

# Restoring deforested or degraded land in the tropics

## Learning from, and building on, FLEGT, REDD+ and associated policy processes

### Key messages

- Restoration of deforested or degraded land in tropical countries could advance national priorities such as food security, rural development and job creation while contributing to the achievement of international climate change, biodiversity and land-related commitments. Although restoration commitments are on the rise, national and local stakeholders are struggling with several challenges to effectively implement restoration initiatives. At the centre of the challenges are land-use governance and institutional factors.
- Restoration of deforested or degraded land could benefit from increased coordination with initiatives and programmes affecting land use. These include Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD+), and zero-deforestation supply chain initiatives<sup>1</sup>. These initiatives use different incentives and approaches to address land-use governance challenges. Therefore, increased learning, coordination and integration in relation to the planning, implementation and monitoring of these initiatives are required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets contained in nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on climate change.

- FLEGT, REDD+, and zero-deforestation supply chain initiatives could complement and support the implementation of restoration initiatives by sharing experiences on participatory land-use planning, secured tenure, legal reform and increased transparency and accountability. Moreover, existing FLEGT and REDD+ structures and stakeholder platforms could be used to facilitate stakeholder engagement in the development and implementation of restoration initiatives.
- The effective enforcement of legal land-use frameworks that prevent (illegal) forest conversion for commodity production brings various benefits. It can drive agricultural commodity producers to expand and intensify their activities on degraded rather than forested land. It can also create incentives for sustainable land management and restore vital ecosystem functions.
- Until recently, private sector interest in restoration was limited. However, the growing number of zero-deforestation supply chain commitments provides incentives for restoration through the development of such supply chains and the promotion of related trade and financial investment. Moreover, innovative partnerships between smallholders or local communities and corporate actors or financial investors can create win-win situations. These combine improved livelihoods, restored and productive landscapes, and responsible commodity sourcing.
- Independent monitoring for forest law enforcement and governance could support the implementation of restoration initiatives by assessing: (a) existing provisions in the legal frameworks; (b) commitments made by governments under the Bonn Challenge or by private companies; and (c) whether these legal requirements and commitments are enforced or what is hindering implementation on the ground.



**Ethiopian landscape.** ►  
Photo: Butik Tekle



▲  
**Degraded land  
Ethiopia.**  
Photo: Butik Tekle

## Introduction

This policy brief extracts lessons from FLEGT, REDD+, and zero-deforestation supply chain initiatives to help overcome some of the governance challenges hindering effective restoration of deforested or degraded land in tropical forest countries. It opens by noting the current growing momentum for restoring deforested or degraded land. Secondly, it outlines the challenges of the effective implementation of restoration initiatives, with a focus on land-use governance and institutional factors. In a third section, the policy brief details the essential role that inclusive land-use planning plays in successful restoration. The fourth section focuses on clear and respected tenure and resource rights. The fifth section underlines the need to translate restoration commitments into concrete policies and action plans. The sixth section explains how a solid business case for restoration of deforested or degraded land should mobilise and encourage actors towards sustainable activities, while lowering the risk of investment by the private sector. The brief closes with some reflections on the essential role of transparency of actions and of accountability of actors for restoration initiatives.

# 1. Current momentum for restoring deforested or degraded land

Worldwide, more than two billion hectares of land are degraded and offer opportunities for restoration.<sup>2</sup> This represents an area larger than South America. Land degradation is the persistent decline in the provision of goods and services that land provides. It affects the wellbeing of at least 3.2 billion people, drives species extinction, and intensifies climate change and mass human migration. A report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) estimates that land degradation costs the global economy as much as USD 4.5 trillion a year, while economic benefits of restoration efforts represent an estimated USD 84 billion a year.<sup>3</sup>

Restoration initiatives aim to achieve the best possible compromise between meeting both conservation goals and the needs of communities in deforested or degraded land. Restoration activities can include: (a) forest restoration for biodiversity recovery, such as for wildlife conservation, environmental protection, eco-tourism or to supply a variety of forest products to communities; (b) agroforestry, where trees are grown together with crops and/or animal production systems; or (c) restoration of degraded or abandoned agricultural lands to increase productivity and reduce the risk of conversion of neighbouring forests. These activities could advance national priorities such as food security, rural development and job creation while contributing to the achievement of international climate change, biodiversity and land-related commitments. Restoration programmes and initiatives, along with improved land management, could provide over 30 percent of the cost-effective emission reductions needed by 2030 to keep global temperature rise well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.<sup>4</sup>

Global and national communities have made strong restoration commitments by embracing ambitious targets. In 2010, parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted Aichi Target 15, which aims to restore at least 15 percent of degraded ecosystems by 2020. In 2011, the Government of Germany and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) launched the Bonn Challenge.<sup>5</sup> The Challenge is a global effort to restore 150 million hectares of deforested or degraded land by 2020. In 2014, the New York Declaration on Forests announced the restoration of 350 million hectares of deforested or degraded land by 2030.<sup>6</sup> The Bonn Challenge 2.0 endorsed this pledge in 2015. Furthermore, SDG 15 target 1 aims to ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and their services by 2020.

