

Incentivising corporate landscape restoration

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In the face of the accelerating global climate-biodiversity crisis, and faced with the loss of carbon sinks and ecosystems critical to human survival, there has never been a more urgent need to restore and protect landscapes. Rebuilding environmentally degraded landscapes is crucial to building climate and economic resilience and to protecting soils, watersheds and wildlife. Collaboration among corporate and other partners is necessary to scale restoration up to the landscape level.

The UN has declared this the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The aim is to halt degradation and restore ecosystems in order to achieve intrinsically-linked global goals for climate, nature (including biodiversity) and human wellbeing (including food security and poverty reduction).

Ecosystem restoration applies to mangroves, seagrass, forests, among others; it can entail natural and assisted regeneration, agroforestry, soil enhancement, and improved and sustainable management across both terrestrial and marine land and 'aqua' scapes. Any degraded ecosystem (for example, mines, farms, forests, fisheries) offers an opportunity for restoration. Restoring ecological integrity also includes large-scale landscape restoration (for example, of a plateau or mountain range).

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Natural resources such as minerals, water, and fertile land are unequally distributed across the globe, and tend to be clustered. In many cases these areas overlap or are adjacent to areas of high biodiversity value (for example, bauxite, titanium and nickel are found predominantly in forested areas). This leads to aggregations of company operations, such as mining, that depend on access to these resources.

While many company operations bring benefits to communities (including economic opportunities, improved healthcare and access to clean water and better security), they often also bring negative impacts: degraded forests, depleted resources, polluted surrounding landscapes and water courses. In some territories, the degradation is still in progress, including:

- Private-sector operations in Borneo (palm oil) and South Sumatra, Indonesia (coal mining)
- Large-scale mining in Guinea (for bauxite and iron ore) and central-southern Brazil and Liberia (iron ore).
- Artisanal and small-scale mining in the Amazon basin (Zamora-Chinchipec, Ecuador) and Congo basin (Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, the DRC, Central African Republic, Cameroon).

FROM DEGRADATION TO RESTORATION

In other territories, degradation has already taken place, without any closure or restoration; these include mining sites such as the Falémé River in West Africa, where there is ongoing degradation (siltation of water courses and leaching of toxic metals).

The private sector in general has minimal engagement with restoration programs on a landscape scale; the reasons are varied, relating mainly to perceptions - of limited opportunities, attached risks, exposure to liabilities, lacking mandates; also of anti-trust laws (hindering intra-sector collaboration).

As a result, few companies integrate landscapes into their environmental and social programmes, and few external influencers such as governments and lending institutions (for example, the World Bank) require this. 'Areas of influence', the areas over which a company's impacts are experienced, tend to be defined on a case-by-case basis. In addition, monitoring and evaluation approaches rarely - especially in the mining sector - look outside companies' direct operations, and reporting on performance rarely includes landscape metrics.

In FFI's view, companies could engage more actively in restoration and would benefit from it. Doing so across landscapes in an integrated, strategic way, in well-defined partnerships (private sector, NGOs and governments) would enable this.

The opportunities are many. Vast areas of degraded land and water courses need restoration, which could safeguard species, protect human livelihoods and access to ecosystem services, as well as re-establish environmental connectivity. Collaboration among corporate partners can lend long-term legitimacy and stability to such initiatives, and can bring resources (financial and technical) and landholdings for restoration. The benefits to companies are great, and include greater consumer trust, meeting and exceeding regulatory restoration targets, reduced water risk, and financial benefits from carbon sequestration to name just a few.

MAKING PROGRESS, STEP BY STEP

Steps to explore and develop these crucial landscape restoration opportunities could entail:

1. Developing a global spatial map of the opportunities. Much of the data exists.
2. Shortlisting the most feasible opportunities using environmental and restoration cost criteria, and choosing those with the highest cost-benefit. These could be further shortlisted through discussions with local companies.
3. Creating blueprints for the shortlisted landscapes, building on, and going far beyond government-regulated restoration requirements, to possible revenue streams from restoration-linked carbon sequestration.
4. Creating partnerships with government agencies and 'influencers' such as development banks and other multi-lateral funders, to capitalise these projects.
5. Producing a tool for organising collaborations, which could also provide guidance and sector-specific case studies.

A number of successful restoration initiatives and models exist, including the Frugal Rehabilitation methodology used for artisanal mining in Mongolia, FFI's own work in restoring and protecting mixed-use rangeland in Kenya and in the Araucaria forest in Brazil, and the cement sector's restoration of limestone and aggregate quarries to priority habitats in Europe. The urgent need, and opportunity, is to scale these approaches up to the landscape level - by bringing in more partners and creating joint restoration strategies to pool and access greater resources - to restore far greater, interconnected, ecological landscapes.