

CONFERENCE REPORT

Social, Economic And Institutional Aspects Of Land And Ecosystem Restoration

AZIM PREMJI UNIVERSITY, BANGALORE, INDIA
APRIL 27-29, 2023

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1. Background

Land is the platform on which more than 99 % of all humans live and provides for majority of the food and other needs. Seventy five percent of all global landmass has been modified by humanity and 25 % have lost its productivity. Restoration of land productivity is, therefore, a global concern.

The G20 Members which met in Riyadh in 2020 came out with Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats with a global ambition of achieving 50% reduction in degraded land. This initiative is currently being implemented with an initiative coordination office in Bonn at the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

The Azim Premji University (Bangalore), Indian Institute of Forest Management (Bhopal) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification, jointly organized an international conference on the Social, Economic and Institutional Aspects of Land and Ecosystem Restoration. The event was organized at the Azim Premji University Campus in Bangalore, Karnataka. Experts and practitioners from around the world joined the 3-day event to deliberate on the topic.

The objectives of the conference were as follows:

1. To discuss and document the social, economic and institutional factors/conditions which enable land and ecosystem restoration.
2. To understand the role of non-governmental actors, including the private sector in restoration and the challenges.
3. To build a network of academics and practitioners to promote land and ecosystem restoration globally.

2. Overview

The conference addressed the social, economic, and institutional aspects of land and ecosystem restoration, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities in restoring degraded ecosystems, enhancing the livelihoods of local communities, and achieving sustainable development goals. Prior to the event, participants were divided into five sub-themes.

The five sub-themes of the conference are:

1. Restoration and the Social Context;
2. Challenges in Financing Restoration;
3. Restoration as a Business;
4. Working with Communities and People.
5. The use of government schemes such as NREGA for land restoration

The event was designed to bring together scholars, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from around the world to discuss and exchange ideas on the critical topic of land and ecosystem restoration. This face-to-face event is a culmination of a series of online consultations and preparation of discussion notes. The discussion notes around these sub-themes are attached in the annexure.

3. Meeting Minutes

Day 1: Opening Remarks

Dr. Muralee Thummarukudy, Director of the G20 Global Land Initiative at the UNCCD, emphasized the importance of restoring degraded ecosystems for a sustainable future. He expressed excitement about collaborating with the IIFM, Azim Premji University, and MoEFCC to host this significant conference, which provided a platform to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices on land and ecosystem restoration.

Dr. K. Ravichandran, Director of IIFM, expressed honor in hosting the international conference and highlighted the importance of collaborations and partnerships between institutions and individuals to share critical and innovative ideas on land restoration.

Mr. Manoj P. V, COO of Azim Premji University, underscored the relevance of discussions on the social, economic, and institutional aspects of land and ecosystem restoration for achieving sustainable development goals.

The meeting agenda was introduced by Sunayana Ganguly, Assistant Professor at Azim Premji University, who provided an overview of the progress made within the five sub-themes, including the discussion papers and webinars. Participants then introduced themselves, and a detailed list of attendees and their biographies can be found in Annex 1.



Snippets from the Opening Session

Technical Session 1

The participants were divided into five working groups corresponding to the sub-themes. The coordinators of each group facilitated parallel sessions, discussing the preliminary versions of their respective discussion papers.

These parallel sessions were be facilitated by the coordinators of these working groups.

Session 1 A: Restoration as a Business (Muralee Thummarukudy, Sunayana Ganguly)

Session 1 B: Restoration and the Social Context (Alisher Mirzabaev, Nicole Harari)

Session 1 C: Financing Restoration (Elke Mannigel, Karen Sudmeier)

Session 1 D: Restoration: Working with Communities (Alok Bang, Jayanti Mukherjee)

Session 1 E (Supplimentary Session): Aligning Development Policies for Green Jobs and Land and Ecosystem Restoration - with a focus on MGNREGA and other Government Schemes (Anjor Bhaskar)

During the parallel sessions, the coordinators discussed the preliminary version of their respective discussion papers. They also used this opportunity to identify challenges and overlaps with other sub-themes. As day one came to a close, the coordinators, along with the respective participants, finalised the first draft of the final discussion paper.



The coordinators facilitating a brainstorming session to finalise the discussion papers.

Day 2: Technical Session 2

On day 2 of the conference, there were two parallel sessions between the four working groups to identify various cross-cutting issues between the sub-themes. The sessions were split as:

Session 2 A: Discussions between participants of 'Restoration and the Social Context' and 'Working with Communities' working groups. This session was facilitated by Alisher Mirzabaev and Jayanti Mukherjee.

Session 2 B: Discussions between participants of 'Financing Restoration' and 'Restoration as a Business' working groups. This session was be facilitated by Karen Sudmeier and Sunayana Ganguly.

Field visit to Navadarshanam

Post the discussions on day 2, the participants visited Navadarshanam in Tamil Nadu, around 50 km from Bangalore. This community was founded in 1990 and occupies 115 acres of land and adjoins a forest. The visit presented an opportunity for the participants to learn from this community about different facets of sustainable living, that supports and sustains local livelihoods. The participants also spoke to the community members about eco restoration and wilderness preservation, alternative energy, sustainable organic farming, water harvesting, health, and healing.



