

Policy Brief

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The 'Missing Middle': Landscape Restoration's Greatest Challenge

Key Findings:

1. Meso or middle level institutions (government, non-governmental) and community-based organizations are critical in restoration delivery pathways. They contribute unique knowledge, know-how and relationships to restoration.
2. Evidence of meso level institutions' involvement shows significant deficits with major implications for scaling-up capacity during implementation of restoration.
3. A critical mass of thriving local enterprise is needed to sustain and drive restoration. Current restoration financing models that are dependent largely on public finance are not sustainable. Therefore, private enterprise is a necessary condition for success and sustainability.
4. Current capacity of meso level institutions is very low. Without technical and organizational capacity and locally generated resources, restoration targets are unlikely to be achieved.
2. Massive capacity building investments are required and would perhaps yield more returns than any other type of investment, especially if connected to restoration innovations and enterprise.
3. In addition to regular agroforestry and forestry extension services, special enterprise development and business extension services are required.
4. Sustained training and learning through networking and knowledge platforms are needed to accelerate uptake or restoration at meso level.

Policy recommendations:

1. Sensitization/awareness raising is needed at meso level. Proactive involvement and engagement are also needed in the currently missing middle. International platforms and mechanisms working on restoration need to ramp up engagement of meso as well as local organizations (including community-based organizations) and bring them into the dialogue and discourse.

Summary

To achieve global restoration goals, the involvement of actors is required at all levels. While evidence that international and national actors are involved, the same cannot be said of sub-national governments, community-based and non-governmental organizations (CBOs, NGOs), the community, and private enterprise. The absence of this critical meso level of institutions is what is referred to as the "missing middle". They are necessary for scaling-up restoration, and this state-of-affairs is likely hampering replication of well documented best restoration practices as well as limiting capacity to scale up. This may place in jeopardy the path to global restoration. This policy brief elucidates the "missing middle" challenge for restoration and provides ideas to overcome it.

Introduction

The world urgently needs to restore huge swaths of land to meet the demand for ecosystem services and is targeting 350 M Ha by 2030 under the New York Declaration on Forests and the Bonn Challenge. Tremendous resources - financial, human and other - are needed at international, national, sub-national and local levels. International mobilization has been great so far. National awareness and commitments are also robust. Many excellent local success stories have also been reported. However, for scaling up and implementing restoration, a critical mass of involvement of sub-national governments, local NGOs, CBOs, academia, and enterprise is needed. So far, evidence of engagement of this key cohort is thin, and this missing meso level engagement may well be restoration's number one challenge. This is what this policy brief seeks to address.

Main Findings

Meso level institutions (government, non-governmental, community and private enterprises) are critical in restoration delivery pathways.

Meso level institutions have an important and unique role to play in landscape restoration, including:

- Interpreting and translating policies to local realities
- Liaising between national and local level institutions
- Possessing lived understanding of local institutions and conditions of complex tenure are therefore critical for negotiating local solutions
- Often having longstanding tested relationships that constitute a valuable trust account at local level that is necessary for restoration
- Targeting implementation of tree growing incentives

Numerous reports of restoration successes provide evidence that the role of local and meso level institutions is critical. According to Nzyoka et al. (2021) and Wainaina et al. (2021), stakeholders' participation in decision making and inclusiveness in all the activities within the restoration agenda were vital in the restoration of the Shinyanga region in Tanzania. This is largely because different stakeholders have roles that complement each other. Similarly, local-level ownership and respect for local cultural values and norms were key to the success of the restoration even decades after donor support ended. These studies also emphasize the role of the local government in the management of landscapes in the Shinyanga region. In a recent review of progress on restoration in Africa, Mansourian & Berrahoumi (2021) also highlight local ownership as a critical factor of success and emphasize that the main challenges for restoration in Africa are largely institutional, social and economic as a whole. Generally, Guariguata and Evans (2020) call for collaborative and participatory monitoring of landscape restoration that involves multiple stakeholders.

We argue here that following the issue attention cycle concept (Downs 1972), in the early phases international and large NGOs are very important in raising awareness and advocating on the issues. (Figure 1a). They are also important given their strong capacity to do the "heavy lifting" on design and piloting (in collaboration with local institutions), as well as catalyzing policy changes. But once we reach the implementation phase, a critical mass of meso level and local institution involvement is needed as shown in Figure 1b. Ten years into the Bonn Challenge, the engagement of meso level organizations should be heading towards the critical mass needed if implementation and scaling up is to work. However, the evidence suggests that this is not the case, and this needs to be corrected.

