

# FACILITATING ADAPTIVE LEARNING AND SCIENCE, PRACTICE, AND POLICY LINKAGES THROUGH INCLUSIVE AND EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING



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 application of the Stakeholder Approach to Risk Informed and Evidence-based Decision-making (SHARED) approach in support of enhancing the scale and effectiveness of restoration interventions in Africa.

**Suggested citation:** Regreening Africa. 2022. Facilitating adaptive learning and science, practice, and policy linkages through inclusive and evidence-based decision-making. Insights series volume 1. World Agroforestry, Nairobi, Kenya.

**Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank the huge expertise and skills of Mieke Bourne and Constance Neely who lead the SHARED component of Regreening Africa. Mawa Karambiri has lead the policy development work and Emilie-Smith Dumont has been instrumental in the Northern Rangeland Initiative in Ghana and both have been superb SHARED facilitators. SHARED events and engagement has been supported by Sabrina Chesterman, Christine Magaju, Gloria Adeyiga, Laura Mukhwana, Ibrahim Toure and Patrick Worms. Lastly we want to thank the incredible consortium partners and expertise from the scientists, NGOs and country teams who have all been a huge part of the SHARED engagement approach.

Photographs by Kelvin Trautman

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## KEY INSIGHTS



Regreening Africa's application of the SHARED approach has supported a **highly inclusive, relationship-centred process** that resulted in the forging of authentic partnerships. The trust and social capital developed through such partnerships is key to effective design and delivery, impact and sustainability of land restoration programmes, and it requires nimble, adaptive support and a significant investment in terms of time, technical skills and dedicated financial support for participatory processes, but yields significant results towards programmatic impact.



**Reflection and learning are key to applying an adaptive management approach.** SHARED designed Joint Reflection and Learning Missions (JRLMs) that have been central to the Regreening Africa's ability to learn and adapt throughout its implementation cycle. Annual JRLMs serve as interactive, evidence-based learning forums between community members, practitioners, scientists and policy actors.



A key strength of the SHARED approach is that it allows for **structured engagement, decision making and prioritisation amongst stakeholders**, while at the same time providing the flexibility and modularity required to adapt to local contexts. Well-structured, consultative processes should be more widely adopted to promote knowledge exchange that

emphasize knowledge exchange and collective action within land restoration efforts.



Strategic stakeholder engagement can be effected through **sequencing and design**, rather than persuasion, using tools such as multi-stakeholder platforms, systems mapping, political economy analysis and strategic consultation.



The use of **facilitated dialogues to engage with evidence and identify priority actions** have been hugely effective as a result of learning within Regreening Africa's member countries. This has included the use of 'evidence walls' to allow for insights and cross-learning across a wide range of stakeholders, including farmers, project implementors and scientists. Information exchange tools and platforms should be designed for accessibility. Regreening Africa has used decision dashboards to provide accessible and actionable evidence, integrating these into national decision-making processes to support land restoration efforts.



**Policy impact should be pursued through inclusive, structured and focused processes.** Regreening Africa used a range of participatory and interactive methods, including outcome mapping, to support local to district dialogues and policy exchange visits, in order to achieve significant policy impact.



# Context

– Why we need inclusive stakeholder engagement and interaction with evidence for land restoration

The urgency of achieving effective and sustainable land restoration in Africa is evident – 83% of people in sub-Saharan Africa are dependent on land for their livelihoods yet two thirds of the land is highly degraded, threatening livelihoods and the food and nutrition security of the poorest, most vulnerable farmers and pastoralists.

