

Issue Paper



# COMMUNITY FORESTRY AND FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION: ATTRACTING SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENTS FOR RESTORING DEGRADED LAND IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



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## Key messages

The Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have set clear targets to restore large areas of degraded land within their borders. Achieving these will require significant commitments, including financial investments. Securing these commitments, however faces numerous challenges, including:

- Different **motivations** of the different stakeholders regarding forest restoration, this includes in the objectives and perceived benefits of forest restoration, reflecting the challenges by stakeholders, particularly government offices, to take a landscape approach to land-use management.
- Lack of **enabling environment** for sustainable investments, particularly regarding legislation.
- **Capacity gaps and limited resources** to approach restoration in a strategic manner including:
  - lack of quality data to facilitate communication between (and within) different government agencies and the private sector.
  - Gaps in the capacity of government offices and rural communities to attract sustainable investments, including for adopting a landscape approach to restoration.

In order to overcome these barriers to the sustainable restoration of the large areas of degraded land, it is important to adhere to the principles of forest landscape restoration (FLR). These include a focus on landscape, the restoring of its functionality, and the effective engagement of local stakeholders, in particular ensuring local communities are put at the heart of any restoration initiative.

By emphasizing a landscape approach and an inclusive participatory process, governments can develop restoration programmes that will attract greater investments, as well as ensuring that local communities benefit equally and adequately. In addition, community forestry (CF) can be an effective vehicle to mainstream FLR: The many assets CF brings to the table include improved governance and tenure, increased carbon stocks through improved forest landscape management, a platform for achieving restoration targets, and livelihood improvement. Furthermore, CF is also valuable to attracting sustainable investments, especially considering its risk management attributes. More, however, needs to be done to ensure that CF can deliver for sustainably managed landscapes, including for successful FLR.

## Background

The degradation of land and forests has many economic, environmental and social consequences. It threatens the livelihoods of millions of forest-dependent people, reduces land productivity that could support economic development, causes economic loss from aggregated natural disasters, and exacerbates social instability.

There are numerous global commitments to address land and forest degradation:

- The Bonn Challenge calls for restoring at least 150 million hectares of degraded land by 2020, and 350 million hectares of forest by 2030.
- The Aichi Biodiversity Targets includes Target 15, a commitment to restore at least 15 percent of degraded ecosystems by 2020.
- The New York Declaration on Forests aims for the restoration of 350 million hectares by 2030.
- Target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) looks to achieve land degradation neutrality by 2030.

Many countries in Southeast Asia have ambitious forest cover restoration targets (Table 1). Meeting these commitments would bring benefits at the landscape level <sup>1</sup>, as well as national and global scales. It would support poverty reduction, economic development, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. However, if not done well, the process of achieving these targets may also have negative consequences, such as potentially undermining the rights and well-being of local communities.

**Table 1. Degraded land and forest area targets for ASEAN Member States (FAO, 2015; FAO and RECOFTC, 2016; RECOFTC, 2017; workshop participants)<sup>2</sup>**

Country	Estimated degraded land (million ha)	Estimated degraded land as % of total land area	Current forest cover (change 2010-15)	Target forest cover (year)
Cambodia	2.6	15%	54% (-1.3%)	60% (2030)
Indonesia	56.9	30%	53% (-0.7%)	53% (2020)
Lao PDR	8.7	36%	41% <sup>3</sup> (+1%)	70% (2020)
Malaysia	--	--	68% (+0.1%)	--
Myanmar	4.2	6%	44% (-1.8%)	45% (2030)
Philippines	7.6	25%	27% (+3.3%)	30% (2028)
Thailand	2.3	4%	32% (+0.2%)	40% (2036)
Viet Nam	9.7	30%	48% (+0.9%)	45% (2020)

<sup>1</sup> A socio-ecological system that is small enough to maintain a degree of manageability, but large enough to be able to deliver multiple functions to stakeholders with different interests.

