Briefing

iied   African Model Forests Network AMFN

Policy pointers

Achieving the SDGs in Africa requires an integrated approach to landscape planning, based on inclusive green growth strategies that address poverty and inequality and take full advantage of the untapped wealth of ecosystems.

African countries have an opportunity to 'leapfrog' to low carbon, socially just development, through social enterprise and innovation starting at the local level.

Collaborative local, national, and regional governance is essential for successful approaches to landscape transformation, as illustrated by the African Model Forest Network and other integrated landscape initiatives.

National policy frameworks, and the actions of development partners, must support the necessary investment, provide incentives and encourage regional coalitions and innovation.

A whole-landscape approach to green development in Africa

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set a new agenda for development, with the ambitious aim of eradicating extreme poverty within the next 15 years while also recognising environmental limits. This new agenda exposes the shortfalls of current approaches and demands a new approach to economic development. African countries are uniquely placed to embrace the new agenda, given adequate strategic support. Drawing on the experience of the African Model Forest Network, this briefing suggests that to be effective, development policy must work at multiple levels, be crosscutting, and engage the people affected. It explores how a socially integrated approach to landscape policy can effectively contribute towards meeting the SDGs, and achieving sustainable development in Africa.

For African nations, and many of the world's Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the SDGs (endorsed by the UN in September 2015) represent a particular opportunity. While some progress was made under the Millennium Development Goals, African countries recognise that they need to urgently tackle the growing problems of environmental degradation, poverty and inequality. The SDGs provide the roadmap for change, with the new agenda requiring a fresh approach — the transformation of the development model.

African countries are uniquely able to benefit from such a transformation. Africa as a whole has been experiencing steady economic growth for the last 15 years, and many countries aim to 'catch-up' to the rest of the world in the next 20–30 years. But their 'less developed' status means they are not yet locked-in to a high carbon, resource-intensive development model.

This provides African countries with a clear opportunity to transform the way they develop,

by shifting to low carbon, ecologically intensive economies, and by benefiting from new technologies and knowledge. African countries will be able to 'leapfrog' to a more sustainable development pathway, bypassing the carbon-intensive approach to economic development that has dominated recent history.

But for such a shift to succeed, it must be focused on the realities of African livelihoods and strive to transform farming, forest and natural resource value chains. Structural transformation, the real path to eliminating massive poverty from African landscapes, must be the central goal. A new approach must create a collaborative, inclusive economy, based on business solutions that work for communities, for conservation and the climate at a local level.

This briefing draws on a 'landscape approach' (an integrated multi-sector approach to development planning and environmental management covering a particular area/ecosystem), as seen in the 'model forests'

developed in Africa and elsewhere (see Box 1), to look at how such a transformation might be achieved, focusing at the local level.

A landscape approach recognises that livelihoods and ecosystems are inter-connected

Taking a landscape approach

A landscape approach is valuable because it recognises that livelihoods and ecosystems are inter-connected: a landscape may include forest, agriculture and other sectors that provide jobs and income for the local population. With this cross-sectoral perspective, a landscape-wide approach can avoid the trade-offs and conflicts that tend to occur with single-sector approaches — whether dominated by the state, by business or by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It acknowledges the connections and takes an innovative approach to governing these sectors, based on the principles of inclusive, collaborative resource governance.

For these reasons, there is growing interest in the potential for using these approaches to support the inter-related objectives of climate resilience, agricultural production, ecosystem services and rural livelihoods. This will mean investing in more productive and more 'value added' rural enterprises. Africa spends US$35 billion a year on food imports.[1] It is the only region globally not to make the most of its forest income by processing higher value goods.[2] There is great potential for increasing income levels by investing in agricultural and forest value chains to produce food and beverages, natural additives, cosmetics, nutraceuticals, pharmaceuticals and biofertilisers, for instance.

To date, 78 different landscape approaches have been identified,[3] but some key features are common. Crucially, all the approaches recognise the importance of local context — 'one-size fits all' cannot be applied — and all address both social and environmental needs.