Land restoration is a complex process involving a multiplicity of actors. Scientists, development actors, governments, farming communities and local institutions all have a stake in land restoration efforts. The scale and complexity of addressing land degradation requires us to “think big and think inclusive” – **solutions have to be implemented at scale to meaningfully address the daunting extent of land degradation, but to be effective, such solutions must be codesigned and jointly implemented through inclusive processes.**

Local actors, who understand the unique environmental, socio-cultural, economic

and policy context within which restoration efforts must be implemented, need to be better integrated into restoration planning, to achieve better designed programmes, more effective implementation, an enhanced buy-in and sense of ownership that is critical for the long-term success of any restoration effort. Women and youth and their networks possess unique capabilities and should be integrated into programme co-design, planning and implementation as important change agents in their own right.

As an ambitious, multi-country land restoration initiative, Regreening Africa has emphasised participatory programme development and implementation since its inception. Together with this emphasis on inclusivity, Regreening Africa has prioritised evidence-based planning, policy impact and the scaling of interventions for tangible impact at ground level. **The Stakeholder Approach to Risk Informed and Evidence-based Decision-making (SHARED) approach has provided a structured process to facilitate this.**

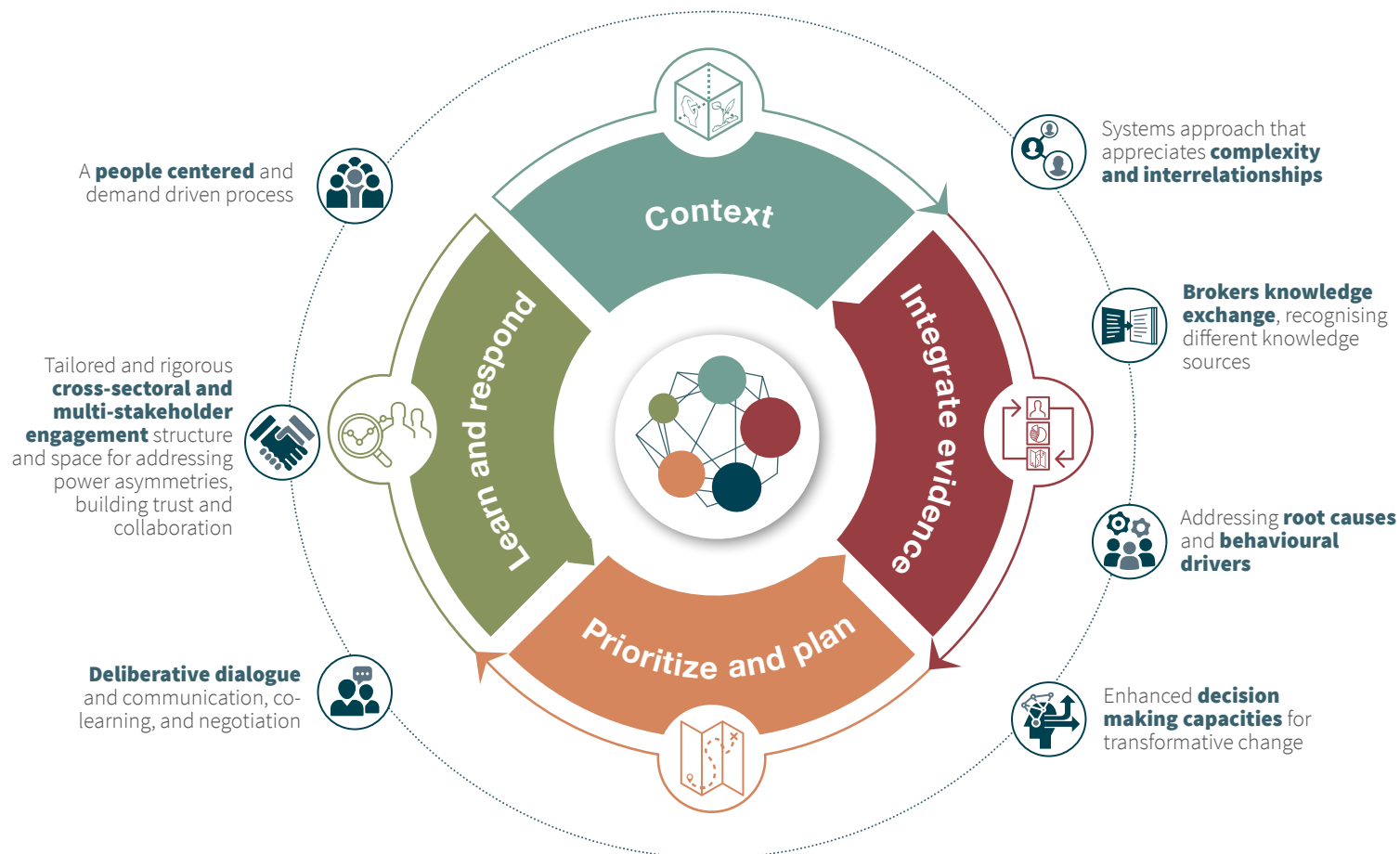


**SHARED is a tailored method for stakeholder engagement**, managing relationships, brokering multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral partnerships, and fostering evidence-and experience- based dialogue, planning, and decision making.

The SHARED Decision Hub is a collective of stakeholder engagement, behavioural specialists and transdisciplinary scientists. The Hub works within Regreening Africa to strengthen the linkages across science, practice and policy and across countries.

The SHARED component focuses on relationships, tailored engagement and breaks down the complexity within the programme to sequence these engagements and access to evidence to technically backstop both the implementation learning and policy entry points.

## SHARED FRAMEWORK



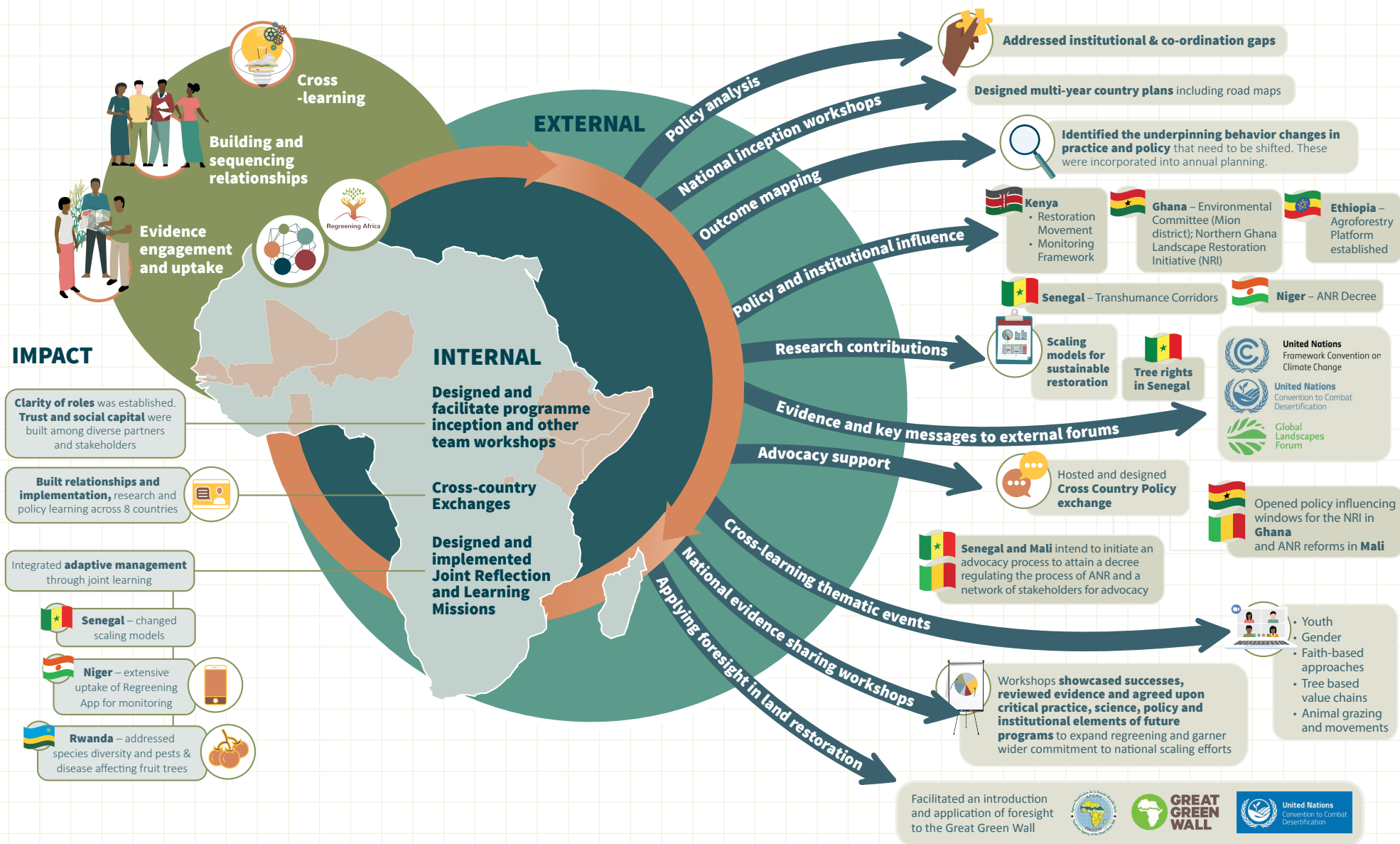
**“THE SHARED APPROACH BROUGHT A CLEAR SET OF PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND A STRUCTURED PROCESS TO PUT THESE IN MOTION.**