<sup>2</sup> Brunei Darussalam and Singapore are excluded as their significantly smaller territory puts their land restoration targets in a different category with regards to the impact at regional level.

<sup>3</sup> FAO (2015) puts forest area for Lao PDR at 81% because FAO's definition of forest is 10% canopy cover, while government of Lao PDR uses 20% canopy cover to define forest.

A great deal of investment is required to achieve these targets. On a global level, for example, it is estimated that US\$830 billion is needed to meet the target of the New York Declaration (FAO and UNCCD, 2015). In theory the funds should be reasonably forthcoming, as restoring degraded land is a highly attractive investment option for both the public and private sectors. The range of potential returns range from marketing timber and non-timber forest products, to carbon sequestration and other environmental services. However, in practice there are numerous challenges to ensure that funding is from sustainable<sup>4</sup> sources.

FLR is an optimal approach to achieving the restoration targets in a sustainable manner. It addresses the complexity of meeting multiple goals, as well as managing the expectations of investors (Box 1).

### **Box 1. Forest landscape restoration (FLR): a holistic approach**

FLR is the long-term process of regaining ecological functionality and enhancing human well-being across deforested or degraded forest landscapes, to meet the present and future needs of all stakeholders. The key principles are:

- Focus on landscapes
- Good governance based on participatory stakeholder management
- Restoration of ecological functions
- Application of appropriate restoration approaches
- Conservation and enhancement of natural ecosystems
- Adherence to local context
- Emphasis on the provision of diverse goods and services, including local livelihoods
- Adaptive management over various time scales

(CIFOR, 2018)

This paper explores the opportunities and challenges for successful forest restoration in Southeast Asia. The emphasis is on FLR and CF as vehicles for restoring degraded landscapes, including for attracting the funding necessary to ensure sustainable outcomes. The report draws on relevant literature, discussions and inputs from representatives of ASEAN Member States, of development organizations, and of finance institutions, who participated in a Regional Policy Dialogue in Bangkok, Thailand on 8-9 March 2018, titled Connecting Finance and Policy: Forest Landscape Restoration in Southeast Asia.

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<sup>4</sup> Sustainable sources of funding can be defined as those that adhere to FLR principles (Box 1)

## Assessing the opportunities and challenges for forest landscape restoration, including funding, in Southeast Asia

The key success factors for sustainable restoration efforts are outlined by IUCN and the World Resources Institute (WRI) in their Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM), as well as by the FLR diagnostic tool published by the WRI (Hanson et al., 2015). A review of these success factors using the WRI's diagnostic tool will help us to understand some of the opportunities and challenges in achieving these targets successfully, using FLR. The three key factors are:

- **Motivation** of key stakeholders, including land owners (such as rural communities with varying tenure arrangements) and policy makers, to undertake restoration activities and adhere to FLR principles.
- **Enabling conditions** from landscape to national and regional levels, including not only an enabling legal and regulatory environment, but also supportive ecological, market and social conditions.
- **Capacities and resources** to develop, implement and monitor FLR on a sustainable basis.

### Motivation

There is a clear recognition among the various stakeholders of the importance of healthy forest landscapes. There are, however, significant differences on what a healthy forested landscape looks like, and in turn how it can be achieved. This is reflected in stakeholders' differing motivations for participating in restoration efforts.

Government officials, for example, will be largely driven by the targets and programmes of their line departments and ministries, e.g. forest conservation. These are often not coordinated between government offices, and may conflict with the interests of local communities.

On the other hand, local communities can have perceptions of land management that diverge from those of government officials or other stakeholders. Those perceptions can also vary within a local community. If restoration objectives and processes are not agreed upon and supported by local communities, any well-intended programme will produce local resistance and potentially social instability, which increases risks and decreases potential returns, including profitability, thereby discouraging potential FLR investors.