Evidence of meso level institution involvement shows a significant deficit

An analysis of partners in the most important restoration partnerships reveals a glaring apparent lack of engagement of meso level partners. The main global platforms and partnerships for restoration clearly show an overall lack of engagement with this level. The 20X20 initiative in Latin America recorded up to 25% of its membership as national and local organizations, including three university partners and Latin American research bodies. It may be an outlier, however, or an exception. The Africa 100 initiative and the UN Decade for Restoration only feature international organizations on their list of partners. Further, the Global Evergreening Alliance recorded just six out of 36 partners to be at national and sub-national level, while the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (GPFLR) recorded five out of 35 partners at national and local level (see Figure 2).

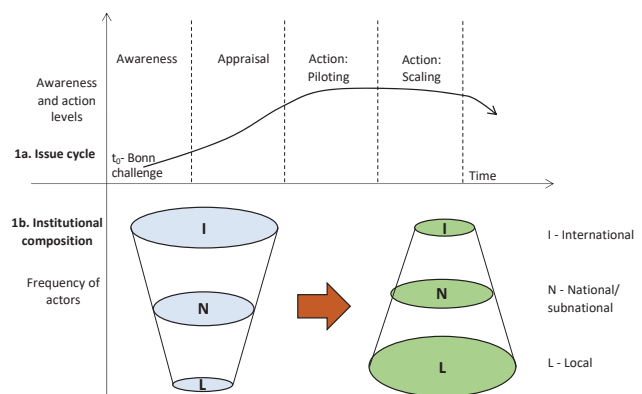


Figure 1. Conceptualization of the restoration process with time with reference to the Bonn Challenge

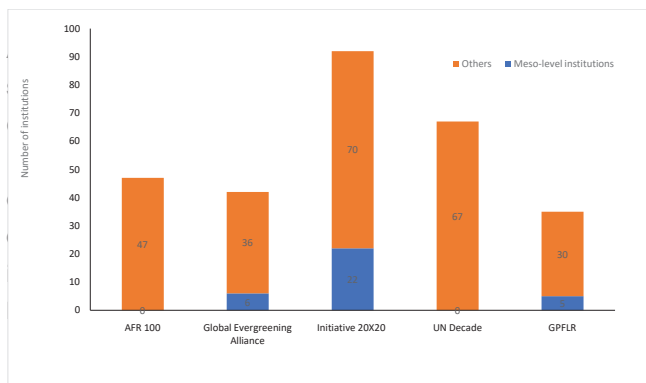


Figure 2. Institutions distributions across various global restoration initiatives

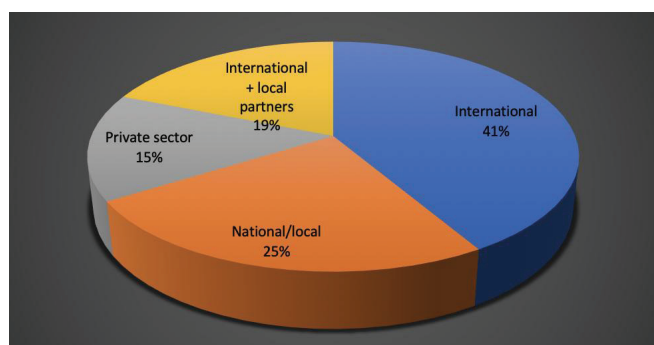


Figure 3. Distribution of stakeholders in restoration projects in Kenya

A critical mass of viable local enterprise is needed to sustain and drive restoration

The relatively low participation of private sector stakeholders in landscape restoration is a cause for concern since they influence funding, investments, political engagement, implementation, and market dynamics. There is a growing consensus that public finance may not be adequate for the growing global restoration needs and that additional private investment is necessary (Gutierrez and Keijzer, 2015; Faruqi and Landsberg, 2017; Löfqvist and Ghazoul, 2019; Wainaina et al., 2020). Private finance is becoming a significant option as commercial restoration business models emerge, and it also offers certain advantages, including faster decision-making and the ability to scale financing as work expands (Faruqi and Landsberg, 2017). Many stakeholders in restoration—entrepreneurs, project managers, governments, and non-profit organizations—do not have a strong grasp of what private financiers look for when making investment decisions (Faruqi and Landsberg, 2017).

Investment in landscape restoration will only be attractive to private financiers only if in addition to meeting the environmental viability, the restoration activities are economically viable (Wainaina et al., 2020). A sustainable avenue for private financing in restoration is through investing in nature-based enterprises. However, these nature-based enterprises are usually high risk due to relatively long payback periods. Hence, the need for blended finance in restoration

(Löfqvist and Ghazoul, 2019). Opportunities for private investment or blended finance (with shares of both public and private finance) are likely to increase as a project transition towards the sustainability phase (ITTO, 2020). Also, investing in building capacity is vital, including training on business advisory skills. These can help in de-risking these enterprises.