**IN REGREENING AFRICA, THE SHARED APPROACH CONTRIBUTED TO POLICY ENGAGEMENT; THIS WAS ALWAYS PART OF THE STARTING PROMISE OF THE PROGRAMME – IT WAS ALWAYS ABOUT INFLUENCING POLICY AND A DIVERSITY OF ACTORS.**

— BERNARD CRABBÉ, HEAD OF THE ENVIRONMENT MAINSTREAMING AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY SECTOR, DIRECTORATE GENERAL INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS (INTPA), EUROPEAN COMMISSION

## SHARED IN REGREENING AFRICA

The figure below illustrates the application of the SHARED approach within the Regreening African programme. The figure depicts work that was implemented more 'internally' across eight programme countries, alongside key work areas that were more 'external' to a wider stakeholder engagement network relevant to Regreening Africa. Lastly, a selection of impacts from this work are showcased.



## INTERNAL WORK (WITHIN REGREENING AFRICA)

# Integrating adaptive management through joint learning

With the complex nature of the programme with multiple development implementors and supporting scientific components working in eight country contexts, a robust engagement process was designed to bring experiences and evidence directly in to adapt annual planning cycles and implementation.



## JOINT REFLECTIVE LEARNING MISSIONS

Joint Reflective Learning Missions (JRLMs) were designed and carried out annually as an **innovative monitoring, reflection, learning and adaptation opportunity** among implementing NGOs, World Agroforestry scientists, community members, government representatives and partners engaged in oversight at the national level.

The reflective missions provided an opportunity to jointly query and learn from one another's lessons, evidence and experience (positive and negative), and build upon project momentum. The JRLMs resulted in:

- revised implementation approaches,
- uptake of new practices,
- identification of policy opportunities, and
- increased collaboration across science, practice and policy.