A number of regional initiatives support these global targets. These include the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100)<sup>7</sup> and Initiative 20x20<sup>8</sup> in Latin America. In 2007, in the Asia-Pacific region, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation adopted the ambitious goal of increasing forest cover by at least 20 million hectares by 2020.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, many tropical forest countries made significant national-level commitments in their national REDD+ strategies and NDCs to promote restoration of deforested or degraded land as a key climate change mitigation and adaptation measure. The corporate and finance sectors are increasingly committed to restoration, through their engagement in and support to zero-deforestation supply chain initiatives.

## 2. Governance challenges limiting restoration initiatives

While commitments to restore deforested or degraded land are on the rise, stakeholders are struggling with several challenges to effectively implement restoration initiatives. At the centre of these challenges are land-use governance and institutional factors. These include:

- lack of inclusive land-use planning
- unclear resource and tenure rights
- lack of clarity in legal frameworks and definitions
- limited coordination and cooperation within and across land-use sectors and levels of governance
- limited stakeholder information and participation
- inadequate investment and incentives

In addition, restoration of deforested or degraded land could benefit from increased coordination with initiatives and programmes affecting land use, such as FLEGT, REDD+, and zero-deforestation supply chain initiatives. These initiatives use different incentives and approaches to address land-use governance challenges. Therefore, increased learning, coordination and integration in relation to the planning, implementation and monitoring of these initiatives are required to achieve the SDG and NDC targets.



◀ **Tree seedlings in Kenya.**  
Photo: WRI

### 3. Inclusive land-use planning is essential to successful restoration

Many tropical forest countries have identified the lack of land-use planning as an important driver of forest loss and land degradation. This shortcoming is due to the absence or poor implementation of land-use planning policies and laws, the lack of reliable and accessible data to inform land-use planning, or divergent stakeholder views and interests on competing land uses.

Land-use planning creates the preconditions to achieve land use that is environmentally sustainable, socially just and desirable, and economically sound. It also facilitates the identification of areas suitable for restoration. It assists in clarifying land uses and rights, namely who has the right to own and access land, to use and cultivate resources, and receive monetary and non-monetary benefits. Land-use planning also reduces long-term investment risk.

Multistakeholder approaches to land-use planning can help reconcile stakeholders' diverging interests, overcome governance challenges, and consider local communities' access and use rights. In the past decade, the experience of the forest sectors of several tropical forest countries in constructive, robust and effective multistakeholder processes has grown.

An example of such multistakeholder processes are the FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs).<sup>10</sup> These are bilateral trade agreements between the European Union (EU) and tropical timber-producing and exporting countries. FLEGT processes have increased stakeholder engagement and transparency in the forest sector. They have also led to the establishment of structures and mechanisms for effective participation. Countries could build on this multistakeholder experience to carry out inclusive land-use planning. Such planning would facilitate the identification of areas suitable for restoration and the implementation of restoration activities in the interest of relevant stakeholders, including local communities.

In countries where FLEGT and REDD+ processes have made little progress so far, or are inexistent, stakeholders could grasp opportunities provided by high-level commitments such as the SDGs and NDCs. These commitments can provide restoration activities greater national visibility, and promote dialogue around land-use governance challenges.

In the context of their REDD+ processes, several tropical forest countries are undertaking efforts to collect information regarding the legal status of land, land cover, customary rights, biodiversity and carbon values, and much more (Box 1). As REDD+ countries move into the investment phase, supported by bilateral and multilateral donors, increased investment might become available for land-use planning. By collecting such information and supporting sustainable and inclusive land-use planning, these REDD+ and other processes provide opportunities for, and complement, the restoration of deforested or degraded land.

