



LEVERAGING NOVEL PARTNERSHIPS FOR LAND RESTORATION IN AFRICA

As a large scale, multi-country, multi-stakeholder restoration initiative, Regreening Africa offers a unique opportunity to generate actionable lessons on the cost-effectiveness and impact of local, national and global restoration efforts. As part of the Regreening Africa Insights Series, this brief shares key learnings and insights emerging from the programme's novel partnership-based approach in support of enhancing the scale and effectiveness of restoration interventions in sub-Saharan Africa.

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KEY INSIGHTS



The multiplicity of systems, stakeholders and skills/expertise involved in land restoration means that **partnerships are essential** to any successful restoration process. Such partnerships must be actively nurtured. Regreening Africa's partnership-based approach holds important lessons for large scale, multi-country land restoration initiatives.



The **research-in-development model**, where scientific and local knowledge are brought together to inform the development process, should be widely applied to support reflexive, inclusive and adaptive restoration interventions based on evidence.



Regreening Africa's **National Oversight Co-ordination Committees (NOCCs)** were central to the programme's success in their contribution to ongoing coordination, systematic biannual reviews, and their ability to leverage key policy windows. NOCCs can serve as a model for other land restoration initiatives.



While recognising unique social, economic, political and environmental contexts, there are important **opportunities for**

learning between countries to support land restoration. As a multi-country initiative, Regreening Africa has actively nurtured such learning opportunities through well-facilitated/structured virtual and in-person workshops, training and exchanges.



Effective partnerships that work closely with local organisations while reaching farmers with local advisory mechanisms such as farmer-to-farmer and farmer groups can achieve ambitious results through scaling solutions, while maintaining an emphasis on **locally-appropriate solutions that are co-designed with communities** at ground level.



Joint monitoring, reflection with evidence, evaluation and learning builds trust between partners and boosts the effectiveness and sustainability of restoration efforts. Regreening Africa emphasised reflection, learning and adaptation from the programme's earliest stages to ensure that any implementation challenges were immediately addressed and the programme was adaptive.



“STRONG PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS, COMMUNITIES, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, RESEARCH ACTORS AND DONORS HAVE BEEN CRITICAL TO REGREENING AFRICA AND WE MUST CONTINUE TO NURTURE THESE PARTNERSHIPS. IT WILL MEAN OUR EFFORTS ARE MORE SUSTAINABLE AND ALSO MORE IMPACTFUL.”

– Mieke Bourne, CIFOR-ICRAF

Land restoration – a systems lens

Land restoration requires understanding and engaging with environmental systems, and equally importantly, also socio-cultural, economic and policy systems.

Land restoration efforts have little chance of achieving enduring results if they don't work closely with landowners and local communities, nor will such efforts achieve success without political buy-in and support from government at multiple levels. Additionally, NGOs offer an extensive network of technical support and research partners bring an enquiring perspective and data to determine progress and impact.

Effective and enduring land restoration therefore requires a dynamic mix of partners that can leverage local systems to sustainably scale restoration efforts. No single organisation or group can offer the full range of scientific, technical, implementation, financial, managerial and policy tools necessary for successful large-scale restoration efforts that also serve and support local communities.

The importance of partnerships to support sustainable development has been emphasised in a range of global and regional frameworks and institutions, including the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Africa Union Agenda 2063 and the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

The launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) emphasised that the incredible challenge of preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide can only be met “if everyone – including [UN] Member States, local governments, partners from the private sector, academia and civil society – come together to find viable, lasting solutions”.¹

The emphasis on partnerships expressed in the SDGs and a range of other global and regional frameworks has informed the development and implementation of Regreening Africa since its inception. In bringing together CIFOR-ICRAF as a leading global research-in-development institution with a group of international and national NGOs (World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, CARE, Oxfam and Sahel Eco), the implementing consortium for Regreening Africa has worked collaboratively from day one. At the national level, partnerships and joint reflection and learning were facilitated ICRAF, with a biannual review process led by National Oversight and Coordination Committees (NOCCs). The NOCCs were each headed by a senior government official and made up of the national EU Delegation representative, implementing partners and additional key stakeholders.

Research-in-development as the basis for effective partnership

Regreening Africa has shown that bringing together a range of partners with a diversity of skill sets, resources and capabilities is transformative: the partnerships between research, development, communities and governments this has allowed are key to the success the programme has demonstrated.