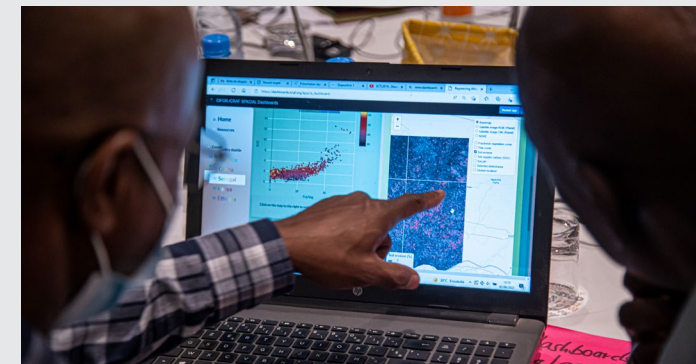
The JRLMs effected integrated adaptive management throughout Regreening Africa. Examples of adaptive changes include:

- thematic cross-country learning and exchange events and visits;

- adjusted scaling model in Senegal and the diversification of tree species in Rwanda;
- greater uptake of Regreening App in programme sites; and
- targeted technical support and emphasis on where additional resources were needed to reach targets.

Cross-Country Thematic Learning Events emerged from the JRLMs, and formed demand-driven virtual dialogues among Regreening Africa colleagues, external experts and stakeholders for sharing experiences, successes, and lessons to inform future efforts. These covered:

- Empowering and mainstreaming youth in land restoration;
- Gender transformative approaches: empowering and mainstreaming women in land restoration;
- Enhancing and expanding tree-based value chains to incentivise land restoration;
- Faith-based approaches to land restoration; and
- Grazing approaches for land restoration and revenue.



## KEY ASPECTS OF JRLMs



### Creating a neutral space.

Provides a space to jointly and honestly reflect on challenges, mistakes, innovations and bring together implementation and scientific findings and perceptions.



### Monitoring that makes a difference.

Allows for the rapid reflection and incorporation of evidence and experience for course correction and adaptive planning processes



### Structuring dialogue for deeper understanding.

Uses facilitation to understand the overall system, unpack themes, trends, behaviours and implications.



### Strengthened relationships and enhanced interaction.





## CATALYZING THE CO-DESIGN OF RESTORATION PLANS AND BUILDING COLLABORATION FOR SCALING IMPACT

SHARED engagement specialists facilitated Regreening Africa's whole-of-project inception workshop and project team meetings, during which clarity of roles were established and trust and social capital were built among partners and stakeholders. Country Inception Events 2018-2019 brought together diverse stakeholders from different sectors, scales, and institutions to review existing restoration efforts and to design roadmaps and provide key inputs to the multi-year country plans to scale up regreening practices. These sessions were used to co-design Regreening Africa's Decision Dashboards and identify the policy engagement opportunities.

In the final year of the programme, country briefs were created, and national workshops were facilitated in Puntland, Somaliland, Senegal, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Mali, Ghana, Niger and Kenya to showcase successes, review evidence and experience, and agree upon critical practice, science, policy and institutional elements of future programmes to expand regreening and garner wider commitment to national scaling efforts.

**REGREENING AFRICA HAS BEEN A MODEL APPROACH FOR FIELD AND ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING AND ADAPTATION – WHAT WE HAVE DONE HAS REALLY WORKED! THE SHARED WORKSHOPS AND FOCUS OF THE APPROACH ON USING EVIDENCE HAS BEEN IMPORTANT FOR ENGAGING WITH THE EU DELEGATIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT. THE SHARED APPROACH HAS ENSURED A LOT OF VOICE FROM FARMERS INTO THE EVIDENCE WE CAN USE.**

– DAVID RODGERS, WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA



**ONE OF SHARED'S INNOVATIONS IS THE USE OF 'EVIDENCE WALLS' TO COLLECTIVELY INTERROGATE AND UNDERSTAND THE KEY FINDINGS TOGETHER.**

