

Somaha Impact Report with Brainforest

Somaha Foundation understands impact as changes achieved through targeted measures in line with and to maximize the Foundation's purpose. It is guided by its Theories of Change, which provide a schematic description of the intended change. At the end of multi-year partnerships, the Foundation and its funding partners reflect on the goals achieved and lessons learned. The Foundation acknowledges the collaboration in the Somaha impact report.

Restoring Forests, Protecting Biodiversity, Driving Impact

Through the co-founding partnership with Somaha Foundation, Brainforest established the Biodiversity Lab to develop early-stage biodiversity business models. The financial support and the ongoing exchange with Somaha Foundation sharpened the Lab's strategic direction and enabled the development of professional structures for impact measurement. At the end of the funding phase, we look back with Camille Accolas and reflect on the future.

«We greatly value the open mindset and innovative spirit of Somaha Foundation. Together we are empowering local entrepreneurs to scale real impact.»

- LEO CAPREZ, FOUNDER AND CEO OF BRAINFOREST

Camille Accolas - a personal commitment to biodiversity

Camille Accolas, Senior Program Manager at Brainforest, has played a central role in shaping Brainforest's impact strategy. She has been committed to sustainability since her university studies.

After several years in consulting in the corporate sector, she decided to redirect her career toward biodiversity, motivated by the desire to spend her time contributing to tangible solutions.

Since joining Brainforest in September 2022, Camille quickly became a driving force behind placing biodiversity at the forefront of the organization's work. For her the Biodiversity Lab is a natural extension of Brainforest's mission, developing strategies that expand global forest cover and boost biodiversity.



Project outline and framework

Project name

Biodiversity Lab

Project objective

Developing technology-based solutions to promote biodiversity in forests.

Funding period

3 years, 2023 – 2025

Funding amount/number of tranches

CHF 300'000/3

Time invested annually in Steering Committee meetings

Brainforest: 20 hours, Somaha Foundation: 20 hours

Steering committee meetings held

7, quarterly

Project team at Brainforest

Camille Accolas, Thomas Gmeiner, Ben O'Sullivan

Working in this field has also shaped her personally. She describes being inspired by the «huge movement of great minds» working actively on global solutions. Each Venture Program connects her with mentors and innovators across global and local contexts, reinforcing her belief that real impact must be built from the bottom up.

Background and project origins

At the time of Camille's arrival, Brainforest was primarily a venture studio for forests, building ventures inhouse. During a systems mapping exercise it became clear, that this approach alone would not be enough to generate the scale of impact wanted, since many promising projects were already taking root globally. This insight gave rise to the Venture Program as core strategy of the Biodiversity Lab, an initiative designed to accelerate early-stage startups that contribute directly to forest regeneration and biodiversity protection instead of duplicating efforts. The Lab works directly with startups and investors, and indirectly with farmers, forest owners, project developers, and local communities. Its guiding principle is simple: value creation should stay close to home, ensuring local communities benefit first before global markets.

What is biodiversity conservation?

According to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), biodiversity conservation refers to the targeted use of measures to protect, restore and sustainably manage the ecosystems that host a wide variety of plant, animal and microorganism species. These ecosystems are essential for maintaining ecological balance and resilience: they store carbon, regulate water cycles, preserve soil fertility and sustain the livelihoods of local communities. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) complements this framework by developing widely used scientific standards and guidance.

Biodiversity conservation efforts range from establishing protected areas and restoring degraded forests to supporting sustainable land-use practices and strengthening the rights of local communities. The overall goal is to preserve the diversity of life that underpins ecosystem functions, supports human livelihoods, and ensures resources for future generations.



Camille Accolas, Senior Program Manager at Brainforest

The Biodiversity Lab's mission

Brainforest's mission is by 2030, to restore and protect 20 million hectares of biodiverse forest by accelerating early-stage startups whose business models drive regeneration.