This collaboration has been informed by the **research-in-development paradigm** (RinD). RinD is a paradigm that has emerged out of CIFOR-ICRAF's² efforts to ensure that the research process itself can innovate in a collaborative and reflexive manner to address the core goal of helping poor and vulnerable people to achieve more equitable and more sustainable livelihoods from the socio-ecological system they are part of.³

Regreening Africa's approach to RinD has focused on **direct collaboration with development partners, communities, policy actors and other stakeholders** to ensure that the programme's interventions respond to specific local and national contexts, address expressed needs and priorities, and

"THE RESEARCH IN DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP IS UNIQUE – LAND RESTORATION IS BEST DONE TOGETHER, WHERE WE CAN ALL USE OUR DISTINCT CAPACITIES TO SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER."

– Davis Wamawungo, World Vision

draw on the best available evidence. Building on the experience of past programmes implemented by CIFOR-ICRAF, Regreening Africa was able to introduce the RinD paradigm in the initial phases of the programme's development, as well as subsequent phases, thereby ensuring that the programme's design and implementation drew on robust evidence and science to inform programming in terms of targeting, planning, implementation and adaptation.

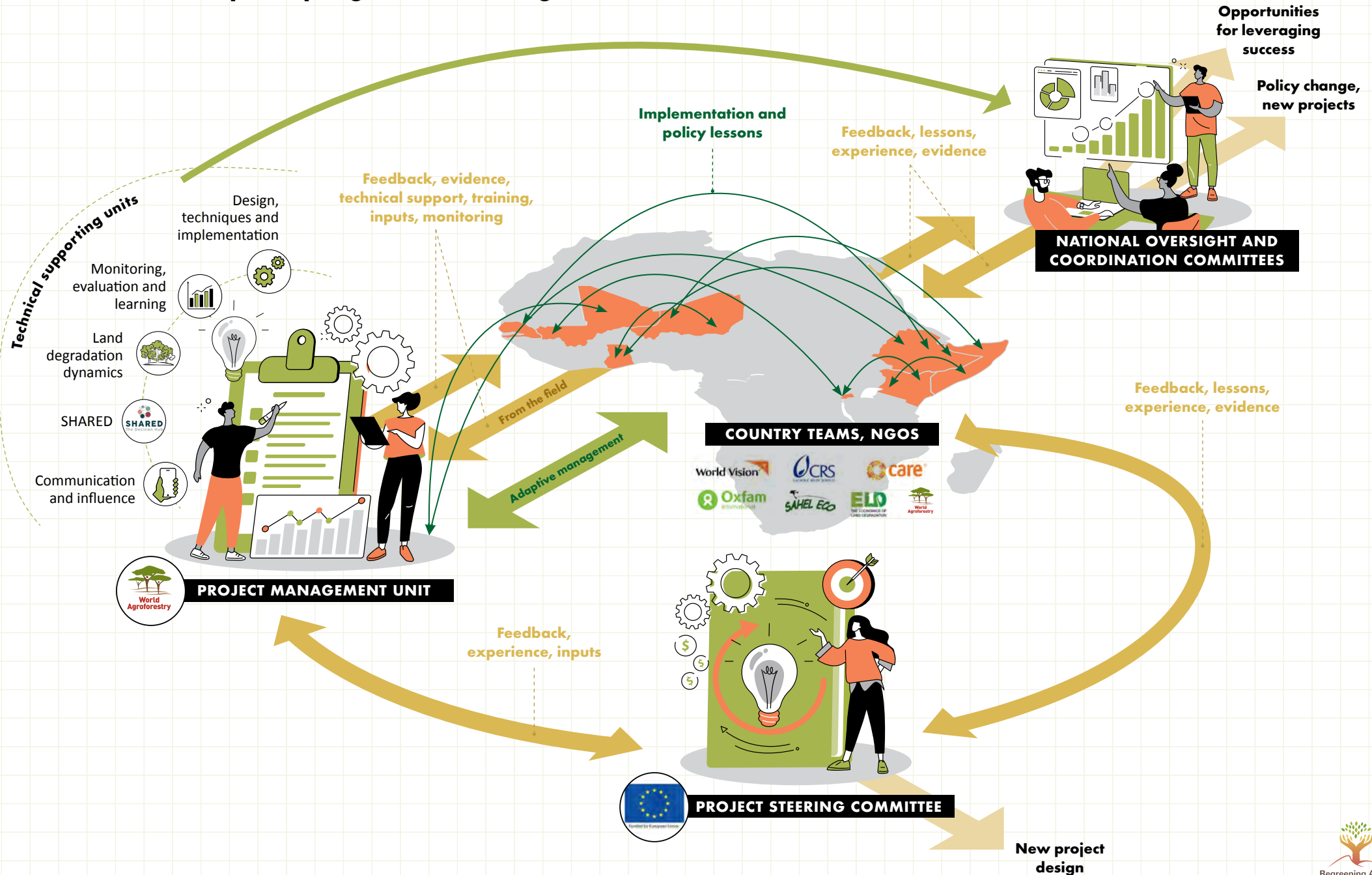
A number of CIFOR-ICRAF teams contributed to this process, including Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), Design, Techniques and Implementation (DTI), Land Degradation Dynamics (LDD) and the Stakeholder Approach to Risk Informed and Evidence-based Decision-making (SHARED) Decision Hub.