All investors expect a return, though there are many forms of acceptable return. One company may invest in restoration of a landscape in return for products and services that increase profits. Another may be more motivated by corporate social responsibility (CSR), and be willing to invest to improve its brand image by being associated with positive social and environmental outcomes.

The challenge is to bring together these different and sometimes conflicting motivations and expectations to address the key issue of risk management. One approach is through the development of CF<sup>5</sup>, which many governments see as an ideal vehicle to achieve the restoration targets: addressing livelihood needs and forest conservation (Table 2). A key strength of CF in FLR is its ability to mobilize communities for landscape restoration. It achieves this by enabling equitable participation and by strengthening the tenure and rights of rural communities.

In recent years there has been increased recognition by governments of the importance of using CF to support livelihood development. For example, Myanmar has recently revised the legal basis for CF in the country, the Community Forestry Instruction, to facilitate its increased commercialization providing a stronger foundation for communities to benefit from their forests (Feurer et al., 2018). This is vital when considering risk management: A community will be disinclined to support any initiative that fails to support their well-being and rights. Any forest restoration initiative would need to ensure this is addressed, with an emphasis on inclusive processes (Box 2).

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<sup>5</sup> Community forestry includes communal as well as smallholder ownership.



**Table 2. Area managed under official land titles or CF agreements (RECOFTC, 2017)**

Country <sup>6</sup>	ha	Target		% Achieved by 2016
		ha	year	
Cambodia	296,240	2,000,000	2029	15%
Indonesia	642,646	2,500,000	2014 <sup>7</sup>	26%
Myanmar	113,765	919,000	2030	12%
Philippines	4,018,952 <sup>8</sup>	9,000,000	2008	45%
Thailand	750,457	1,600,000	2025	47%
Viet Nam	4,256,375	4,000,000	2020	106%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,078,435</b>	<b>20,019,000</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>50%</b>

**Box 2. Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM)**

The Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM) is a tool to facilitate national or sub-national assessments of FLR potential based on an agreed vision of landscape restoration (IUCN and WRI, 2014). It addresses some of the conflicts that can arise when restoration projects are designed top-down without adequate consideration of local interests. ROAM supports the FLR principles, and is designed to create a shared understanding of the opportunities those principles provide. It also promotes the value of multifunctional landscapes among decision-makers and land managers, including rural communities. The analytical outputs from ROAM that support a well-designed FLR initiative are:

- a shared understanding of degradation drivers and FLR objectives;
- identification of priority areas for restoration;
- identification of the most appropriate restoration intervention types across the assessment area;
- quantification of the costs and benefits of each intervention type;
- estimation of the values of additional carbon sequestered from each intervention type;
- assessment of the key success factors and identification of approaches to address major policy, legal and institutional bottlenecks, and;
- analysis of the finance and resourcing options for restoration in the assessment area.

<sup>6</sup> Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore do not have social forestry programmes that transfer land rights to local people. Data on the area of social forestry in Lao PDR is not available.

<sup>7</sup> In 2016 Indonesia set a new target of 12.7 million ha of land to be placed under social forestry by 2019.

<sup>8</sup> It is unclear if the target date has been formally extended.



## Enabling conditions

The global restoration initiatives often align with regional and national restoration programmes, for example the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Examples of national initiatives in the ASEAN region include the Myanmar Reforestation and Rehabilitation Program (MRRP), the Peatland Restoration Program in Indonesia (Box 3), and the payment for forest ecosystem services (PFES) programme in Viet Nam, as well as national CF programmes. A key pillar for the success of these initiatives is an enabling legislative environment, to ensure that they are harmonized, clear and enforced – a significant challenge in the region (RECOFTC, 2018).

