

Accelerating Forest Landscape Restoration

Key Governance Factors

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Key messages

- ▶ Implementing forest landscape restoration at scale requires deep transformations across all sectors to shake up current models of governance, finance, business and thinking.
- ▶ Coordination and political will among national and local stakeholders are central preconditions.
- ▶ As people value forests and landscapes in different ways, inclusive and fair processes of stakeholder participation are imperative.
- ▶ Collaborative decision-making also helps in instances where new land-use conflicts arise when once degraded land becomes economically valuable again.

Introduction

With a global restoration potential of up to 2 billion hectares, the forest and land-use sector can make a significant contribution to fulfilling the Paris Agreement. In almost every country of the world, forest landscape restoration (FLR), which aims for the long-term conservation and sustainable use of forests, can help to reduce land-based emissions. The 2nd Bonn Challenge that seeks to restore 350 million hectares globally by 2030 may result in binding up to 15 gigatonnes of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (Dave et al. 2017). Beyond carbon sequestration, rehabilitated landscapes offer ecosystem services that can play an important role in achieving sustainable development goals related to food security, the conservation of biodiversity, the health and resilience of local communities and job creation (Vallauri, Aronson and Dudley 2005). Moreover, sustainably used and restored landscapes may significantly reduce the pressure on natural forests. Using landscape restoration options at a broad scale and to their full potential may therefore be decisive in achieving the 1.5°C goal.

While political support for FLR seems unprecedented, the question arises as to whether commitments at international policy level will translate into action on the ground and mobilize key players. FLR and the ‘quadruple wins’ it offers for human livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and climate mitigation and adaptation, is all but unknown in the forestry community. As such, the approach has remained heavily underutilized in recent decades. In the research project *Raising Transformative Ambitions: Contributions of Effective Climate Instruments* (TABEK²), we analysed the opportunities and conditions under which a broad actor engagement in FLR initiatives may be achieved. This has not been extensively investigated, especially in regard to governance-related aspects (Pistorius and Freiberg 2014). The goal was to elaborate concrete options for ambitious climate and forest protection through FLR that are not only effective and efficient, but also politically desirable and implementable.

² The TABEK project is a German contribution to the IPCC Special Report on 1.5 degree warming and is jointly carried out by Perspectives Climate Research gGmbH and the University of Freiburg. The research objective is to contribute to “transformation pathways and climate protection” by examining how international climate policy instruments for emission reductions in developing countries may potentially contribute to raising ambitions in nationally determined contributions necessary for achieving the 1.5°C target. A more detailed project description is available at <https://www.forstpolitik-umweltpolitik.uni-freiburg.de/ResearchEN/tabek-en-sr1.pdf>.

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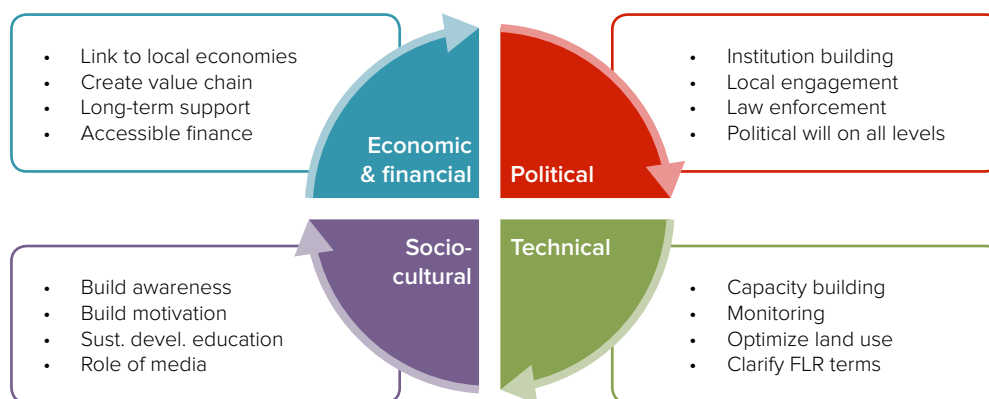


Figure 1. Key governance options for accelerating Forest Landscape Restoration (Reinecke and Blum 2018).

