

IUCN Forest Conservation Programme



Forest Landscape Restoration

Broadening the Vision of West African Forests



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Published by: IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK



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ISBN: 2-8317-0865-6

Photos: Front cover: IUCN/Gaël Gillibert and IUCN/Jean-Marc Garreau; p.3: IUCN/Virpi Stucki; p. 4, 5, and 7: IUCN/Gaël Gillibert; p. 6: IUCN/Anthea Stephens; back cover: IUCN/Ger Bergkamp

Layout by: Patricia Halladay Graphic Design

Printed by: Sadag Imprimerie, Bellegarde-sur-Valserine, France

Available from: IUCN Publications Services Unit
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<http://www.iucn.org/bookstore>

A catalogue of IUCN publications is also available.

This publication is printed on 150 gsm 100% recycled paper.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.



What is Forest Landscape Restoration?

A forest landscape restoration (FLR) approach brings people together to identify and put in place a mix of land-use practices that will help restore the functions of forests across a whole landscape, such as a water catchment. It focuses on restoring forest functionality at a landscape level rather than a site level, which translates into gaining the optimal quantity and quality of forest resources necessary for improving and maintaining people's well-being and ecological integrity. In addition to restoring forest functions, the aim of the approach is to strengthen the relationship between rural development, forestry and other natural resource management and conservation approaches. It shifts the emphasis away from simply maximizing tree cover on individual forest sites to optimizing the supply of forest benefits within the broader landscape.

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Forest landscape restoration is a collaborative venture. If it is to succeed, it must involve everyone with a stake in the forests, from local farmers to charcoal-makers, from game hunters to logging companies. They must agree on long-term objectives for the landscape, identify the various goods and services that matter most to them and work out how best to restore them. The FLR approach acknowledges that land-use trade-offs are inevitable.



Forest Landscape
Restoration

Challenges facing West African forests

At the turn of the 20th century, dry and moist forests of West Africa measured more than 1.5 million square km. Colonial policies and practices maintained after independence tended to promote large-scale expansion and intensification of commodity crops such as cotton, coffee and cacao, and clearance to claim land. These actions resulted in the conversion of forests to farm land, leaving remaining wooded areas highly fragmented and degraded. Today, the forest

cover of the region is estimated to be no more than 20 percent of its original extent, making it one of the most degraded tropical ecosystems on the planet.

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A simplistic model of environmental degradation and poverty has often led to policies that either reduce poverty at the expense of the environment or protect the environment at the expense

of the poor. For example, degraded forest resources tend to encourage migration to increasingly fragile forest lands, thereby provoking overuse. In turn, the deterioration of forests further impoverishes the poor. Indeed, failure to tackle both challenges simultaneously threatens the asset base that the poor need to survive or emerge from poverty.

Forest Landscape Restoration: a solution for West Africa?

Forest Landscape Restoration is not a new approach in West Africa; a number of initiatives already exist in the region. One example is the flooded forest of Youwarou in the north of Mali. It is the largest wetland in West Africa and an ecosystem with tremendous ecological and socio-economic value. A combination



of nature-related changes, such as climate variation and sedimentation, and human activities, such as collecting firewood and building materials, virtually destroyed this unique ecosystem, leaving less than 40 hectares of the forest intact.

Together with its partners, IUCN – The World Conservation Union initiated a project to restore and protect the flooded forest with a holistic and participatory approach, paying considerable attention to poverty reduction and finding ways to sustainably use local resources. The project has succeeded both in restoring the ecosystem and in bringing people together to plan, on a landscape level, land-use and other activities in Youwarou. Local conventions on fisheries, *bourgutier* aquatic plants, and flooded forests of *Acacia kirkii* have been drafted in order to ensure that common resources are used in an equitable way. These conventions and land-use plans have been important tools in negotiating the different trade-offs that landscapes require, and have proved to be useful in reducing tensions between user groups.

FLR in Youwarou, Mali

FLR activities in Youwarou are advancing the three pillars of sustainable development:

- **Social:** 450 women are now employed through community groups working on various wetland activities, collectively contributing approximately 12 million CFA-francs (18 000 Euros) to the economy after two years of FLR.
- **Economics:** Local financing mechanisms were developed; for example, a local credit bank for women has managed to create extensive capital without external help.
- **Environment:** The restored flooded forests of the Niger River delta now serve as an important haven for rare hippopotamus and manatee.



Forest Landscape Restoration

Although separate success stories of forest landscape restoration in West Africa, such as Youwarou, already exist, it is important to repeat the approach and adapt the lessons learned across the region. As a people-centred approach, forest landscape restoration is essentially cross-disciplinary in its planning

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and implementation. It requires the skills of social scientists, agronomists, animal-husbandry specialists, foresters and others. It builds on participatory approaches, bringing together individuals, communities, institutions and local and municipal councils — in

short, all stakeholders — to negotiate a common vision for the landscape. This calls for increased communication, collaboration, consultation and establishment of partnerships and alliances with those often not visible in the landscape.

The benefits of a forest landscape restoration approach include sustainable livelihoods for local communities, improved understanding among stakeholders, better governance over forest resources and more available forest goods and services for all.



What is the Global Partnership on FLR?

The Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) is a network of governments, organizations, communities and individuals who recognize the importance of forest landscape restoration and want to be part of a coordinated global effort. The partners will learn from one another's experiences and identify, undertake and support forest landscape restoration activities.

Partners now include IUCN – The World Conservation Union, WWF International, the United Kingdom, Kenya, Finland, the United States, Japan, El Salvador, Italy, Switzerland and South Africa, the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the Program on Forests (PROFOR), the United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), and CARE International.

www.unep-wcmc.org/forest/restoration/globalpartnership/



Forest Landscape Restoration is about getting the right blend of approaches, at the right scale, to deliver the forest goods and services that people and societies need. Although separate initiatives on projects using the FLR approach in West Africa already exist, there is a need to repeat these examples on a broader scale.

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