

# Lessons from the landscape – approaches that work

## Ensuring equitable benefits for forest and farming families



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### **Listening in the landscape**

*Enhance trust and social cohesion with forest and farming families and all other stakeholders, as a basis for understanding and negotiation*

### **Democratizing decision making**

*Strengthen forest and farmer organisations, and local government, to better represent members and public interests in landscape decision making*

### **Making sectoral approaches work**

*Promote responsible and long term resource management policies and practices within relevant sectors, with a landscape-level vision*

### **Agreeing definitions and standards**

*Agree on a Landscape Convention that includes an agreed understanding of terms and concepts used in landscape approaches and planning*

Resilient, multifunctional landscapes provide multiple benefits to many people, and are considered a cornerstone of sustainable economies and equitable development.

But demands and claims on our landscapes are rising, and poor management persists. Land degradation, conflict, inequality and poverty are the results. Insecure tenure, power imbalances and competing interests hamper efforts to make real change. Fair and transparent decision-making at the landscape level is in any case a complex undertaking. And there is also the political landscape to consider.

Isolated, top-down and single-sector solutions have been seen as one of the problems, and in response, 'the landscape approach' has been increasingly advocated as the answer. Being multi-sectoral and integrated, this would ensure that land use planning, policies and management decisions benefit everyone and the environment.

This concept appears plausible and attractive, though questions remain regarding its true effectiveness. It emphasises having a deep understanding of the landscape, continuous learning and adaptation, adequate representation of interests and collaborative decision making. But concerns are raised that although aimed at supporting forest and farming families, the landscape approach can also further marginalize them.

This policy brief introduces some common lessons seen where landscape approaches have worked. And it offers suggestions to rural development professionals that can help to consolidate and scale up the successes, for the benefit of the land and the lives of those who depend on it.

# Lessons from the landscape

A review of cases from around the world [see back page] reveals what makes landscape initiatives successful

## Bolstering community spirit is paramount

Increased social capital is the key benefit of landscape initiatives – a greater sense of community, recognition, empowerment and collective decision making. Local institutions, social structures, hierarchies, rituals, traditions and customs can all help in protecting common resources. The catalyst for community action has often been a significant environmental problem, but outside support can leverage action, via funding, training, facilitation or technical expertise.

## The importance of linking benefits across scales

The likelihood of better-for-all outcomes, within the landscape and beyond, is higher when short term private benefits are tied to long term, global public interests. Only when farming, forest and fisher families see tangible gains in terms of increased productivity, income and access to resources, do they have an incentive to invest in abstract goals like protecting biodiversity or climate change adaptation and mitigation.

## Ensuring security and equity in resource access

Who really controls the resources in a landscape determines the extent of democracy in decision making. Initiatives driven by resource secure supply chains focus on mitigating negative social and environmental impacts. Initiatives resulting from common or local concerns emphasise the need for effective organisation of stakeholders, cross-sectoral coordination, and negotiation of trade-offs between conflicting land uses and interests.

# But challenges remain

When scaling up successes, some realities must be confronted.

## Trade-offs are common and must be managed

Win-win-win solutions that maximise local food security, economic interests and global environmental goals are attractive but unattainable dreams. It is not possible to satisfy all stakeholders interests all of the time when resource demand exceeds supply, and there will always be trade-offs.

## Local solutions for global problems?

Positive outcomes are assumed when local people agree on choices and action. But can changes in landscape management really contribute to addressing complex issues such as climate change? And how can distant consumers and others outside the landscape influence local decisions without being seen as imposing outsiders?

## From flexible options to solutions that last

Practical landscape management arrangements are often flexible and informal. But to develop and sustain the benefits, they have to be formalized within governance frameworks that have the legitimacy and mandate to enable implementation, monitoring and enforcement.

## What is a landscape?

The European Landscape Convention (2000) defines a landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of nature and/or human factors”. This definition, part of the only international policy framework that specifically concerns landscapes, acknowledges that all stakeholders can hold their own different view of the same landscape, and pursue their own objectives within it or outside it.

# Approaches that work

The international community has an important role in supporting forest and farm families to manage landscapes for the benefit of us all, through solid, specific and holistic policies and approaches. Here are four ways that development practitioners can help to promote positive landscape-level experiences.

## Facilitate listening in the landscape

Increased social capital among land users translates into sustainable landscapes, but only if decision making is truly inclusive and transparent, and bridges sectoral interests. Donors and development practitioners can stimulate this by strengthening institutions that increase the trust between land users, governments, and outside interests.

Support existing institutions that are legitimate, culturally appropriate and landscape-wide, rather than creating new ones, to provide platforms for cross-sectoral dialogue, safe spaces for interaction and equitable distribution of benefits, costs, risks and opportunities among all who have a stake.

## Democratize decision making

The future of landscapes must be in the hands of the people who live there, and they must have the capacity to speak out for their own interests. Strong local government is also needed, with representation of community interests through producer organisations, indigenous peoples, women and youth groups, and civil society bodies.

Increase the support provided to local organisations, and assist civil society networks to work more closely with local governments as part of local, inclusive, transformative rural development programmes.

## Make sectoral approaches work

Just replacing poor sectoral policies and management practices with multi-sectoral ones is no guarantee of success. Sectoral approaches can support global and public interests and trigger positive changes, but they must be sound, responsible and fit effectively together into the landscape.

Promote responsible public and private standards, such as commodity and investment standards, backed by credible due diligence, accountability, enforcement and incentives.

## Agree definitions and standards

A landscape convention would allow for better coordination by reducing confusion between sector-based policies and standards. It could also catalyse more strategic approaches by creating a shared framework for integrated landscape management.

Have an International Landscape Convention as a reference for policies and other instruments dealing with rural development, supply chains, resource management, and environmental and cultural concerns. This should be based on principles of integrated and equitable landscape governance and management.

# Unravelling the landscape approach

A desire to unravel the landscape approach brought together Tropenbos International, ILEIA – Centre for learning on sustainable agriculture, and the AgriCultures Network. With their respective focus on forests and farmers, the partnership reflects the emergence of integrated and inclusive approaches at the landscape level. This brief was produced to coincide with the second Global Landscapes Forum in December 2014, in Lima, Peru. It highlights findings from interviews, stories from the field, research, publications, meetings and seminars gathered during the production of these publications:

- Towards productive landscapes (ETFRN News 56, 220pp.)
- Farmers in their landscapes (Farming Matters, experiences in family farming and agroecology, 30.3, 44pp.)
- El paisaje y la agricultura familiar campesina (LEISA revista de agroecología, 30.3, 40pp.)
- Espaces et territoires (Agridape revue sur l'agriculture durable à faibles apports externes, 30.3)
- Unravelling the landscape approach: Are we on the right track? (conference report, 16pp.)

*Publications are available from [www.tropenbos.org](http://www.tropenbos.org) and [www.agriculturesnetwork.org](http://www.agriculturesnetwork.org)*



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By making knowledge work for forests and people, Tropenbos International contributes to well-informed decision making for improved management and governance of tropical forests. Our longstanding local presence and ability to bring together local, national and international partners make us a trusted partner in sustainable development.

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