According to Gutierrez and Keijzer (2015), meso level organizations have an important role in accessing innovative financing sources to address the gap in national and international forest restoration financing and to translate these into sound action. This will require continuous adaptation to an evolving finance market. For example, WeForest WF, an environmental NGO, is financed by the private sector, and to a limited extent, by private individuals. Since 2010, WF had mobilized nearly 140 private companies from 24 countries to invest in a portfolio of reforestation and restoration projects designed to increase tree cover along with social, economic, and other ecological benefits (Gutierrez and Keijzer (2015).

Current capacity of meso level institutions is low

Stakeholder participation and collaboration is essential for optimal FLR outcomes. In developing FLR interventions, the diverse requirements, values and perspectives of stakeholders need to be harmonized and their knowledge and experience adequately used (ITTO, 2020). Adequate participation of meso level institutions, including sub-national governments, local NGOs and CBOs, is vital for inclusive governance and successful restoration (Wainaina et al., 2021; Nzyoka et al., 2021). Partnerships between governments, corporations, NGOs and individuals are key to overcoming existing barriers and creating new opportunities for FLR investments (Löfqvist and Ghazoul, 2019). Involvement of these meso level institutions is also necessary to ensure the sustainability of restoration projects in the long run. However, involvement of these in restoration is still low. Hence, there is a need to strengthen the institutional capacity of different stakeholders to help them navigate legal processes and conduct appropriate project management so that they can conduct restoration within their local socio-political and cultural contexts (Davila et al., 2016). Closely related, academia has a vital role to play in building the necessary capacity for restoration. However, a gap looms between what is taught at universities and restoration on the ground (Ghazoul J. and Schweizer, 2021; Meli et al., 2019). Thus, skills and knowledge gaps need to be addressed to encompass the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of restoration.

Davila et al. (2016) and Bloomfield et al. (2019) present several ongoing initiatives aimed at building the capacity of meso level institutions and other FLR stakeholders. For example, the Environmental Leadership and Training Initiative

(ELTI), a program of Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, was created in 2006 to help land-use decision-makers in the tropics conserve and restore tropical forests, native tree cover, and the ecological integrity of human-modified landscapes. ELTI's target audience includes public officials, farmers, producers, community leaders, practitioners and other stakeholders that directly or indirectly influence land use in agricultural or degraded areas. Such capacity development initiatives can help stakeholders address the multidimensional nature of FLR by tailoring capacity development to stakeholder needs, integrating information from diverse sources, exposing participants to the full suite of restoration interventions, and reaching beyond the technical aspects of restoration (Bloomfield et al., 2019). Continuous training of restoration professionals is also key but, this must be supported by financial aid to cover trainee attendance costs, and by enabling policies increasing demand for restoration (Meli et al., 2019).

Recommendations

We recommend the following to be thought through and developed to unlock the missing middle challenge for restoration.

Sensitization / awareness raising / and engagement of meso level stakeholders is needed

Proactive action is needed to sensitize local and meso level stakeholders and to engage them in restoration at all stages in the project and policy cycles. Sensitization could take the form of local media such as community radio shows, local drama or roadshows, or community environmental education. In project and policy cycles, all actors, including donors and evaluators, need to encourage and nudge meso level and local stakeholder involvement. Several incentive and disincentive instruments can be deployed in this regard. See Sarmiento et al. (2020) for guidance on facilitating multi-stakeholder forums.

Massive capacity building is required / financial, human and technical

Not all stakeholders have the requisite technical knowledge to fully participate. Hence, developing stakeholder capacity is integral to the FLR process (Stanturf, 2021). Meso level partners need help to build their technical and resource mobilization capacities. Targeted training programmes are necessary - both formal and informal. This may mean engaging training institutions and supporting curriculum development of locally suited modules.

Extensive investments will be needed in knowledge and learning platforms as well as partnership platforms that are tailored to the needs and reach of meso level organisations. Leveraging mobile platforms and mobile internet connectivity might be key.

Special enterprise / innovation development and business extension services are required - in addition to regular agroforestry and forestry extension services

Tremendous investments will be needed to catalyze the engagement of the private sector enterprises in restoration. This will require initial investment of public money to catalyze and de-risk restoration efforts but also to direct private sector investments and initiatives. The Land Accelerator of World Resources Institute and World Agroforestry's Dryad programme are examples of deploying public finance as a catalyst, while the World Economic Forum's UpLink programme is an example of what private initiatives can do. Broadly, these three examples combine technical support, capacity building, and enterprise development. We briefly describe these three cases in Box 1 to show what is doable to unlock meso and local level engagement in scaling up restoration.