At a conference on Landscapes, People, Food and Nature in Nairobi, Kenya in July 2014,[4] more than a hundred practitioners of the landscape approach in Africa shared their experiences and proposed a way forward in accordance with the post-2015 agenda. They adopted the African Landscape Action Plan, which positions landscape-scale multi-stakeholder governance as crucial, alongside the capacity to manage institutional complexity, and adaptive, collaborative management systems specifically oriented towards learning. The plan was endorsed by the African Union as part of the Business framework of TerrAfrica, the Sustainable Land and Water Management partnership set up by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The 'model forest' experience

Model forests combine place with a partnership and a process. The place is a landscape or ecosystem area; the partnership is voluntary and inclusive, from national policymakers to local farmers; and the process is a journey of dialogue, experimentation, and innovation designed to understand what 'sustainability' means within a given landscape and then to use the partnership to work toward it.[5]

Counterintuitively, model forests are not just about forests but can include all forms of land use and activities within a large area (such as agriculture, fisheries, mining, water, energy, and even topics related to the wellbeing of the individuals who live within that area, including health and education). Even cities can be part of a model forest. By encompassing all aspects of activity within an area, the aim is to make sustainable development a reality through collaboration, adaptation, social learning and innovation. Each model forest is unique but all share a common framework, underpinned by six core principles: partnerships, landscapes, sustainability, governance, a programme of activities, and networking.[6]

While there have been previous attempts to instigate a landscape approach, many have struggled to develop a delivery model that effectively brings all the actors together; often led by NGOs or local authorities, it is a challenge to mesh different agendas. With 23 years of experience in developing a method to overcome this, the International Model Forest Network

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Box 1. History of the 'model forests'

Model forests were originally developed in Canada as part of an initiative to introduce a more sustainable approach to the country's forest programme under the government's Green Plan. This involved changing attitudes as well as practice, bringing together the concepts of landscapes, partnerships and sustainability.

The approach initially spread through 'twinning' arrangements, with a model forests in Canada linking up with partners in Mexico and Russia. The International Model Forest Network was established in 1994, with regional networks developing in Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Baltic Sea.[7] Together these networks have developed model forests across more than 30 countries, covering more than 100 million hectares.[8]

The African Model Forest Network (AMFN) is a not-for-profit pan-African organisation, based in Cameroon. It has, with the Mediterranean Network, supported the development of 12 model forests across eight African countries, including Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Morocco.

brings together different stakeholders, making it possible to take a joined-up approach to governance across the whole landscape.

This effectively creates a collaborative platform, which becomes a vehicle for change — with local actors in the driving seat, alongside the traditional drivers of investment and innovation, the state and the private sector. This platform has the legitimacy and the power to bring together disparate players and creates a more inclusive form of governance.

Three basic principles appear to be key to making the approach work:

1. The partnership is completely voluntary

2. Partners come to the table with all their entitlements, formal and informal rights and claims intact, and

3. The partnership is not rights-based, but based on partners' interests (although the partnership may address the issue of rights through a jointly developed consensual programme of work).

Since 1992, these principles have informed landscape-wide approaches in 70 large landscapes in more than 30 countries, bringing together representatives from the public and private sectors, civil society, knowledge organisations, as well as communities and indigenous people. Model forests are not the only way of governing landscapes, but they are one way that can facilitate a transformational approach, creating the opportunity for better outcomes.

Drawing on the experience of model forests in Africa (see a case study from Cameroon in Box 2), the African Model Forest Network (AMFN) has devised the 'One Programme', which can be used as a tool to help coordinate activities and support a collaborative learning process. Activities can range from mentoring programmes, technical or financial business support, through to direct investments in various products, such as symbiotic biofertilisers, or food and beverages from wild-harvested and domesticated African plants.

Landscape approaches have faced criticism because they cannot be tightly defined, with suggestions that there is no clear process. Yet experience suggests that what could appear to be 'muddling through' is a consequence of taking a systemic approach to landscape governance, the result of applying the six core principles and developing a partnership to drive the process. As a result each model forest is unique: it applies the six unifying principles to its own conditions. The model forest concept is potent with the flexibility and adaptive properties of an open system.