Research methods

Following a social constructivist perspective, we highlight that “words matter in policy and planning” (Van de Brink and Metze 2006). This is a view that helps us to systematically understand when and why people reject policies, such as those pertaining to restoration, even where there are high economic incentives or supportive institutions (e.g. Hajer 1995, 2006; Foucault 1972). Our interpretative analysis draws on participatory observation during workshops and side events (e.g. at the Conference of the Parties/Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), expert interviews and desk research investigating scientific analyses, reports and policy-related documents. A survey of 69 actors from governments, banks, science, international organizations and communities from 34 different countries across all world regions conducted between July and August 2017 complements the data. This brief pinpoints the results of our research and identifies people’s aspirations (in political terms) in relation to scaling up FLR.

Study results: Key governance-related factors in FLR practice

When understood as a process of decision-making by non-public and public actors, governance encompasses many factors beyond government rulings. Different stakeholders highlight a diversity of governance-related processes relevant to FLR implementation. *Figure 1* covers the key factors as identified by participants in our survey and interview partners.

Political aspects

From a governance perspective, political will at all policy levels and a functional institutional environment are critical for scaling FLR. As a crosscutting approach, FLR spans different sectors and jurisdictions. Collaboration between different stakeholders is therefore imperative. Decision makers have to be convinced of the positive impacts of FLR for people’s lives, the environment and their own political survival. A holistic and long-term approach, which extends beyond individual policy makers and their election cycles, is needed. However, power dynamics and vested interests are difficult to



Scientific assessments and local capacity building are important management and evaluation factors for scaling FLR. Integrating local and traditional knowledge assures that FLR remains practical and socially acceptable. Photos by Axel Fassio/CIFOR (Top), Marlon del Aguila Guerrero/CIFOR (Bottom).

overcome. Capacity building through technical training or South–South exchange can increase the awareness and skills of political leaders and thereby eventually change mindsets. To motivate political leaders, ownership, identity building and mutual recognition of all actors should be at the core of FLR initiatives. In line with the dominant view that FLR builds on inclusive and fair stakeholder participation, project developers and public authorities from national to local governments are well advised to proactively facilitate collaborative approaches. These should engage and coordinate all relevant actors from all sectors. For implementation on the ground, FLR depends on integrative policies, as well as appropriate institutional and regulatory frameworks. Functional institutions help to gain and maintain social acceptance of and legitimacy for FLR interventions. Experience from REDD+ has shown that land tenure insecurity increases the risk of land grabbing and land-use conflicts. New governance opportunities arise when more attention is dedicated to local tenure rights and when such reforms receive support from unexpected actors (Larson et al. 2013). Apart from

governments as major agents for incentivizing the right behaviour – through policy reforms – local communities are the key drivers of change on the ground. This shared responsibility, however, bears risks for new or exacerbated conflicts over rights, responsibilities and power. Political will, as well as new intellectual and institutional models of governance, are key to overcoming political barriers and achieving the required scale and quality of collaborative political action.

Technical aspects

We already know much about the technical aspects of FLR. This knowledge builds on long-lasting experience with projects in different realms. Nevertheless, essential knowledge gaps and disputes over knowledge claims persist and threaten FLR implementation. Apart from conceptual controversies – for instance, about what restoration actually means in practice as opposed to a strictly scientific concept – gaps in data and models hamper learning from experience. Suitable restoration practices for implementation need to be identified. This includes ways of addressing the seed challenge and choosing appropriate species in light of changing societal needs and environmental conditions, such as a changing climate. In this context, it is important to better integrate techno-scientific with practical and traditional knowledge to ensure that practices build on scientifically robust evidence, and are socially acceptable and practical. Such an integrative approach to knowledge is indispensable for immediate action, not least because humans lack a full understanding of the very dynamics and values of landscapes. Improving research and analytical models, as well as approaches to capacity building and technology transfer among different partners is vital to improving the quality of restoration planning, management and monitoring techniques. However, it appears equally important to find innovative ways of dealing with different perceptions of restoration and to increase both the awareness and valuation of nature. This includes addressing the common suspicion that broad-scale FLR initiatives prioritize models with high carbon value but contribute little to the conservation of biodiversity or food security and livelihoods. While this prioritization is based on technical and efficiency reasons, it ultimately leads to environmental degradation and rural impoverishment. An adaptive, learning-oriented approach is needed and will ideally enable FLR stakeholders to build on the existing technical and local knowledge.