The participants at Navadarshanam in Tamil Nadu

Day 3: Technical Session 3

On the final day of the conference, coordinators of the five sub-themes presented the groups key observations and findings. During this session, the five groups identified and discussed the cross-cutting issues between all the sub-themes. Once the presentation concluded, the participants were given the floor to further express the perspectives and observations. This technical session was facilitated by Dr Ravichandran (IIFM).

Concluding Remarks

Prof Santhakumar V, Azim Premji University, closed the three-day conference, commending the engagement of all participants and the partner institutions' support. Following this, he also spoke about the role of the G 20 Land Initiative and possible future actions by the participants as a group or sub-groups.

With over 80 participants, the conference provided an exceptional opportunity for meaningful discussions, sharing experiences and best practices, and exploring new approaches and solutions to the complex challenges associated with the restoration of land, habitats, and ecosystems.

4. Outcomes and Way Forward

The outcomes of the conference and the processes that led to that are as follows:

1. A comprehensive global literature review was conducted to identify gaps in understanding the social, economic, and institutional aspects of land restoration.
2. Building upon the insights from the literature review, an article advocating for a national systems approach to land restoration was developed and communicated to a broader range of stakeholders.
3. Researchers and practitioners actively engaged in land restoration were contacted to collaborate in group discussions focused on various sub-themes: (a) Restoration and the social context, (b) Restoration: Working with Communities, (c) Financing Restoration: Challenges, (d) Restoration as a Business: Opportunities and Challenges, and (e) Utilizing government schemes such as the Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India for land restoration.
4. Each group produced a discussion paper based on a series of webinars and in-person discussions held during the conference. These papers will be edited and published on the website of the G20 Global Land Initiative.
5. A significant outcome of the conference was the establishment of a platform comprising academics, practitioners, administrators, and individuals from private businesses involved in land restoration, particularly in India. There are plans for continued collaboration and collective thinking beyond the conference.
5. Key messages resulting from the conference and preceding discussions include:
 - The necessity of adopting a systems approach to understand the specific social contexts that enable land restoration. Factors such as private property rights may facilitate restoration in certain contexts but not in others, depending on the presence or absence of other enabling or disabling factors.
 - Despite the growth of funding mechanisms and increased availability of financial resources for land restoration, individuals and organizations in developing countries face challenges in accessing these resources. Simplification of procedures, standardization of expected outcomes, and capacity building of end-users are needed to ensure that resources reach restoration projects at scale.
 - Land restoration must address power imbalances and issues of inequality to garner support from local communities. These inequalities encompass gender disparities, discrepancies between those reliant on forests or land for sustenance and others, disparities between officials in positions of power and ordinary people, and the divide between resourceful private companies and others.

- There is an interconnectedness between human development and incentives for land restoration, although this relationship may not be singular or unidirectional. Strategies for land restoration should be aligned with efforts to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals.
- While restoration is viewed as a business opportunity, scaling up small enterprises faces significant challenges. Building broader markets for their products requires collective action, and potential solutions to these challenges were identified during the conference discussions.

To ensure sustained collaboration and partnerships among participants within the subgroups, the following activities are suggested as follow-up actions:

- Finalize and publish all discussion papers on the GLI website.
- Propose the next conference on the policy aspects of land restoration to be held in Brazil in early 2024 and begin discussions with partners.
- Organize a bi-annual academic conference on the latest research on land restoration, with the first conference potentially taking place in Bonn, Germany, in the second half of 2024. This collaboration between the G20 Global Land Initiative and the University of Bonn could result in the publication of an edited volume containing the conference deliberations.
- Document the challenges and advocate for policy changes and other actions needed in India to promote land restoration in non-forest lands.

5. Annexure

5.1 Concept Note

Social, Economic and Institutional Aspects of Land and Ecosystem Restoration - A Conference of Academics and Practitioners

Background

Land is the platform on which more than 99 % of all humans live and provides for the majority of the food and other needs. Seventy five percent of all global landmass has been modified by humanity and 25 % have lost its productivity. Restoration of land productivity is, therefore, a global concern.

The G20 Members which met in Riyadh in 2020 came out with the Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats with a global ambition of achieving 50% reduction in degraded land. This initiative is currently being implemented with an initiative coordination office in Bonn at the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

The Azim Premji University (Bangalore), Indian Institute of Forest Management (Bhopal) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification, is jointly planning to organize an international academic seminar/conference on the Social, Economic and Institutional Aspects of Land and Ecosystem Restoration. The event will be organised at the Azim Premji University Campus in Bangalore, Karnataka. Experts and practitioners from around the world will join the 3-day event to deliberate on the topic. This concept note highlights the key features and details of the planned event.

Objectives

1. To discuss and document the social, economic and institutional factors/conditions which enable land and ecosystem restoration.
2. To understand the role of non-governmental actors, including the private sector in restoration and the challenges.
3. To build a network of academics and practitioners to promote land and ecosystem restoration globally.