Box 2. Case study: the African model forests and the Cameroon pilots

Cameroon became the first African Country to adopt the Model Forest landscape concept in 2005 when it recognised the pilot Campo Ma'an and Dja et Mpomo Model Forests. Funding from Canada saw the Network expand between 2010–14. Overall, 20 African countries have shown an interest, with eight implementing the concept in Central and North Africa.

In each region, this started with high-level government support and big landscape conventions organised by alliances including local governments, NGOs, communities, indigenous people, and private interests. These convening processes are valuable as they establish common visions, strategic plans and the governance structures which form the basis of each model forest's identity. But there must also be job creation through innovative enterprises and economic systems to achieve sustainability. Good landscape governance and economic activity are necessary 'social accelerators' for rural transformation.

The Cameroon pilots had their share of setbacks. But they were able, with network support, to experiment with mobile rural business training, female-run businesses based on wild African plants, and the production of high-value pens from waste exotic wood.

In 2013, they attracted a US$2 million investment project, with stringent 13-month delivery conditions attached. Using the AMFN economic matrix and innovative delivery systems based on farm schools, local expert facilitators, and extension partnerships with state agencies, the pilots were able to make real impacts, delivering the project on time.

Some 2,000 model forest farmers quickly adopted innovations, such as mycorrhizal biofertilisers and line planting to enhance their yields. Several hundred more, mostly women, took up moringa olifeira, alanblackia and other promising wild species to set up profitable enterprises. These seeds of transformation should be reflected upon for focused investments in resilient African landscapes.

African lessons for sustainable development

It is by successfully bringing together a multi-stakeholder platform that Model Forests create the potential for a more sustainable approach to development — as envisioned in the SDGs. This multi-stakeholder platform is the basis for developing a common vision and programme for the landscape. But this is just the starting point: to take root properly in African contexts, governance concepts must bring about change and prosperity and, so, have to be grounded in the real economy.

This quest for change and prosperity has driven AMFN's 'Africa Living Land' (ALL) initiative — a social business umbrella for model forests' green products. Many such social enterprises are blossoming across Africa, alongside private endeavours. This is the kernel of an alternative growth model that will allow local people to benefit from ecological intensification and ecological revolution in the African economy.

Landscape platforms and networks are ideal vehicles for advancing this emergent social business strategy. In Africa, model forests function in the same way as social infrastructure — with resilience, reactivity and the ability to be sustained with or without external funding, as well as the capacity to respond quickly and consistently to opportunities. In this way, classic aid projects can become the seeds for long-term investments in local value chains and social enterprises. Partners find ways to work through collaborative challenges and conflicts, resource crunches and crises to find solutions to their collective needs. There may be extraordinary successes and inspiring stories along the way, or there may be failure. It is this process of looking for solutions through uncertainty, contingency and complexity that allows new ways of doing things to be found. With time and engagement, as more people become involved in these collaborative initiatives, the process gains in social identity, depth, width, as well as integrative and transformative power.

New critical connections fostered by landscape approaches make a system shift in environmental governance and the green transformation of the local economy plausible outcomes. Facilitating and accelerating this system shift under the SDGs is within reach of African and the LDCs.

But for such a shift to occur, support and investment is needed. Policymakers must recognise the benefits and provide incentives for landscape approaches, as well as facilitating the kind of collaboration between different bodies that such a process requires. Only then will it be possible to realise the potential for model forests and African landscape initiatives to drive a new kind of economic relationship, providing a sustainable economy that recognises the value of natural resources and supports the smallholders who rely on them.

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Notes

[1] Africa Progress Report (2014) Grain, Fish, Money: Financing Africa's Green and Blue Revolutions. Africa Progress Panel, Geneva. / [2] Scherr, SJ and S Shames (2012) What we call "Landscapes for Food, People and Nature". http://peoplefoodandnature.org/blog/terminology / [3] See www.peoplefoodandnature.org / [4] See www.peoplefoodandnature.org/event/landscapes-for-people-food-and-nature-in-africa / [5] African Model Forest Network (2013) A presentation note / [6] African Model Forest Network (2013) A presentation note / [7] Bonnell et al, 2012, From Rio to Rwanda: Impacts of the IMFN over the past 20 years, The Forestry Chronicle, 888, 3, pp245-254. / [8] African Model Forest Network (2013) A presentation note

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