"LARGE SCALE IMPACT REQUIRES EVIDENCE-BASED INNOVATIONS TO BE WIDELY ADOPTED ACROSS MULTIPLE CONTEXTS. THE RinD APPROACH USED BY CIFOR-ICRAF AND PARTNERS [...] ESSENTIALLY INTEGRATES RESEARCH DESIGN INTO IMPLEMENTATION WHILE PROVIDING REAL-TIME FEEDBACK FROM AND WITH FARMERS."

– Leigh Winowiecki and Fergus Sinclair (CIFOR-ICRAF)

Partnership, creating a cycle of innovative learning, reflection and adaptive programme management



Participatory monitoring, reflection, evaluation and learning

Monitoring, reflecting and learning is a central element of the research in development approach. Regreening Africa has emphasised the importance of collaborative participatory monitoring and reflection as a means of building trust between partners, supporting adaptation based on lessons emerging from programme implementation, and contributing to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of restoration efforts pursued through the programme.

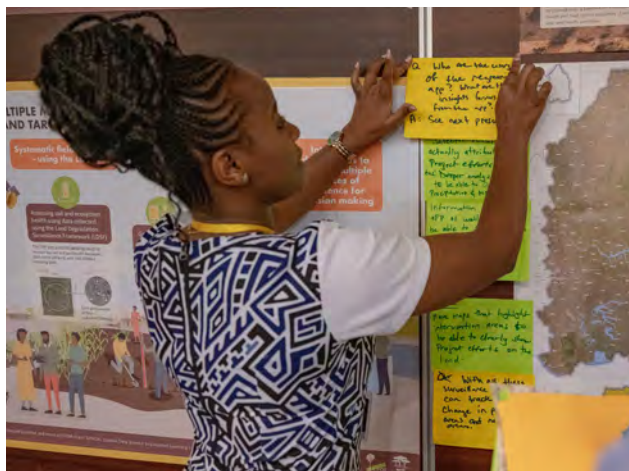
Regreening Africa employed the SHARED (Stakeholder Approach to Risk Informed and Evidence-based Decision-making) methodology to support the linkages and engagement processes between the different levels of the partnership. The SHARED methodology provides a comprehensive framework, tailored to specific decision contexts. It brings together processes, evidence, and tools and shifts the decision paradigm toward more inclusive, inter-sectoral and inter-institutional integration in order to address complex decisions and achieve desired outcomes.⁴



One of the key innovations of applying the SHARED methodology in Regreening Africa was the establishment of **Joint Reflective Learning Missions (JRLMs) as an innovative monitoring, reflection and learning opportunity** among implementing NGOs, CIFOR-ICRAF scientists, community members, and partners engaged in oversight at the national level. The reflective missions provide an opportunity to jointly query and learn from one another's evidence and experience, build upon programme momentum, and consider revised implementation approaches and focus. The JRLM processes allowed stakeholders to collaboratively take stock of progress to date within

countries and across the programme, as well as to identify the priority efforts for the remaining programme implementation period, with an emphasis on ways to transition the country efforts for continuation and sustainability.⁵

Regreening Africa had to adapt in responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the planned in-person field visits and workshops had to be conducted on virtual platforms.



Fortunately, these adjustments to Covid-19 could be integrated smoothly, building on the strong social capital developed in the early stages of the programme and supported by a range of communication channels and tools, including social media (such as WhatsApp) and the Regreening Africa app.

The JRLM processes consisted of two parts:

- 1 a field visit to programme sites, and
- 2 physical or virtual national and global interactions.



Country teams and members of the NOCC carried out field visits to programme locations to discuss with the community and receive their feedback upon the implementation process and progress, understand key challenges, and to identify what practices or catalytic actions could be further developed to increase scaling and meet programme goals.