#### Box 1: Inclusive land-use planning in Cameroon<sup>11</sup>

In Southwest Cameroon, state and non-state actors are working together to implement land-use planning at local level, in support of the country's REDD+ commitments. These efforts are leading to increased transparency and availability of information on the socioeconomic and environmental costs and benefits of various land uses, on existing (customary and formal) tenure relations, and on users or rights holders likely to be affected by land-use interventions. This increased transparency facilitates an inclusive land-use planning process. Stakeholders from government, private sector and local communities are discussing various land-use options. In doing so, they may also identify areas suitable for restoration and calculate sustainable benefits from restored land. Inclusive land-use planning decisions tend to better reconcile stakeholders' diverging interests. Because of the inclusive and participatory approaches used, stakeholders have a greater sense of ownership for decisions made. These decisions are therefore more broadly accepted and implemented.

## 4. Clear and respected tenure rights ensure the sustainability of restoration initiatives

Clear and respected tenure and resource rights are fundamental to identifying right holders entitled to plant and benefit from the restoration of deforested or degraded land. These include the rights and responsibilities of individuals and communities to trees, forests or land under statutory or customary law. Without clear use, access and tenure rights, there is reduced incentive for communities and smallholders to undertake any form of sustainable land management. Tenure security also facilitates right holders' access to finance and investment that could support restoration efforts. Restoration initiatives are expected to be more successful when they focus on areas with clear rights to land and resources, or when coupled with efforts to enhance and enforce tenure and resource rights.

Initiatives such as FLEGT and REDD+ processes put efforts into recognising and clarifying tenure, along with strengthening the enforcement capacity of government agencies. However, more needs to be done in combination with new approaches and initiatives to make substantial progress. This calls for enhanced collaboration among FLEGT, REDD+, zero-deforestation supply chain, restoration and other processes affecting land use. This collaboration would step-up action to overcome political, institutional and technical barriers for secure tenure and resource rights.



◀ **Plants leaves to be harvested.**

Photo: Mokhamad Edliadi, CIFOR

## 5. Scaling up restoration requires clear policies and legal frameworks

Many tropical forest countries have taken up restoration commitments in their NDCs or REDD+ strategies.<sup>12</sup> This provides a framework for stakeholder engagement and the implementation of restoration activities in some countries (see box 2). Nonetheless, much effort is still needed to translate these restoration commitments into concrete policies and action plans.

A first step is the clarification of policies, legal frameworks and the definition of key terms, such as restoration, abandoned land, deforested land and degraded forest land. These efforts make clear what can or should be done, by whom and how, on deforested, unproductive and degraded areas. Such a clear legal framework, policies and definition of key terms are vital to the implementation of restoration initiatives. However, only a few tropical forest countries have explicitly embedded restoration conditions and requirements in their legal frameworks.

The effective enforcement of legal land-use frameworks that prevent (illegal) forest conversion for commodity production brings various benefits. It can drive agricultural commodity producers to expand and intensify their activities on degraded rather than forested land. It can also create incentives for sustainable land management and restore vital ecosystem functions.

### Box 2: Coordinated action to implement NDC targets on restoration in Brazil<sup>13</sup>

Brazil's NDC under the Paris Agreement incorporates the target of restoring and/or reforesting 12 million hectares of deforested or degraded forest land by 2030. After ratifying the Paris Agreement in 2016, Brazil adopted a federal decree in January 2017, establishing the National Policy for the Recovery of Native Vegetation. This policy articulates, integrates and promotes policies, programmes and actions that encourage the recovery of forests and other native vegetation under the Forest Code. An action plan, adopted in November 2017, implements the policy. The action plan coordinates government efforts to:

- raise awareness of the benefits of restoration
- enhance the quality and quantity of seeds and seedlings of native species
- promote markets for native vegetation products and services
- align and integrate institutions and public policies
- develop financial mechanisms to support recovery initiatives
- improve and expand technical assistance and rural extension
- undertake spatial planning and monitoring
- invest in research, development and innovation

The action plan aims to strengthen policies, financial incentives, markets, restoration technologies, best agricultural practices and other measures to achieve the 12 million hectares target.



FLEGT processes have experience in clarifying and increasing the understanding of legal and regulatory frameworks. They have revealed that, in many countries, overlapping or even conflicting legislation undermines the forest sector. In some countries, the legal and regulatory framework is so complex, that it is difficult to understand what is legally required.

In countries where restoration is not clearly included or defined in legal frameworks, FLEGT processes could provide lessons and experience on participatory legal and regulatory reform to inspire restoration stakeholders. FLEGT processes could also offer multi-stakeholder platforms, bringing together governmental and non-state actors, including local communities, indigenous groups and private sector, to define key terms and agree on reforms for restoration.