There are other initiatives that do not explicitly focus on restoration, but that will help strengthen legal and regulatory environment around forestry. These include: a programme led by the World Economic Forum titled Zero Deforestation Commitments from Commodity Producers and Traders; the UNFCCC's programme Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+); and the Voluntary Partnership Agreements under the European Union's Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade Action Plan (FLEGT VPA). These promise to strengthen the regulatory environment for addressing the drivers of deforestation and degradation, while also placing significant emphasis on strengthening the rights and participation of rural communities (Kane et al., 2018).

Another dimension of the enabling environment consists of the market opportunities for the various products and services from FLR, which bring a different set of dynamics into play. The market for forest products in ASEAN is growing significantly. While this is providing improved livelihoods for forest-based communities, some are based on unsustainable sources such as rubber and palm oil. This issue is deep-seated, with many regulations actually undermining legal and sustainable practices (Gritten et al., 2015), and some countries in the region facing many issues on the ease of doing business (World Bank, 2018). If the financial returns from restoration are limited, including being undercut by unsustainable sources, then investors looking for sustainable investment projects are more likely to take their resources elsewhere.

In addition to the competition from less scrupulous investors, sustainable investors also face the challenge of a lack of bankable sustainable projects that can give a guaranteed return. There are several interlinked challenges here:

- **Scale:** Most investors are attracted to large-scale investments, while many sustainable projects are smaller in scope.
- **Time frame:** Achieving an attractive return on a sustainable investment can take many years, sometimes far longer than might be the case for other private sector investments.
- **Governance and management:** Investing in sustainable projects often involves dealing with burdensome government bureaucratic processes, which absorb resources.
- **Risk:** Sustainable projects bring their own complex risks for the investor, for example a lack of clarity regarding the land tenure of local communities could create conflict, delays and costs.

A further disincentive to any responsible investor is the poor forestry governance throughout the region. This is reflected in the ongoing loss and degradation of natural forests, even while overall forest areas are technically growing in most countries (FAO, 2017). Governments in the region must take the lead in addressing this (Box 3).

### Box 3. The role of government in mobilizing investment in forest landscape restoration (FLR)

Governments play a key role in creating an enabling environment for attracting quality investments to FLR. This requires them to play the following broad interconnected roles:

#### 1. Convenor

- Bring together multiple stakeholders, including the private sector and local communities, to ensure inclusive practices, emphasizing a landscape approach.
- Coordinate various investment sources to ensure synergy and support up-scaling.

#### 2. Creator of enabling legal and regulatory environment

- Ensure strong and clear tenure and rights.
- Harmonize laws and regulations to address contradictions and loopholes.

- Ensure coordination of mandates and roles of institutions.
  - Establish incentives including tax exemption, soft loans and capacity development support.
3. Provider of credible information
- Ensure access to credible land use data, including ownership.
  - Ensure that credible, including participatory, monitoring systems are in place for determining impacts of FLR activities.
4. Investor
- Integrate FLR in national budgets.
  - Recognize and support opportunities for blended finance (the strategic use of development finance for the mobilization of commercial finance).
  - Provide technical and legal services.
5. Risk manager
- Ensure conflict mitigation and transformation strategies are in place.
  - Provide collateral for loans.

## Capacities and resources

As the motivation and the enabling conditions develop, they must be complemented by appropriate capacities and resources to build on the increasingly solid foundations, while ensuring that the guiding principles of FLR are effectively followed.

The various stakeholders range across different scales, from international to landscape, and have correspondingly diverse capacity requirements. These also reflect the complexity of the landscapes to be restored. While the capacity needs must be addressed systematically (Box 4), many of the components are already in place thanks to previous and current participatory forest landscape management programmes. Examples include: the development of CF; capacity development programmes linked to initiatives such as REDD+ and FLEGT VPA; and socially responsible private-sector programmes. These initiatives have already started to draw investments from government departments, the private sector and development organizations. They have also resulted in changing attitudes, with stakeholders taking an interest in developing knowledge and skills on the why and the how of participation to obtain the desired impacts.