These field visits were followed by a **facilitated interactive workshop** among members of the programme implementation team, NGO Headquarter leads, CIFOR-ICRAF scientists, the programme management team and in some cases EU country delegates and NOCC representatives to interrogate country programme progress and evidence from scientific and process teams.



The JRLM focused on key activities for **scaling up the effort and buy-in** to sustain, expand, and extend the progress achieved to date, and to improve the impact and quality of implementation.⁵



“THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN A RESEARCH ORGANISATION AND NGOS REPRESENTS ONE OF THE BIG WINS OF THE REGREENING AFRICA PROGRAMME. IT HAS ALSO BEEN USEFUL TO BRING RESEARCHERS TOGETHER WITH FARMERS, PROVIDING THEM WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE CONTEXT-SPECIFIC ISSUES AND DEVELOP APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS.”

– Alex Mugagi, World Vision Rwanda

Supporting coordination and locally-appropriate scaling

With Regreening Africa being implemented across eight countries and involving a diverse set of stakeholders, effective coordination at regional and country level was essential. Close coordination among the implementing consortium partners, in particular, was important to ensure coherent and effective implementation. At the national level, the NOCCs in each country provided strategic and policy advice to partners, reviewed work plans and progress, and provided overall guidance regarding implementation.

Buy-in and engagement by government is an important element of large-scale restoration activities, and therefore efforts have been made to ensure that the NOCC is chaired by an appropriate government agency representative at senior level, often represented by the Ministry of Environment.

Working closely with government and other policy stakeholders in the design, implementation and oversight of the programme has played an important role in strengthening the policy component of Regreening Africa's work, allowing for direct engagement and advocacy channels to support policy change.


Regreening Africa's Project Management Unit requires each programme implementing country to hold NOCC meetings biannually to review and discuss programme performance in the reporting period. Through these review and reporting activities, **NOCCs have played an important role in reflecting on implementation**

experiences, incorporating learnings, addressing bottlenecks and prioritising actions.

The committees have also helped Regreening Africa **identify opportunities for leverage and expansion** of scale, and improve efficiency, effectiveness and impact. Indeed, Regreening Africa's highly ambitious targets – reversing land degradation over at least one million hectares to benefit 500,000 households, while also catalysing an even larger scaling effort to restore tens of millions of hectares of degraded land across Africa – would not have been feasible had the programme not worked closely with existing, established NGOs and community engagement mechanisms.

Building on existing organisations and processes allowed Regreening Africa's implementation partners to identify successful and scalable solutions, leverage existing expertise and resources, and ensure that interventions were appropriate to local contexts.





Land degradation is a pervasive challenge across large parts of Africa and other regions of the world. To deal with this challenge, it is essential to scale solutions. At the same time, however, land restoration must address context-specific local ecological, social, economic and political systems.

This dynamic tension between operating at scale and at the same time ensuring locally appropriate solutions has been managed in the Regreening Africa programme through a consistent emphasis on direct engagement with farmers, landowners and other local stakeholders, as well as establishing multiple platforms and tools (including seminars, workshops, monitoring data feedback sessions, exchanges, JRLMs, and the Regreening Africa app) for co-design, reflection and learning. This has included engagement with specific stakeholder groups, including women, youth and faith-based communities, who are often marginalised in restoration and land management processes and decisions.

As part of Regreening Africa's implementation programme, CIFOR-ICRAF's SHARED Decision Hub hosted a series of co-learning events on a variety of topics, some of which have not traditionally been prioritised in large scale restoration efforts, but are nevertheless critical for success; these have included topics such as gender, youth, faith-based organisations, grazing rights and land tenure.

A further element that has played a key role in Regreening Africa's success was the programme's efforts to **identify and work closely with lead farmers** and other locally based agents, which has helped the programme maintain ongoing communication between local, national and regional stakeholders, as well as scaling out to a large number of households.



“THE [REGREENING AFRICA] PARTNERSHIP WAS MADE SEAMLESS AMONG CONSORTIUM PARTNERS, WHICH ALLOWED US TO WORK EFFECTIVELY TOGETHER DESPITE COMING FROM DIFFERENT POLICY AND OPERATIONAL BACKGROUNDS. TRANSPARENCY, RESPECT AND CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT WAS CENTRAL TO MAKING THIS PARTNERSHIP A SUCCESS.”

– Edward Akunyagra,
World Vision Ghana

CONTRIBUTING TO A SUPPORTIVE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Effective restoration requires a supportive policy environment at multiple levels. Regreening Africa's partnership-based model has played a key part in feeding insights from global policy processes back to regional, national and local levels, and vice versa.