Economic and financial aspects

In order to initiate large-scale changes in land-use practices, FLR programs need to engage the private sector proactively. Feasible FLR business cases are critical for convincing private actors to change their practices and shift investments. However, major hurdles to abandoning unsustainable agricultural and business practices are the potentially high opportunity costs and the long time horizon of returns from investments in forests. To be effective in the long term, the restoration of landscapes needs to be linked to the local economy and has to ensure long-term employment prospects for the population. For smallholders, agroforestry systems, in

particular, have proven to be a viable approach. In terms of an enabling environment for new business models, initiatives for deforestation-free supply chains (Sen 2017) and jurisdictional zero-deforestation commitments (Wolosin 2016) are promising approaches. These have the advantage of including up-chain businesses, which are more responsive to consumer pressure. Interestingly, pure market-based approaches to FLR and especially industrial business models that focused on short-term economic returns were viewed rather critically in our survey. For this reason, governments should still play a key role in most economic and financial matters. Only a minority of respondents see the private sector as the main agent for financing FLR. The public sector should oversee business operations and provide financial support for FLR activities. Domestic and international public institutions should ensure sufficient, long-term finance for FLR initiatives to overcome problems such as lacking starting capital, insecure financial returns or long time horizons of investments. International finance for FLR is likely to build broadly on the existing REDD+ funding architecture. However, in order to realize the full potential of FLR, the international community needs to increase the levels of support and further design funding streams in line with the integrative, multi-dimensional nature of FLR. Although most existing funds – such as the Global Environment Facility, the Green Climate Fund, the UN-REDD Programme and the World Bank Climate Funds – include safeguard systems and co-benefit requirements that address trade-offs and synergies with other goals, they often suffer from an imbalanced focus on carbon sequestration. In addition, experience with national REDD+ programs has shown that progress is significantly slowed by uncertain funding, demanding requirements and insufficient donor coordination. While streamlining different funding lines, e.g. through a common system for safeguards, would reduce the transaction costs of accessing funding for recipient countries, donor organizations may not (yet) be willing to give up their individual rules and institutional rationale (Carrapatoso and Geck 2018).

Socio-cultural aspects

Considering the multiple transformations required with respect to governance, economy, finance and knowledge, it seems that not much less than a paradigm shift that spans all societal sectors is needed. Awareness raising and education are central for the landscape approach to become mainstream and thereby a holistic, long-term and collaborative strategy. However, moving the idea out of its conceptual niche in ecology or environmental advocacy into mainstream society still seems like a mammoth task. Although there is a newly evolving awareness of the necessity to change dramatically the ways in which people, and especially consumers, value nature and landscapes, powerful interests may still be reluctant to accept considerable changes to current business or trade models. For awareness raising and, in particular, to educate tomorrow's decision makers (who are the young people of today), the role of curricula in schools and universities as well as news coverage in classical and social media is critical.

Discussion and conclusion

With the current, unprecedented political attention on FLR and various environmental agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, the Aichi Targets and the New York Declaration on Forests, the window of opportunity for political action on FLR is wide open. Yet, experience with FLR and related approaches reminds us of numerous socio-political, technical and economic governance challenges. To solve these, we need more than mere political will or new ideas in theory and practice. We need a much more cautious approach to considering the political implications of FLR. Its implementation does not depend on addressing 'technicalities' alone but also on new forms of more collaborative decision-making at all levels. This implementation must acknowledge that different people understand and value landscapes and their restoration differently. Even an 'abandoned land' is not 'emptied from meaning' for people living in and around it. To prevent new conflicts over land or meaning from arising, new business models are as important as innovative approaches to collaborative governance and integrative knowledge systems that respect the different interests and perspectives of the various stakeholders in landscapes.

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