## EXTERNAL WORK

# Influencing policy dynamics

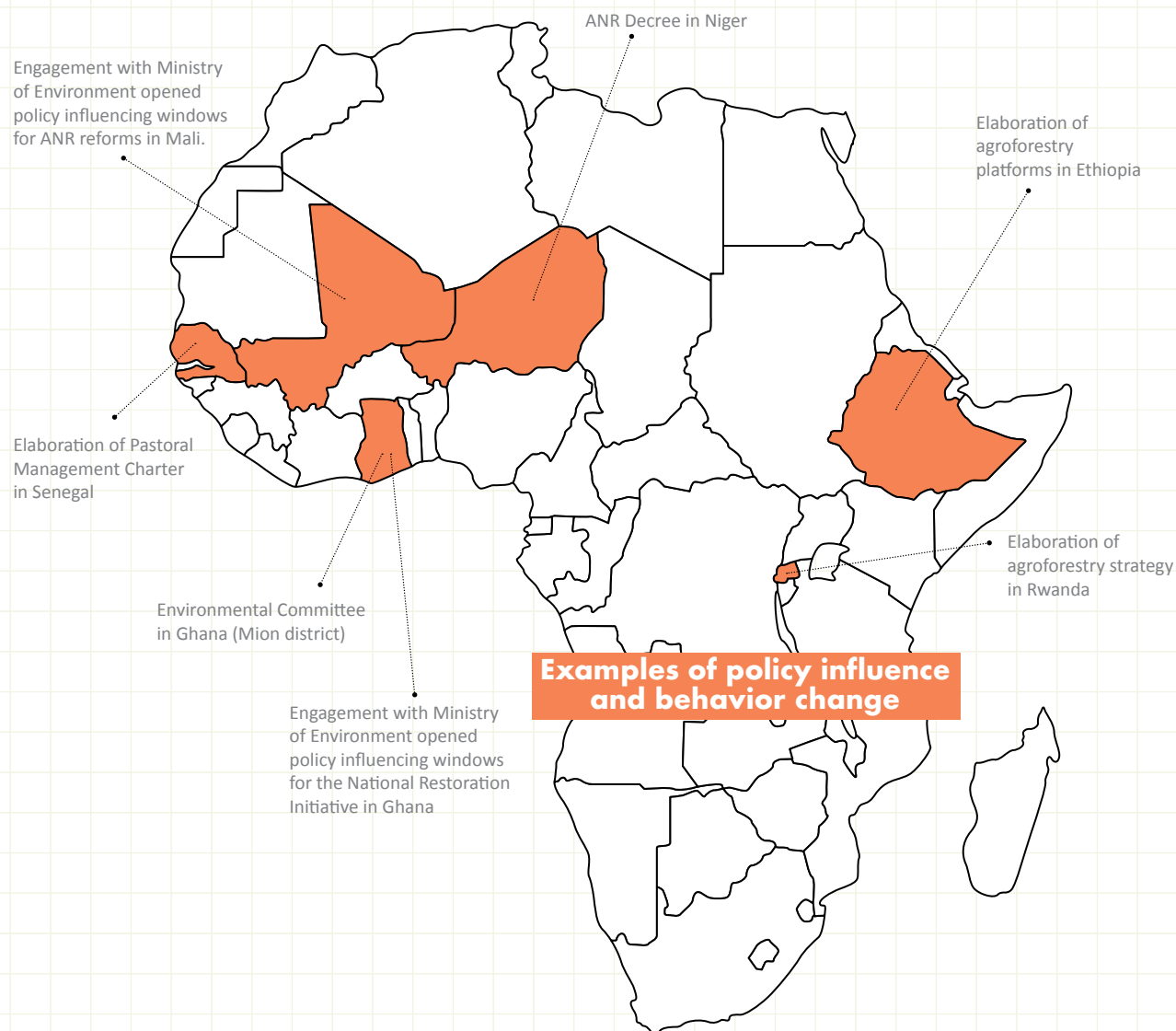


## POLICY ANALYSIS AND OUTCOME MAPPING

During the first year of the project, SHARED undertook a policy analysis across the countries in order to understand enabling and disabling policies for land restoration with a focus on agroforestry. The study found that there was little coordination among institutions, agroforestry was not mainstreamed in strategies and frameworks, there was a prevalence of unsecured land and tree tenure, and there was a critical gap in technical capacity and implementation capacities and investments, agroforestry value chains must be strengthened, and that agroforestry contributes to national and international targets including the multi-lateral environmental agreements.