GLOBAL:

Regreening Africa's partners are part of the task forces of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other global processes such as the Coalition of Action for Soil Health, and have contributed to a number of global policy forums including the UN Food Systems Summit.

NATIONAL:

At the national level, NOCCs have played an important part in shaping policy processes:

- The programme used consultative approaches with decision makers across scales to understand the degree to which policies, by-laws, and institutions were supportive of land restoration, to present evidence associated with effective land restoration, and to discuss how land restoration could be better enabled within the participating countries.
- Cross-sectoral coordination among decision makers has been promoted through the programme in order to enhance political support for land restoration.
- Building on policy analysis desk studies and initial stakeholder engagement, outcome mapping was used to identify necessary behaviour change shifts and mechanisms for influence to shape policy advocacy efforts, with an emphasis on the integration of evidence.
- Outcome stories showcased the policy advocacy and resulting changes.
- Regreening Africa has supported movement building through the Kenya National Landscape Restoration Scaling Conference and action groups and the Northern Ghana Restoration Initiative

REGIONAL:

- Regreening Africa has worked closely with African regional institutions and initiatives such as the African Union Commission, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100) and the Great Green Wall initiative.
- Representatives of regional institutions and initiatives were invited to Regreening Africa workshops and events to promote uptake of lessons emerging from the programme and the scaling of solutions.

“REGREENING AFRICA HAS SHOWN THAT PARTNERSHIP IS ABSOLUTELY CRUCIAL. WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING OUR DIFFERENCES, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BRING DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP LASTING SOLUTIONS.”

– Niclas Gottmann, European Commission





CONCLUSION



Partnerships are essential to achieving effective and enduring land restoration.

While an emphasis on partnerships is not in itself novel, Regreening Africa has been able to introduce a number of innovative approaches and processes to help ensure that the partnerships developed through the programme contribute to achieving the ambitious targets it had set.



Building the RInD paradigm into the very design of the programme from the earliest stages, with its emphasis on consultation, collaboration and using the best available evidence, helped ensure that the programme offered practical, context-specific and scalable solutions. From day one, the programme emphasised reflection, learning and adaptation to address challenges in a timely manner and ensure the programme's outcomes could be achieved despite unforeseen events, including a global pandemic and security challenges.



Working with a combination of research institutions, global and national NGOs, government agencies and local organisations ensured that interventions built on existing models and effectively leveraged expertise and resources. The NOCCs supported political buy-in, strengthened reflection and learning, and created policy advocacy channels to ensure that the programme could make the most of emerging policy windows.



Workshops, co-learning events and a variety of monitoring and communication tools, including the Regreening Africa app, allowed the programme to achieve and track results at scale while at the same time ensuring that solutions were always tailored to specific local contexts and co-developed with local stakeholders.



The programme management unit has worked extensively to **build communication linkages** between the country teams. A managed central WhatsApp group and 8 country WhatsApp groups, monthly newsletters and a strong programme identity had helped to create a 'unified' voice across the diverse partners.



The lessons emerging from Regreening Africa will inform the ongoing efforts of partners to support land restoration in Africa, including through AFR100 and the Great Green Wall initiative, as well as having the potential to catalyse meaningful change in land restoration efforts around the world.



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ABOUT REGREENING AFRICA

Regreening Africa is an ambitious five-year project that seeks to reverse land degradation among 500,000 households, and across 1 million hectares in eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. By incorporating trees into croplands, communal lands and pastoral areas, regreening efforts make it possible to reclaim Africa's degraded landscapes.

As part of a larger global and regional effort to halt and reverse land degradation, the European Union-funded project, Regreening Africa, aims to improve smallholder livelihoods, food security and resilience to climate change in eight African countries. More specifically, it seeks to reverse land degradation over at least one million hectares and benefit 500,000 households, while also catalyzing an even larger scaling effort to restore tens of millions of hectares of degraded land across Africa.

With an initial phase over 2017-2022, this unique research in development is led by World Agroforestry (ICRAF) and implemented by consortium of international non-governmental. The consortium includes World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere and Oxfam, as well as national NGO Sahel Eco. The eight countries that it is active in are Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Senegal, with a light touch in Burkina Faso.

Regreening Africa focuses on the incorporation of trees into many land-use types, including croplands, communal lands and pastoral areas, with complementary soil and water conservation and soil improvement practices. It leverages science and research to track the impact of implementation and enhance concurrent social inclusion and livelihood-enhancing efforts as well as creating a sustainable enabling policy environment for land restoration at national and sub-national levels.

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