Communities restoring landscapes
Stories of resilience and success

Foreword

Vox Populi, Vox Dei! For Roman orator Cicero, the voice of the people became the voice of God in special "heightened" places: in "public meetings of ideas and thought;" in the "houses of government;" in the "meetings at the games and gladiators." We consider the Global Landscape Forum (GLF) a similarly "heightened" place where we give precedence to the voice of the people, providing ample opportunities for debate and decision making.

In this slim anthology, we present a collection of stories about women and men from different settings in Africa who banded together to restore degraded farmlands, forests and coastlines. As they were for Cicero, the voices, ideas and thoughts of the people in public meetings must be the starting point for anyone – whether researcher, policy maker or practitioner – Interested in understanding, learning and ultimately in solving society's problems. We put this collection of stories together for the GLF of August 2018, "Landscape Restoration in Africa."

These 12 stories span multiple ecosystems—from dry wooded savannahs and miombo forests, to tropical montane forests, coastal mangroves and even farmlands. The tales are told by men and women of different ages and ethnicities; yet despite their unique perspectives, they offer several important common lessons.

Visionary and inspirational leadership creates a locus where social bonds are activated and nurtured. It also creates new bonds with external actors who provide various forms of support to local communities, making adoption easier and increasing the prospects of sustaining restoration efforts.

Tenure security and rights matter. In all of the stories – especially those involving coastal mangroves – communities do not have fully recognized ownership rights to the forests and landscapes they invest in restoring. However, whatever claims they do have are, in many instances, recognized, enforced and secure because of their actions.

Gender matters. Patriarchy, which concentrates rights to land, trees and forests with men, limits the extent to which women can engage in restoration or reforestation. However, this bias can be chipped away over time as women persist, build alliances, challenge norms and "keep on planting trees" in the spaces where they can.

Success is less about the amount of land physically reforested or restored, and more about livelihood enhancement and restored communities; shifts in the distribution of benefits, including across genders; adoption of supportive governance arrangements; and the integration of local, traditional knowledge with the techno-scientific.

More lessons abound in this rich collection, and the reader, regardless of intent, will at the most basic learn something from these local women and men who have dedicated their time and effort to restoring the landscapes they live in and value.

I am immensely grateful to the community members and their allies who took time to share their stories and experiences—their names and locations are duly acknowledged in each story. It is also my pleasure and honour to acknowledge staff and partners of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)
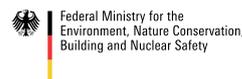
without whom this amazing work would not exist: Esther Mwangi, who developed the concept, crafted questions, reached out to colleagues in different settings and persuaded them to share their community contacts; Monica Evans, a highly skilled writer, who captured and interpreted the stories in an accessible and interesting way. Olivia Mutai and Dali Mwagore translated French and Kiswahili interviews into English. Our colleagues Lalao Aigrette, Salomao Bandeira, James Kairo, Mwita Mwangora, Thuita Thenya, Carl Trettin and Mathurin Zida played an important role through introducing the writers to the groups and individuals they work with.

I wish you a productive journey through this collection and would encourage you to "Listen!" and reflect, on these compelling stories of resilience and success

Dr. Robert Nasi
Director general, CIFOR

The Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) is the world's largest knowledge-led multi-sectoral platform for integrated land use, bringing together world leaders, scientists, private sector representatives, farmers and community leaders and civil society to accelerate action towards the creation of more resilient, equitable, profitable, and climate-friendly landscapes.

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