◀ Elders inspect recently planted trees in Ethiopia. Photo: WRI

## 6. Creating incentives for restoration through markets and trade

A combination of technical support and regulatory, financial and fiscal incentives is required to deliver restoration objectives and change the behaviour and practices of actors. A solid business case for restoration of deforested or degraded land should mobilise and encourage actors towards sustainable activities, while lowering the risk of investment by the private sector. It needs to provide enhanced livelihoods, increase food security, create jobs and ensure a diverse yet productive and resilient ecosystem.

REDD+ offers opportunities to increase technical capacities and catalyse reforms through investment and result-based incentives. Private sector interest in restoration has been limited until recently. However, the growing number of zero-deforestation supply chain commitments provide incentives for restoration through the development of such supply chains and the promotion of related trade and financial investment. These commitments increase demand for sustainably produced commodities. They provide market incentives for supply chain actors, including smallholders, to improve their production practices. These include sustainably intensifying production, expanding into degraded land rather than converting forests, or introducing agroforestry techniques. Some corporate zero-deforestation commitments tolerate forest clearance (after cut-off dates) when compensated by restoration of an equivalent area. These commitments thus make restoration of deforested or degraded land part of a sound agro-business model. Corporate and financial sector investments in zero-deforestation production and supply chains could therefore become an important new source of funding for restoration.

The promotion of timber from restored areas and plantations could generate similar market incentives for restoration. By promoting trade in legal timber from restored areas, FLEGT could generate regulatory and market incentives for the restoration of deforested or degraded land. Therefore, responsible markets and trade in timber and agricultural commodities play an important role in supporting the transition to sustainable land-based activities.

Agroforestry systems are land-use systems where trees are grown together with crops and/or animal production systems. They have shown to be effective restoration models and can provide long-term, diversified income and security for smallholders.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, some agroforestry models are based on innovative partnerships between smallholders or local communities and corporate actors or financial investors. These create win-win situations combining improved livelihoods, restored and productive landscapes, and responsible commodity sourcing (see Box 3).

### **Box 3: An innovative partnership between cocoa producers and a chocolate manufacturer provides incentives for restoration in Côte d'Ivoire<sup>15</sup>**

In Côte d'Ivoire, cocoa production is encroaching the remaining forests. Agroforestry development allows for zero-deforestation cocoa production while involving smallholder cocoa producers who implement more productive and sustainable practices. Meanwhile, a chocolate manufacturer supports the cost of establishing commodity-based agroforestry in pilot sites. This, in turn, enables the manufacturer to source zero-deforestation cocoa from these pilot sites. The participation of the government and a third party is desirable to ensure such an arrangement is continuous and equitable. This third party also facilitates dialogue between the smallholders and the companies, identifies mutually beneficial opportunities, monitors commitments, and mediates when there is disagreement.

## 7. Transparency and participatory monitoring to track progress and increase accountability

Greater levels of transparency allow citizens and other stakeholders to hold government officials and non-state actors accountable. Making relevant data available to the public is an important first step in achieving accountability through improved transparency. This increased transparency and accountability will be crucial for the sustainability of restoration initiatives over time.

Various initiatives, such as the FLEGT and REDD+ processes, generate and share information on land use and land-use activities (see Box 4). For restoration initiatives to succeed, stakeholders could build on these valuable experiences to regularly share documents. These documents can outline the duties and responsibilities of various restoration actors, the terms and conditions for carrying out restoration or the benefits accrued from restored areas. This information would be available to all relevant stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples.

### Box 4: FLEGT and REDD+ processes provide relevant information and monitoring experiences

Liberia's FLEGT VPA defines information that the Government should publish or make available on request under the Liberian Freedom of Information Act. Some of the information that the VPA commits the Government to disclose include allocation of timber concessions and contracts, taxes, management plans and demonstration of sincere efforts for sustainable forest management. The open and participatory manner in which Liberia's VPA was developed, and the availability of the VPA institutions to provide the information that the Government agreed to publish, have encouraged civil society organisations and local communities to push for accountability.

Similarly, many REDD+ countries are currently mobilising actors and resources, building structures and capacities to assess, monitor and report on the various impacts and outcomes of national REDD+ policies and activities. The monitoring, reporting and verification requirements of REDD+ generate significant amounts of information. This includes information on the extent and condition of forests, land use and land-use changes, and social, environmental and governance benefits.