Based on these findings and the first workshops, outcome mapping was used to identify the underpinning behavior changes in practice and policy that need to be shifted and these were incorporated into annual planning and reflection.

**“THE SHARED APPROACH HIGHLIGHTS HOW PROCESS INNOVATIONS CAN HELP TO SOLVE A CLASSIC PROBLEM WITHIN DEVELOPMENT: HOW TO FACILITATE INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES WHICH INTEGRATE BOTH TECHNICAL AND CONTEXTUAL KNOWLEDGE, ALLOWING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS TO MAKE DECISIONS THAT ARE CONTEXTUALLY APPROPRIATE, TECHNICALLY SOUND AND LOCALLY LEGITIMATE.”<sup>1</sup>**



1. <https://www.sparc-knowledge.org/resources/innovation-governance-integrating-technical-and-contextual-perspectives-address-fragility>



## CASE STUDY: INCLUSIVE POLICY ADVOCACY IN GHANA THROUGH SHARED

The SHARED approach was used to create an **inclusive platform for rigorous multi-stakeholder engagement throughout the development of Ghana's Northern Restoration Initiative (NRI)**, a coordinated effort by a consortium of actors working in northern Ghana on three thematic areas (landscape restoration, community resilience, and food security) to support the design and implementation of policies and strategies that promote sustainability of the restoration interventions in the savannah mosaic landscapes of the region.

Through a series of structured dialogues at district, regional and national levels co-designed and facilitated using SHARED

and led by a team from World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and World Agroforestry, a variety of stakeholders were able to share experiences, develop a common vision and create priority action plans for scaling landscape restoration interventions by NRI in the region.

Building on the successful restoration work in Ghana, the development of the NRI was initiated through district level stakeholder dialogues in Upper East and Northern Regions (Bawku West, Garu & Tempane and Mion). These events fed into a broader cross-regional dialogue held in Tamale, Ghana, to advance the development of a set of recommendations which was then brought for further elaboration and ownership at the SHARED event in November 2022.

Recommendations cover five thematic areas and outcomes related to scaling practices, policy alignment, local environmental governance, livelihood incentives and socioeconomic benefits of land restoration, partnership, and multiple stakeholder platforms, as well as evidence, data and information.

Subsequent SHARED engagements of the multistakeholder platform for the NRI have been convened at district and national level, to review evidence, open policy influencing windows and design advocacy strategies for the NRI in Ghana.







## CROSS-COUNTRY ADVOCACY EXCHANGE

Building upon a study in Senegal to assess the perceptions of foresters, animators (extension staff), and farmers on the burdensomeness ('les lourdeurs administratives') of tree use procedures, a cross-country exchange took place in Niger in September of 2022, bringing together restoration implementation and policy actors from Senegal and Mali to review evidence and advance advocacy strategies for policies that enable FMNR/ANR, agroforestry and other land restoration practices pertinent to the region.

Participants recognised the importance of high-level political will for sustained change. Colleagues from Senegal and Mali intend to initiate an advocacy process to attain a decree regulating the use of trees grown through natural regeneration and a network of stakeholders for advocacy will be elaborated including other Sahelian countries.