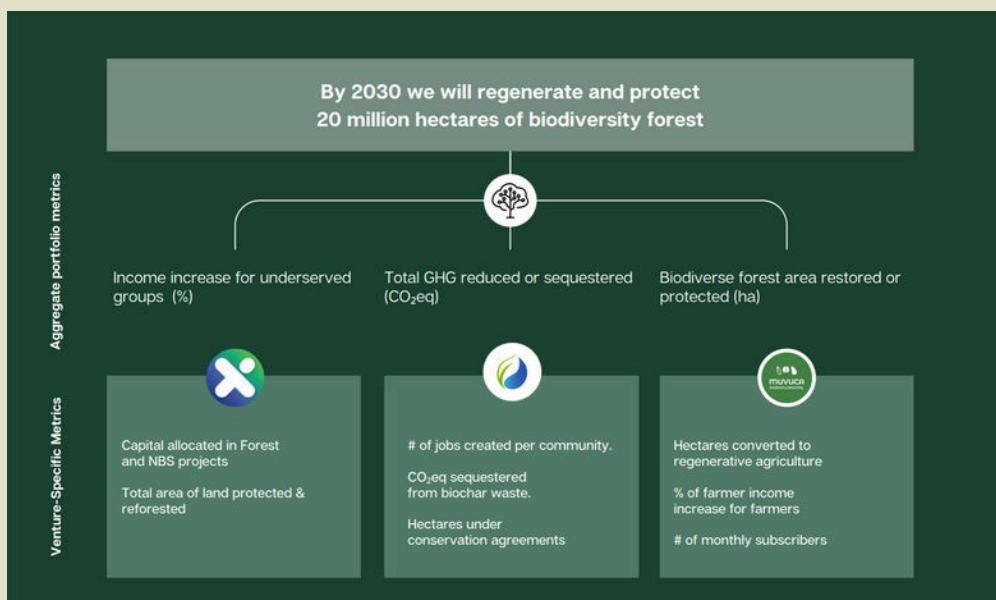
Biodiverse forests are ecosystems rich in a wide variety of plant and animal species, each playing a role in maintaining balance and resilience. They provide vital functions such as storing carbon, regulating water cycles, and sustaining the livelihoods of local communities.

In just three years, the Brainforest Venture Program supported over 30 startups and invested in 6 teams for continued collaboration. These teams are already scaling impact: from protecting nearly 29,000 hectares of forest in Suriname to advancing tech-driven regenerative supply chains.

A Systemic Approach to Impact - Metrics and Reporting

Defining impact metrics as an enabler of Brainforest work proved to be a challenging undertaking. This is why Brainforest designed an impact methodology that distinguishes between platform level and venture level impact.

At the platform level, all teams report on three core indicators: CO₂ reduced or sequestered, hectares of biodiverse forest restored or protected, and one social impact metric. This allows a shared language across the Brainforest portfolio to track progress toward their mission to restore 20 million hectares by 2030.



At the venture level, tailored impact strategies with each team were co-developed, identifying the specific metrics that best reflect their contribution to ecological and social outcomes.

Each venture reports on environmental categories as well as one social impact indicator, ensuring that every startup demonstrates both ecological and community level benefits.

«We have a clear impact strategy that guides all our work, but there is no one size fits all approach at the venture level. We collect three key indicators across all startups to maintain consistency, while supporting each team to build a tailored impact strategy that reflects their specific model and mission», explains Camille.

Integrating Digital Innovation

The Biodiversity Lab constantly explores digital innovations that demonstrate ways technology can accelerate conservation impact. One example is drone technologies such as the Brainforest Venture Ceres Seeding that replants indigenous seeds after forest fires or in inaccessible deforested areas, tailored to local environmental conditions. Another example is AI for biodiversity, which examines how artificial intelligence can act as a lever for biodiversity solutions.

«Co-founding the Brainforest Biodiversity Lab with Somaha Foundation has been an inspiring collaboration. The Lab's progress and success reflect the dedication and expertise of the Brainforest team and the constructive partnership among all collaborators - a benchmark of building scalable, lasting biodiversity solutions.»