In addition, we need to think about developing business extension services at local level i.e., individual and landscape levels. These need to encourage the development of community and individual green enterprises that can serve restoration. In much the same way as we have developed extension services for forestry and agriculture, we need green land-based business extension services. These will differ from the classic support that traditional banks and micro-finance institutions provide and will tremendously advance restoration.

Policy incentives may be handy if well developed and implemented

Exploring a workable set of incentives across scales might help unlock engagement of meso and local level institutions. Tree tenure changes in Niger proved to be a significant boost for restoration. Recent positive tree tenure changes in Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire usher in hope for the restoration of degraded cocoa and forest areas. Community forestry tenure arrangements are known to have catalyzed restoration in Shinyanga. Minang (2018) and Wainaina et al. (2021) have demonstrated a suite of incentives that could potentially be deployed.

Assessing across-scale connections

The wide gap reported in this document highlights the limitations of the current framings of large-scale restoration initiatives. For successful restoration, the resources (financial, tools, skills, and others) found at the international level should complement national policies and strategies in implementing restoration. The complementarity between the two should

give impetus to the local restoration efforts within the existing local realities and experiences, including local ecological knowledge. In turn, such local details could be instrumental in defining appropriate restoration actions in different contexts. Restoration, thus, needs to be an outcome of the across-scale collaborations and complementarities created (for more see Minang et al 2014).

Case studies

A. The Land Accelerator

Sustainable business models for agriculture and land use are estimated to be worth US\$2.3 trillion with a possibility of creating over 70 million jobs by 2030 (Z Zhongming, L Linong, Z Wangqiang, L Wei, 2018). Entrepreneurs in rural areas have limited access to capital and technical know-how, yet production of agricultural goods from restored land is cost-effective. To solve this contradiction, the World Resources Institute curated a networking and accelerator program to empower entrepreneurs restoring degraded forests and farmland to capture investors and effectively market their products. Targeting Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, the Land Accelerator fosters entrepreneurship by imparting cost-effective approaches to develop and restore rural areas. This is done through individualized mentorship, in-person, and online trainings (WRI, 2019).

Under the topic of FLR, restoration entrepreneurs go through an intense four-month program to enable them scale up. Innovators are empowered to tackle climate change and create jobs by restoring land. Since its inception on 3 December 2018 in Nairobi, Kenya, the program has attracted 56 entrepreneurs from 23 countries, created 2,700 jobs and helped 120,500 farmers. In addition, 101,200 hectares are under restoration, and 3.1 million trees are growing.

See www.wri.org/initiatives/land-accelerator

B. DRYAD: performance-based financing for sustainable community forest enterprises in Cameroon

DRYAD was an experiment in deploying public finance to de-risk and prepare community forest enterprises in Cameroon for private investment through a performance-based finance approach that achieved better access to finance to catalyze sustainable enterprises of forest products and services for the benefit of forest communities. The five-year project was financed by UK DFID and implemented by World Agroforestry, TMP Systems, and four local NGOs.

The main features of the model were conditionality (a community forestry enterprise could only access finance if it met performance targets) a transparent monitoring

system, and technical support on enterprise management, governance, agriculture and forestry. DRYAD successfully supported 29 community forest enterprises, registering a failure rate of 6% in a country where 90% of all small and medium enterprises fail in year 1. It also created 470 full-time jobs, enabled progress towards 50% of production targets by year 2 of operations, and trained more than 1500 people. Enterprises began to plough back benefits into community projects (Duguma et al., 2019). Substantial potential exists for scaling up DRYAD given its success. See www.worldagroforestry.org/project/dryad-financing-sustainable-community-forest-enterprises-cameroon

C. Uplink Platform

Designed and developed by co-founding partners Deloitte and Salesforce, Uplink is a digital crowd-engagement network platform with the aim of connecting the best entrepreneurs and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) innovators globally to a growing network of experts and decision-makers who can execute the change required for the next decade. It was launched at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2020 after its announcement at the 2019 Sustainable Development Impact Summit.

Utilizing an inclusive approach under its different challenges and through collaborative action groups, anyone can sign up and contribute impact-oriented ideas and innovative solutions to world challenges and SDG attainment roadblocks as well as build alliances with like-minded exponents.

A good example is the Trillion Trees Challenge. On the basis that the earth formerly had 6 trillion trees that have today been reduced by half and the degradation continues, the Trillion Tree Platform (1t.org) aims to mobilize, connect, and empower the global reforestation community to conserve, restore and grow a trillion trees by 2030 in support of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The platform seeks to raise ambitions for commitments and connect ecopreneurs and innovators globally to develop solutions in achieving the trillion trees goal. With a total of 533 contributions globally, the program has four focus areas: mass mobilization (knowledge, information, technologies); greening cities; building forest economies; and reaching scale through fund mobilization.

See www.weforum.org/uplink

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