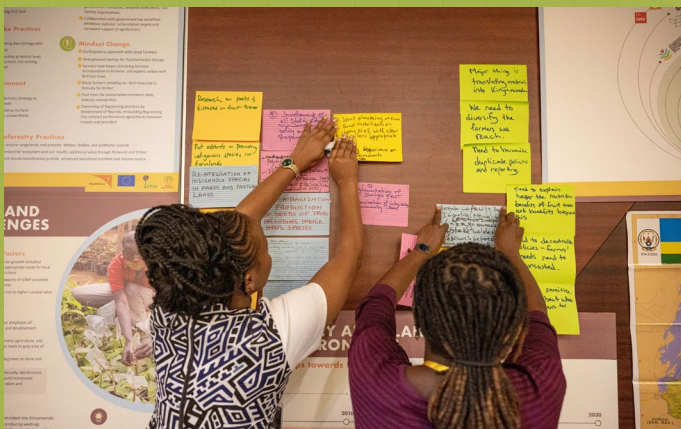
Behaviour changes included shifts in decision makers' perception of FMNR reforms in their country (Senegal and Mali) and their engagement to advocate for an FMNR decree in their country.

**"NGOS HAVE OUR OWN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHODS BUT WE DON'T HAVE STRUCTURED APPROACHES TO MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES AND NOT IN THE SAME WAY AS SHARED THAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED."**

**SHARED ENSURED FREQUENT INTERACTION ACROSS ALL STAKEHOLDERS AND BUILDING ON EVIDENCE. THROUGH REGREENING AFRICA CRS HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED BY THE SHARED APPROACH, AND HAVE NOW USED IT IN SEVERAL OF OUR OWN PROGRAMMES TO DESIGN AND EXECUTE STRUCTURED AND EVIDENCE-BASED ENGAGEMENT."**

— OLAF WESTERMAN, SENIOR TECHNICAL ADVISOR ON CLIMATE CHANGE, AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOODS, CRS





## KEY LESSONS

Multiple stakeholders have highlighted the SHARED approach as one of the key strengths of the Regreening Africa programme, particularly its ability to provide a balance between structure and flexibility in multi-stakeholder deliberations, to support context-specific interventions and adaptive management and to ensure focused, actionable outcomes.

Important lessons from the implementation of the SHARED approach in Regreening Africa include:



By influencing stakeholders' mental models, preferences or understanding of payoffs through enabling access to evidence or deliberation, you can **shift the zone of political possibility**.



**The SHARED approach promotes shared understanding and trust between stakeholders** in the context of a large and complex land restoration programme, thereby supporting authentic partnership. However, relationship building and developing trust is not a once-off event but an ongoing investment throughout a programme's



inception and implementation. Sustainable and authentic engagement and relationship building requires significant time, technical and financial resources.

**The development of stakeholder relationships is central to the joint problem solving, strategizing, and reflection** necessary for a programme to achieve meaningful impact at scale. This speaks to the research-in-development paradigm, which emphasises collaboration and knowledge integration from a variety of sources by bringing together multiple partners to contribute their knowledge and expertise to achieving programme goals.



**Appropriate planning and adequate budget allocation to support engagement and relationship building** throughout a programme's design and implementation is an often-overlooked aspect in land restoration initiatives. The SHARED approach has shown huge impact through a small team. Key to scaling the impact in

future Regreening Africa work would be to train in-country facilitators and SHARED advocates who can use the key principles and foundations to design context relevant engagement processes based on evidence.

**“THE SHARED APPROACH IN REGREENING AFRICA HIGHLIGHTED HOW IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AMONGST ORGANISATIONS IS. WE MAY COME INTO A PROGRAMME ANTAGONISTIC ABOUT ROLES, BUT WE HAVE MOVED TO MUTUAL ENRICHMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL. THIS NEEDS TO BE THE ESSENCE OF RUNNING PROGRAMMES AND A BIG SHIFT TOWARDS DOING DEVELOPMENT DIFFERENTLY. BUILDING TRUST AND HONESTY IN THE RELATIONSHIPS AND SEEDING THIS SOCIAL CAPITAL TO INFORM AND PROVIDE MUCH BIGGER IMPACT THAN A PROJECT TIMELINE.”**

— RAVI PRABHU, DIRECTOR GENERAL WORLD AGROFORESTRY (ICRAF)

## 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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