- MARC-PHILIPPE FREY, LEAD «PILOT PROJECTS» OF FREY CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Products co-funded by Somaha Foundation

Venture Programm

A program for business ideas focused on biodiversity leverage points identified in the systems mapping report. Selected proposals receive expert support to develop a business model during an 8-week program. Two examples are:

Orijin - Scaling Regenerative Supply Chains

<https://orijin.io/>

Orijin, the first startup invested in through the Biodiversity Lab, uses technology to help first-mile coffee and cacao farmers collect data that demonstrates their crops are regenerative and compliant with sustainability standards.

BioTara - Incentives Against Deforestation

<https://biotara.earth/>

BioTara offers in Suriname alternatives to destructive gold mining and logging by training communities to harvest Brazil nuts and other botanicals. Small factories in the rainforest allow communities to extract the oils locally, keeping value close to home.

Systems Mapping

A report based on a multi-stakeholder workshop exploring key systemic drivers of biodiversity loss and identifying leverage points for impactful solutions - including technology to protect and regenerate biodiversity, improved monitoring, new (or better) infrastructure to implement biodiversity projects at scale, and incentives for local communities to keep forests standing.

The Role of Somaha Foundation

Somaha Foundation has been a partner well beyond financial support. It was an early believer and co-founder of the Biodiversity Lab, and has acted as a strong ally within a network of foundations. Together, Somaha Foundation and Brainforest co-developed the Steering Committee Meetings - quarterly sessions with funders that allow for open discussion, learning, and problem-solving. Camille highlights this as transformative: «The Steering Committee method we co-built with Somaha Foundation has been extremely valuable. These quarterly open meetings with all funders would not have come about without Somaha's input.»

Somaha Foundation also helped Brainforest refine its communication and reporting processes. Their insistence on clarity and their willingness to ask challenging questions strengthened Brainforest's approach.

Reflections, Advice, and Anecdotes

Camille reflects on the pace of innovation in biodiversity solutions and the importance of remaining adaptable. Her advice for others starting similar initiatives is to stay open-minded and resilient. Market trends or external chatter can easily distract or discourage, yet many startups she has worked with have shown the ability to bounce back and reinvent themselves.

For her, this resilience is proof that biodiversity ventures, when rooted in strong science, carry inherent relevance across industries. For Camille the lesson is clear: impact is rarely achieved through top-down models. It must be built from the ground up, starting locally and scaling globally.

Insights for Greater Impact

While Camille emphasizes the strong and transformative role Somaha Foundation has played in the Biodiversity Lab, she also highlights areas where the partnership, and the wider sector, could improve.

One recurring challenge is the use of terminology. Foundations and organizations often use big, inspirational words or internal jargon that may create confusion. Camille stresses the importance, clearer language and consistent knowledge transfer to supported teams would strengthen alignment and clarify expectations.

She also points to the importance of balance in project design. Foundations often have highly defined views of what they want to fund, while venture accelerators like Brainforest must remain flexible to support early-stage solutions. Finding a middle ground between these perspectives and ensuring that grants align with long-term collaboration will create greater impact for all parties. Ultimately, Camille underlines that achieving greater impact requires listening closely to what partners actually need.

Future Outlook

Looking ahead, Brainforest aims to build on the successes of the Biodiversity Lab, continuing to identify leverage points and support startups at critical early stages. There is a vision to expand scope — potentially working with even earlier-stage, more localized solutions - while maintaining the «NGO heart and business mind» that defines the organisation's approach.

Camille also stresses the importance of long-term partnerships: «Impact is hard to observe in just one year. After three years, we reached a completely different place from where we began. Multi-year partnerships create room for growth and bigger impact.»

Publisher

Somaha Foundation
www.somaha-stiftung.ch

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What is the Brainforest Biodiversity Lab?

Brainforest was founded with the vision that nature-based solutions can and should be economically viable. The organization's goal is to regenerate and protect 20 million hectares of species-rich forests by 2030.

To achieve this goal, the Biodiversity Lab was launched with the support of Somaha Foundation, followed by the establishment of the Venture Program. The program focuses exclusively on ventures in the areas of forests and biodiversity and enables high-impact and scalable solutions to be brought to market through strategic support, technical expertise, and access to financing.