### **Box 4. Systematically identifying and addressing the capacity gaps for forest landscape restoration (FLR)**

RECOFTC recognizes the opportunities but also the risks from the various forest restoration initiatives across the region. As a capacity development organization, RECOFTC is working to identify and address the capacity gaps to ensure that forest restoration adheres to the principles of FLR, which in turn helps ensure sustainable outcomes.

The starting point is the development and implementation of a capacity development needs assessment (CDNA), on the basis of which a capacity development programme will be designed and implemented, as well as monitored. RECOFTC has implemented capacity development programmes, based on CDNAs, on CF and REDD+ throughout the region. The organization is currently conducting its first CDNA focusing on FLR, which is being tested in the Ing watershed in northern Thailand.

A key component of the CDNA and the resulting capacity development programme for FLR is addressing the extent to which key stakeholders have the necessary attitude, knowledge and skills to access financing. This issue is apparent throughout the region and goes beyond forest landscape restoration. One particular area in this respect is the capacities of local communities to work with the private sector and financial institutions, and vice versa.

Nevertheless, many challenges remain regarding the capacity gaps for sustainable land-use management, including FLR. This can be observed among all stakeholders, and is often compounded by barriers created by regulations and laws. In Cambodia, for example, training is provided for local communities to address the capacity gaps for managing their CF; however, they are often poorly attended. This happens when incentives are lacking, and the prospects appear too distant of obtaining an approved community forest management plan (CFMP) and developing forest-based livelihoods. This is particularly the case when CFs are located in degraded forests, with insufficient incentives to restore these forests. One immediate effect is that efforts by community members to control illegal logging are minimal at best, partly due to the lack of funding for forest protection without CFMP approval (Gritten et al., 2015).

Accessing the resources, particularly funding and appropriate technology, is strongly linked to the capacities of the key stakeholders. There are programmes to connect local communities, including smallholders, to finance throughout the region. Examples include the World Bank's Forest Sector Development Project in Viet Nam, which covers 43,000 households and more than 76,500 ha of forests, supporting access to finance and technical support including for forest restoration. One farmer who was part of the project noted: "Our family has 4.2 hectares of plantations... Five years after receiving a loan... we could earn VND 90 to 100 million (\$3,950-4,390) per ha after deducting investment costs such as seedlings, fertilizer, and interest. We could not only pay back the loan principal but also had enough money to build a new house and afford some modern appliances" (World Bank, 2016). Nevertheless these examples are still the exception rather than the norm.

One key impediment for stakeholders seeking to attract investors is access to quality data. A lack of systematic processes for its collection often results in contradictions within the data, and in local communities not being adequately involved. Potential investors need to know the direct and indirect costs and benefits, including the expected rate of return, for a given FLR project (Box 5). And where the data is available, stakeholders still need the skills to package, communicate and interpret the information in an accessible manner depending on the desired goals of the investor.

#### **Box 5. Telling a compelling story with numbers**

Attracting an investor requires giving them clear information on what they can expect from their investment. Many organizations are working to ensure that governments, land owners and investors are connected around a clear understanding of the costs, benefits and returns from FLR.

One example is a marketing tool developed by Commonland, which is working to create large-scale landscape restoration programmes that are attractive to investors. Their tool is based on four types of return from landscape restoration:

- inspiration: beauty, innovation, purpose
- financial capital: financial performance
- natural capital: fertile soils, carbon storage, water
- social capital: jobs, income, cohesion and engagement

(Ferwerda, 2015, p.21)

While all four returns must be considered, the developer may also emphasize some returns over others, according to the motivation of the investor.

An example from Viet Nam provides a good illustration. An assessment by IUCN of 450 ha of restored mangroves in Hai Phong in the northeast found significant benefits including income from the collection and sale of aquatic products (Cuc, 2015). In 2013 this stood at \$319-498 per month per ha, compared with \$131-272 in 2005. In addition, the indirect benefits included carbon accumulation valued at \$44,535/ha/year, habitats for aquatic organisms valued at \$882-980/ha/year, and about \$1-2/ha/year for medicinal plants. Furthermore, the restored mangrove also provided other services including protection from storms. Packaging this for potential investors would weigh up all these direct and indirect benefits as returns against the investment in time and money.

