Our Forest and Landscape Restoration Principles

WeForest — Making Earth Cooler

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1 Focus on forest and landscapes

We define landscapes as an integrated mosaic of ecosystems, land uses and management practices under various tenure and governance systems. The landscape generally has multiple functions, as it provides a variety of (ecosystem) functions and services, such as biodiversity, food and water, economic growth, and human well-being.

Scale of intervention

Landscapes, as opposed to individual sites, are the ideal unit for planning and making decisions that consider natural resource use, restoration, conservation and livelihoods in an integrated manner. It is at this scale that ecological, social and economic priorities can be balanced, as it allows for a better understanding of trade-offs, options and scenarios around proposed decisions and desired outcomes. Furthermore, most ecological processes function at landscape scales, which allows maximizing ecological restoration impacts of our projects.

Forest potential

We focus on landscapes that have or had historically high natural forest and tree cover. In these landscapes we aim to conserve remaining natural forest and restore (part of) the forest where it was lost or degraded. When appropriate, we focus restoration efforts in locations that reconnect remaining forest fragments through corridors or stepping stones, to facilitate migration of animals and/or plants.

2 Conserve existing forests, avoid conversion of natural ecosystems and assist natural processes of recovery

We define a "natural ecosystem" as an ecosystem that spontaneously developed over longer timeframes, and where the vegetation structure is stable and in balance with the local environmental conditions.

Conservation first

FLR primarily targets the conservation, recovery and sustainable management of historical forests.

Avoid conversion of natural ecosystems

The increase in tree cover in the landscape should furthermore never come at the expense of other natural ecosystems such as grasslands or wetlands. In other words we value all natural ecosystems and we focus on reforestation where natural forest was lost, not afforestation on sites that have never supported natural forest in the past.

Assist natural processes of recovery

Whenever possible, our forest restoration interventions aim to maximize natural regeneration potential before resorting to planting of native tree species.

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3 Restore multiple functions for multiple benefits

FLR aims to restore functions across the landscape, benefiting multiple stakeholders. This usually includes ecological functions (e.g. species diversity, forest structure), ecosystem services (e.g. clean water, soil erosion reduction, drought mitigation, cultural significance) and socio-economic functions (e.g. agroforestry food production).

The multiple functions can be achieved in separate sections of the landscape. While ecosystem functions will dominate where forest conservation and restoration is deemed optimal, socio-economic functions are more likely to take place in the farming zones in the landscape. Similarly, the number of ecosystem services to be strengthened will vary across sections of the landscape, from supporting soil health in the farming zone, to clean water provisioning and erosion control in conservation and restoration zones.

4 Context-driven, tailored intervention approaches

Knowing that no 'one size fits all', our projects are shaped to local context using a variety of approaches, in a way that is respectful and considerate of the landscape history as well as local social, cultural, economic and ecological values and needs.

Our approaches draw on the latest science, best practices, and traditional knowledge.

5

Empower local stakeholders

Local stewardship

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is at the heart of all our stakeholder engagements. We recognise that FLR can only be successful if communities are at the heart of the project: active, voluntary involvement of local stakeholders leads to better buy-in, greater access to local knowledge, motivated management and less need for external resources. We actively engage with local stakeholders and adopt participatory and community-led approaches to ensure sustainable and effective ownership of the FLR process.

Inclusion

Our projects ensure that all voices are heard and that everyone's needs count. We recognise that different groups and social categories within a landscape can have different needs and priorities. Their local ecological knowledge may also differ, as well as their capacity and availability to participate in FLR initiatives. Some activities may be specifically tailored to the needs of one group or social category: beekeeping for landless youth; small livestock and cooking energy for women.

Capacity building

WeForest acknowledges that local stakeholders at different scales (local, regional) have different resources and capacities. We support through projects the building of the capacities of stakeholders in charge of project management including private landowners, communities and governments.

6 Embrace partnerships and collaboration

We partner and collaborate with the local communities, government institutions, scientific community, the private sector, civil society, landowners, land managers, in ways that create shared value, for decisions regarding restoration goals, implementation methods, and trade-offs.

7 Support local livelihoods

In many landscapes, forests are closely linked to local livelihoods; changes in forest and associated ecosystem functions can have negative and positive impacts on livelihoods, and livelihoods can be both a cause and a driver of forest degradation and deforestation. Our FLR approach aims to alleviate the consequences and reverse the drivers.

Promoting forest-friendly practices

When appropriately designed, forest- and farm- based enterprises and land use practices can reverse forest degradation, mitigate its impact, incentivise sustainable forest management and, in some cases, financially sustain it. We support livelihood approaches that have a meaningful impact both on forest and farm landscapes contributing to food, income and energy needs (e.g. agroforestry), when these are identified as critical drivers of forest degradation.

Making forests valuable to people

To ensure the sustainability of our impact, we ensure that fair and equitable arrangements aimed at distributing forest-based revenues and other non-monetary benefits (e.g. ecosystem services) to local communities are put in place.

8 Manage adaptively for long-term resilience

Start small

When designing FLR projects within new landscapes, we first implement pilots to test the effectiveness of our approach, before scaling up.

Long-term engagement

Our engagement in a landscape lasts a minimum of 10 years combining implementation and monitoring.

Adaptation and continuous learning

Together with local stakeholders, we adjust our strategies over time as environmental conditions, socio-economic realities, knowledge and values can change. During implementation and after, we ensure that continuous monitoring, evaluation and learning is leveraged through clearly defined goals, objectives and indicators, allowing us to make adjustments as the FLR project progresses.

Financial sustainability

A proportion of forest-based revenue should be channeled back through balanced benefit sharing mechanisms into financing the forest restoration effort in the long term. Other income streams can include carbon credit trading and payments for ecosystem services.

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