Conservation News

Let us not forget the human dimensions of ecosystem restoration

Target 2 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework concerns ecosystem restoration. Prior to that, the Bonn Challenge on Forest Landscape Restoration, the AFR100, the New York Declaration on Forests, and the Paris Agreement, amongst others, have all called for the restoration of vast areas of forest.

Restoration is, however, a human endeavour that requires full engagement of people at all levels of decision-making and at all stages of the restoration process. In an April 2024 report supported by WWF, the Society for Ecological Restoration and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (Mansourian et al., 2024, iufro.org/publications/joint-publications/article/2024/04/24/human-dimensions-of-forest-landscape-restoration), six social scientists and five conservation and forestry practitioners have come together to explore the human dimensions of forest landscape restoration.

Human dimensions of restoration are multi-layered. At their simplest, they are the activities that are necessary in the human system to enable restoration, such as negotiating long-term objectives, resolving conflicts or carrying out multi-stakeholder consultations. But there are also underlying reasons that determine why people restore or destroy forests, and there are many factors that influence why people may or may not support restoration. For example, landlords that live far away from their landholdings may not feel the same attachment to their land and forests as Indigenous rural communities and thus may be more inclined to transform them to other land uses, or confronted with powerful companies that contribute significant tax revenue to governments, rural land users may have little say in how their forests are managed.

This new report explores why consideration of human dimensions is essential in forest landscape restoration and how they could be better integrated into practice and policy-making to improve conservation impact. The report includes relevant guidance and tools from other fields that can contribute to improving the ways in which human aspects are integrated into forest landscape restoration and restoration more generally. It is intended to support practitioners and policymakers in their consideration of human dimensions at all stages of restoration and to strengthen the role of social science in restoration. If we are to meet the global goals on restoration in a way that improves biodiversity, we must better integrate human dimensions.

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