## Ensuring that forest restoration connects with sustainable investment

In theory there are many financing opportunities to address land degradation in Southeast Asia. In practice, however, numerous challenges exist. One key issue is attracting investments to the multiple benefits of FLR, over other options that may be more focussed on a single product or service. This is compounded when laws and regulations, or their poor implementation, too often undermine a responsible or sustainable investment, or else where capacities to understand and address the requirements to access investment are not in place, and efforts to strengthen these are not systematic.

An analysis of the motivations, enabling environment, and capacities and resources has highlighted the work to be done for ASEAN Member States to achieve their forest cover targets, including accessing sustainable investments. Designing a forest restoration programme based on the principles of FLR (Box 1), will go some way to addressing the issues. The next step is how to bring these FLR principles to life: We argue that CF is the best vehicle to achieve this (Box 6 and Figure 1). CF is also an attractive proposition for investors, for example as a mechanism for risk management. With its emphasis on participatory approaches and social inclusion, CF can effectively mitigate conflict, and provide mechanisms to address it effectively when it does occur. Thus, it promotes a de-risked or more secured landscape for FLR activity.

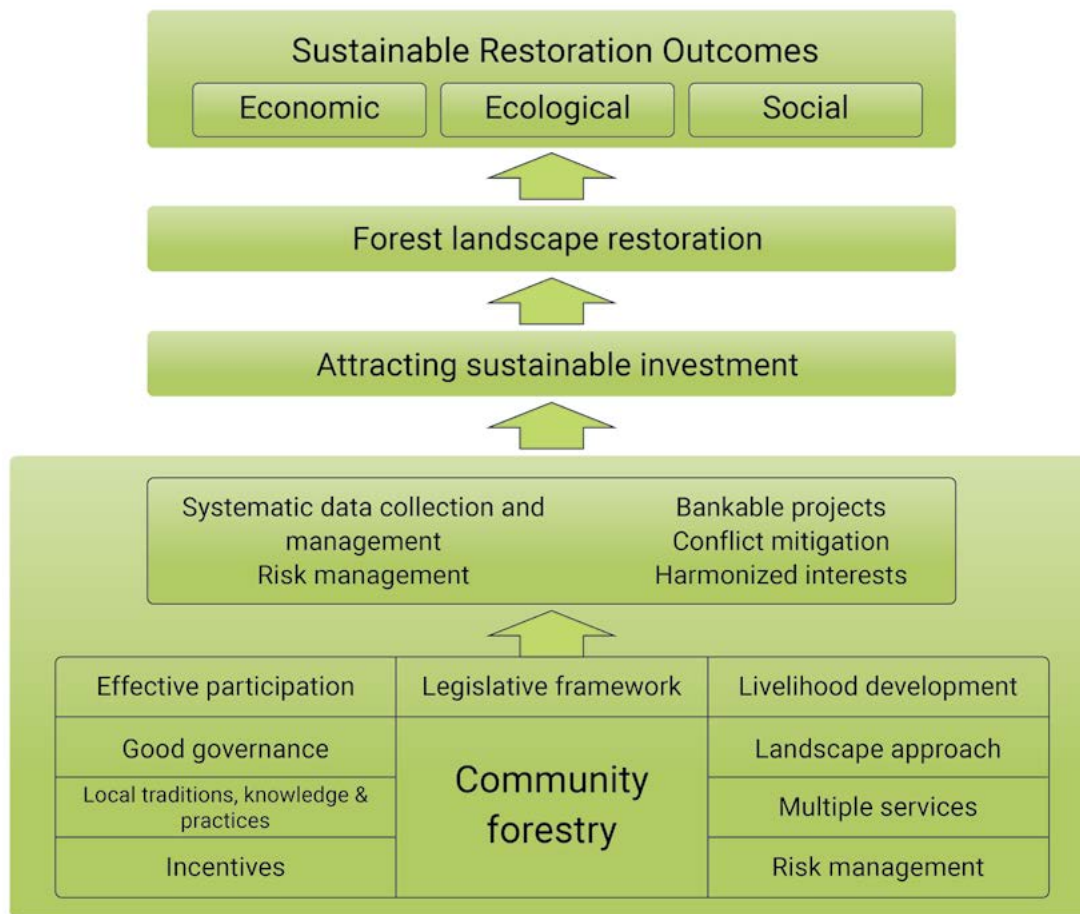
### **Box 6. The fundamentals for effective community forestry**