Expected Outcomes of the Conference

1. A review of literature and existing practices to understand what enables land and ecosystem restoration.
2. A series of policy/advocacy briefs under different themes based on the discussions during the conference. These briefs can be used for advocacy by the G20 Global Land Initiative
3. A collaboration plan and platform for collaborative research and experience sharing on the social, economic, and institutional aspects of land and habitat restoration.

Partners

- Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India
- G 20 Global Land Initiative, UNCCD
- Azim Premji University
- Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), Bhopal

Total number of participants

From India: 50

Other countries & international organisations: 23

Dates and Venue: 27-29 April, 2023, Azim Premji University, Bangalore. (3 days)

Five Sub-themes of the Main Theme:

1. Restoration and the Social Context
2. Challenges in Financing Restoration
3. Restoration as a Business
4. Restoration: Working with Communities and People
5. There is a side event to discuss the role of the Rural Employment Guarantee Program and other governmental schemes in land restoration.

Discussion note around which these sub-themes emerged is attached here: <https://practiceconnect.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/socioeconomic-conditions-that-enable-restoration-of-land-and-ecosystems/>

5.2 Agenda

DAY 1: THURSDAY, 27TH APRIL 2023

Time	Activity
9:00 AM	Arrivals, registration & coffee
9:30 AM	Opening Plenary Session: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening Remarks, Azim Premji University (APU) • Opening Remarks, Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) • Opening Remarks, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) • Inaugural Address, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) • Setting the Scene, Sunayana Ganguly (APU) • Vote of Thanks, Apoorva Bose (UNCCD)
10:30 AM	Coffee Break
11:00 AM	Technical Session 1 Participants of the conference will be split into four working groups: (a) Financing Restoration; (b) Restoration as a Business; (c) Restoration and the Social Context; (d) Working with Communities. There will also be a supplementary one-day session on (e) Aligning Development Policies for Green Jobs and Land and Ecosystem Restoration - with a focus on MGNREGA and other Government Schemes. These parallel sessions will be facilitated by the coordinators of the working groups. Session 1 A: Restoration as a Business (Muralee Thummarukudy, Sunayana Ganguly) Session 1 B: Restoration and the Social Context (Alisher Mirzabaev, Nicole Harari) Session 1 C: Financing Restoration (Elke Mannigel, Helen Ding, Karen Sudmeier) Session 1 D: Restoration: Working with Communities (Alok Bang, Jayanti Mukherjee) Session 1 E (Supplementary Session): Aligning Development Policies for Green Jobs and Land and Ecosystem Restoration - with a focus on MGNREGA and other Government Schemes (Anjor Bhaskar)
1:00 PM	Lunch
2:00 PM	Technical Session 1: Continued
3:45 PM	Tea & coffee break
4:00 PM	Technical Session 1: Continued
4:45 PM	Open discussion on the Technical Session
5:00 PM	End of day 1
5:45 PM	Cultural Programme followed by dinner

DAY 2: FRIDAY, 28TH APRIL 2023

Time	Activity
9:00 AM	Arrivals, tea & coffee
9:30 AM	Technical Session 2 <i>There will be two parallel sessions between the four working groups to identify various cross-cutting issues between the sub-themes.</i> Session 2 A: Discussions between participants of 'Restoration and the Social Context' and 'Working with Communities' working groups. This session will be facilitated by Alisher Mirzabaev and Jayanti Mukherjee Session 2 B: Discussions between participants of 'Financing Restoration' and 'Restoration as a Business' working groups. This session will be facilitated by Karen Sudmeier and Muralee Thummarukudy
1:00 PM	Lunch
2:00 PM	Field visit to Navadarshanam, Tamil Nadu
7:00 PM	End of Day 2: Participants return from the field visit

Time	Activity
9:00 AM	Arrivals, tea & coffee
9:30 AM	Technical Session 3 This session will be facilitated by Dr Ravichandran, IIFM <i>Participants of the conference will meet to identify and discuss the cross-cutting issues between all four sub-themes: (a) Restoration and the Social Context; (b) Restoration as a Business; (c) Financing Restoration; (d) Working with Communities.</i>
11:30 AM	Technical Session 4 This session will be facilitated by Dr Muralee Thummarukudy, UNCCD <i>Thinking About Global Actions and the role of G 20 Land Initiative</i>
1:30 PM	Lunch break
2:30 PM	Closing comments, reflections and way forward This session will be facilitated by Jayanti Mukherjee, APU
3:30 PM	The way forward and closing remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing Remarks, Azim Premji University (APU) • Closing Remarks, Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) • Closing Remarks, UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) • Closing Address, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) • Vote of Thanks
4:15 PM	End of retreat

5.3 Biographies of the participants

The biographies of all the participants can be accessed here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bWVb45it4kztXDKGwRWz-H1KwUDo5pwf2fp42EZ6lcM/edit?usp=sharing>

5.4 Discussion Notes

The discussion notes of the five sub-themes can be accessed here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dICpqwsyVS8gTvENT1NENsfjD7ygXC-o?usp=sharing>