Restoration interventions can benefit from FLEGT and REDD+ processes either directly by using the capacities and restoration-relevant information they provide, or indirectly, by using monitoring models and methods that restoration stakeholders can also use.

The involvement of non-state actors in monitoring activities improves access to information, transparency and accountability while nourishing multistakeholder dialogue. Such independent monitoring also plays a critical role in tracking progress and linking local aspirations with national and global restoration goals.

Independent monitoring for forest law enforcement and governance exists in several tropical forest countries. Non-state stakeholders get involved in monitoring of forest law enforcement and infractions, thereby improving forest governance and sector credibility. Deforestation drivers are often located outside the forest sector. To effectively address this challenge, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of the Congo have recently explored ways to expand independent monitoring beyond forest governance to broader land-use issues. These include inconsistencies in land-use planning and land allocation, which often hinder restoration. To support the implementation of restoration initiatives, independent monitoring could look at: (a) provisions in existing legal frameworks; (b) the commitments made by governments under the Bonn Challenge or by private companies; and (c) whether these legal requirements and commitments are enforced on the ground or what is hampering implementation.

# References

- <sup>1</sup> Recently, a growing number of private and public actors have made commitments to eliminate deforestation from agricultural commodity supply chains and trade. While clarity over the concept of zero-deforestation is lacking, these commitments and initiatives set in motion change throughout commodity supply chains and related trade.
- <sup>2</sup> WRI and IUCN, Atlas of Forest and Landscape Restoration Opportunities, <http://www.wri.org/resources/maps/atlas-forest-and-landscape-restoration-opportunities>
- <sup>3</sup> Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Summary for policymakers of the assessment report on land degradation and restoration, 2018, <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/ldr>
- <sup>4</sup> Griscom et al 2017, Natural climate solutions, <http://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/early/2017/10/11/1710465114.full.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/challenge>
- <sup>6</sup> [https://nydfglobalplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/NYDF\\_Declaration.pdf](https://nydfglobalplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/NYDF_Declaration.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> <http://afr100.org/>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.wri.org/our-work/project/initiative-20x20>
- <sup>9</sup> FAO, Regional strategy and action plan for forest and landscape restoration in Asia-Pacific, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/3/i8382en/i8382EN.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> VPAs are key elements of the EU FLEGT Action Plan, which aims to prevent the importation of illegal timber into the EU. VPAs are bilateral trade deals between the EU and timber exporting countries to promote legal timber and enhance forest governance.
- <sup>11</sup> For more information, see also <http://www.euredd.efi.int/publications/building-a-mapping-alliance-for-inclusive-and-transparent-land-use-planning>
- <sup>12</sup> Of the 36 governments that made pledges under the Bonn Challenge, 16 already directly mention restoration as one of their strategies to achieve their NDC targets. See: Lee, D. and Sanz, M.J., UNFCCC Accounting for Forests: What's in and what's out of NDCs and REDD+, Policy Brief, Climate and Land Use Alliance, 2017. <http://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Policy-brief-NDCs-and-REDD-revised-Sep-6-2017.pdf>
- <sup>13</sup> Dave, R., Saint-Laurent, C., Moraes, M., Simonit, S., Raes, L., Karangwa, C. 2017, Bonn Challenge Barometer of Progress: Spotlight Report 2017, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN, 36pp, <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2017-060.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> FAO, Agroforestry for landscape restoration: exploring the potential of agroforestry to enhance the sustainability and resilience of degraded landscapes, 2017, <http://www.fao.org/3/b-i7374e.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> For more information, see also <http://www.euredd.efi.int/publications/deforestation-free-supply-chains-a-pes-pilot-project-in-cote-d-ivoire>

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## About the EU FLEGT Facility

The EU FLEGT Facility supports the implementation of the EU FLEGT Action Plan with a focus on Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs). The EU FLEGT Action Plan sets out a programme of actions that forms the EU's response to the problem of illegal logging and the trade in associated timber products. The Facility is hosted by the European Forest Institute and was established in 2007.

## About the EU REDD Facility

The EU REDD Facility supports countries in improving land-use governance as part of their efforts to slow, halt and reverse deforestation. It also supports the overall EU effort to reduce its contribution to deforestation in developing countries. The Facility focuses on countries that are engaged in REDD+, an international mechanism that incentivises developing countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from their forest and land-use sectors. The Facility is hosted by the European Forest Institute and was established in 2010.

## Disclaimer

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