CF covers social, economic and conservation dimensions in a range of activities including: decentralized and devolved forest management; smallholder forestry schemes; community-company partnerships; small-scale forest based enterprises; and the indigenous management of sacred sites of cultural importance (Gilmour, 2016). Its rationale is that local communities know the forest landscapes the best, depend on the landscape the most, have proven to be the most effective managers of these landscapes and, most importantly, have rights to these landscapes. The following fundamentals need to be in place for CF to deliver:

- Secure tenure, in the form of property rights.
- An enabling regulatory framework, with a reasonable balance between rights and responsibilities.
- Strong governance.
- Viable technology to establish and maintain productive forests.
- Knowledge of markets and market access for goods and services to promote sustainable livelihood development.
- Supportive bureaucratic mandate and culture.

When these are in place one can see how CF would also be a driving force for FLR - overlapping with the FLR principles (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. How CF can be a vehicle for attracting sustainable investments for FLR**



## Ways forward

There are numerous ways to attract sustainable investments to restore degraded lands in Southeast Asia through FLR. An important issue that must be addressed by those seeking investments is an understanding of their different sources, their motivations (i.e. expectations), and the information they require. Ultimately, the different and sometimes conflicting motivations between and within the various stakeholder groups need to be addressed before considering how to access these sources of investment. There is cause for optimism, stemming from the initiatives and programmes at landscape, national and international levels that support FLR, including the development of CF in several countries. Based on these, we recommend the following measures to be taken by different stakeholder groups and investor types:

### Government with an interest to meet forest-cover targets

- Continue support for CF-related mechanisms, recognizing their value in supporting adherence to FLR principles. This support should include ensuring that rural communities can benefit financially from their own forests.
- Ensure that ministries and departments, including finance-, investment-, and land-based offices such as agriculture, forestry and wildlife, work together to facilitate sustainable investments. This includes addressing any conflicting laws and regulations that increase the transaction costs for investments in FLR.
- Support and create entry points for non-state actors to participate in data collection on land-use management, as well as support the analysis of costs, benefit and rate of return for FLR of degraded land, including creating a portfolio of potential projects.
- Address legislation that discourages sustainable investments, including roundwood export bans.
- Overall, work toward de-risking land based investments.

**Financial institutions** (from philanthropists to traditional investors)

- Commit to not investing in conflict landscapes.
- Abide by the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and participatory processes to avoid potential conflicts.
- Tailor the language of proposed business models to reflect the capacities of stakeholders. Communication and facilitation skills of field staff are essential to a conducive work environment.
- Communicate in an open and transparent way their objectives and expectations when it comes to FLR investments, such as their expected rate of return, or what pieces need to be in place for the investment to work for them.

**Rural communities and their advocates**

- Support capacity development programmes for rural communities, aligned with CF mechanisms, so that those communities can more effectively engage with private- and financial-sector actors.
- Support the documentation of good practices for FLR.
- Facilitate learning and collaboration among the different stakeholder groups.
- Clearly articulate and communicate communities' expectations and requirements around land-based investments on community land and assets.

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