you should do after a dangerous situation

Once you are in a safe place, let your team know, consult a doctor, report the incident and talk to someone you trust if you feel the need to.

Step 1. Reach a safe place away from any danger.



3. Reaction

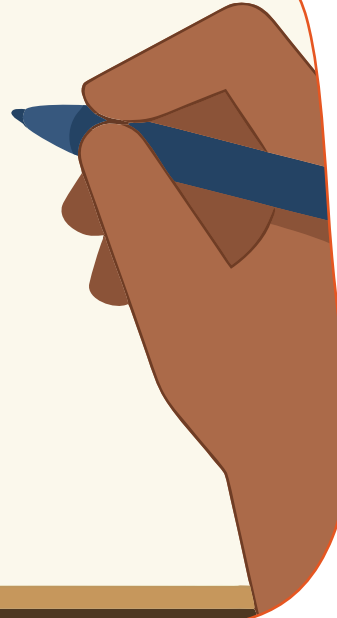
Step 2. Record the incident as soon as possible, either yourself or with help from someone you trust.

It was 2 p.m. when a man threatened me while I was carrying out a community observation mission.

He asked me to give him my phone, which I did.

As soon as he took it, he ran away.

I was then able to run to the village to ask for help.



Advice

Carry a notebook to document missions and security incidents.

3. Reaction

Step 3. Seek medical support to check your physical and mental health.



3. Reaction

Step 4. Talk openly with colleagues or other observers about what happened.



3. Reaction

Step 5. Together, analyse the incident and decide on the actions to be taken.



It is important to regularly analyse incidents that have occurred as this allows us to:

- develop preventive measures to reduce these risks in the future;
- strengthen safety protocols;
- inform NGOs so that they can carry out advocacy work.

Conclusion

To ensure personal safety, anyone involved in community forest observation should:

Prepare thoroughly:

- understand the local context;
- assess risks;
- be properly equipped.

Act responsibly while on a mission in the forest:

- travel in groups at the right times;
- exercise discretion and confidentiality;
- adopt a safety protocol to respond effectively to danger;
- prioritise personal safety;
- seek help after an incident;
- learn from experience to reduce future risks.

**To find out more about RFUK,
please visit our website:**

<https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org>

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