

From commitment to action

Establishing action points toward operationalizing integrated landscape approaches

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Highlights

- There is congruence between the action points for establishing landscape approaches identified from both the theory literature and case studies
- Coordinated policies that utilize landscape approach frameworks are necessary for fulfilling climate and development objectives
- Multilevel governance structures and independently facilitated multistakeholder negotiation platforms are fundamental to achieving progress

Introduction

Integrated landscape approaches are increasingly recognized as a strategy to reconcile competing socioeconomic and environmental objectives within developing tropical landscapes (Reed et al. 2016). Through enhanced multistakeholder collaborations, proponents of the landscape approach assert that ongoing negotiation can identify where synergies and trade-offs exist between the various stakeholders operating within such landscapes (Sayer et al. 2013; Ros-Tonen et al. 2015). Principles of adaptive management can then be applied to encourage synergies, negotiate for potential trade-offs and seek alternatives for stakeholders whose aspirations are not being fully met – therefore creating an environment in which there are ‘more winners and fewer losers’ (Sayer et al. 2014). This more holistic approach to landscape management represents a welcome departure from previous approaches that maintained focus on sector-based objectives, often without regard for the needs and aspirations of others.

As such, the landscape approach concept has been widely embraced by both conservation NGOs and development agencies. Furthermore, the recent formalization of major global commitments toward climate change (UNFCCC 2014) and sustainable development (United Nations 2015) is resulting in burgeoning support for landscape approaches

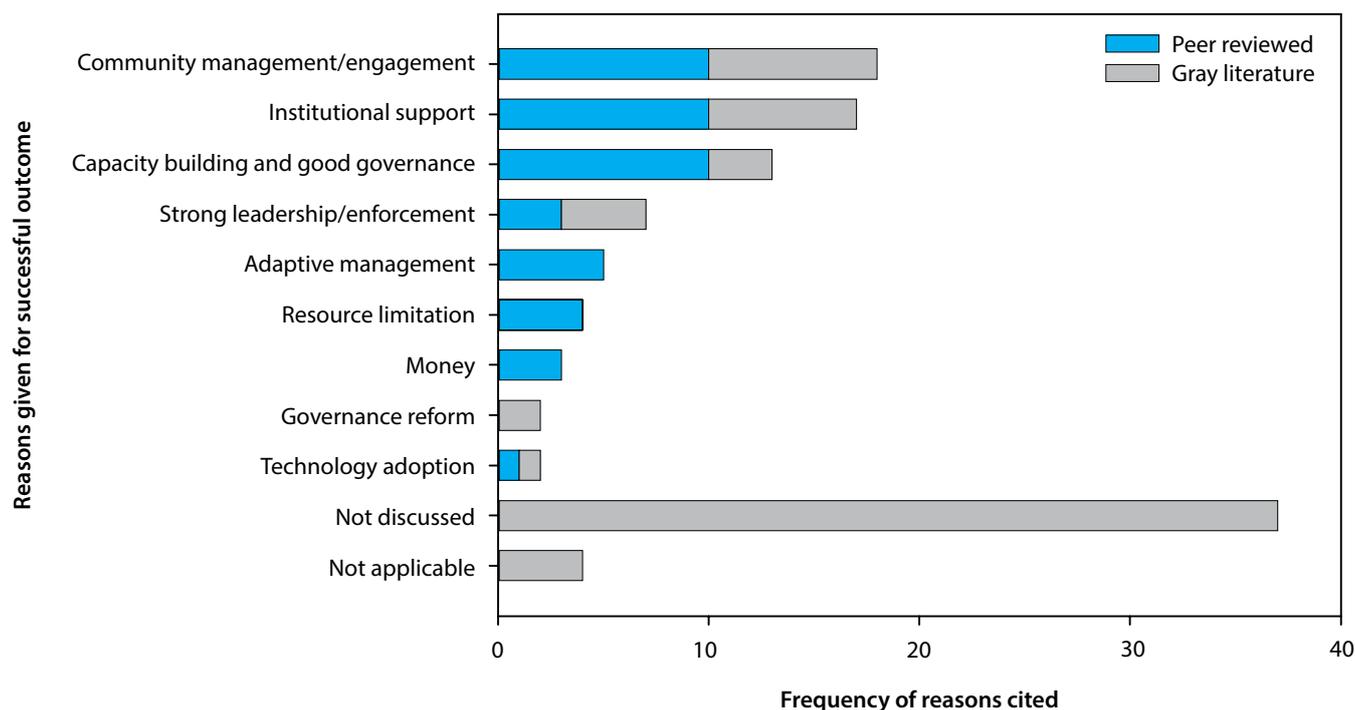
at governmental and intergovernmental levels. However, despite the applicability of an integrated landscape approach as an organizing framework with which to align globally conceived commitments and more local realities (van Vianen et al. 2015), there is concern that evidence of the effectiveness of the approach in practice is still lacking (Sayer et al. 2016). Our recent review of over 17,000 documents captured just 24 peer-reviewed scientific studies about the tropics, with a further 150 from the gray literature (Reed et al. 2016).

Moving landscape approaches from commitment to action – does the evidence support the theory?

Here we provide a brief synthesis of our recent research that identifies key action points that can stimulate and aid efforts toward operationalizing landscape approaches. By overlapping the findings of two recent reviews of the literature – one about the theory and development of landscape approaches, and the other giving examples of landscape approaches in practice – we can illustrate where congruence exists between the recommendations of conceptualists and the experience of practitioners of the approach.

Table 1. Key action points for implementing landscape approaches identified from the theory literature.

Five key aspects of an effective landscape approach (the five Es)	Summary
Evaluate progress	Without metrics, feedback loops fail and adaptive management is unachievable. The design of metrics must be specific to the landscape context, but ideally should encompass the evaluation of social, environmental, production and governance variables. Monitoring processes should aim to balance participatory engagement and scientific rigor.
Establish effective and transparent governance	Optimal governance will be variable between landscapes. However, identifying what structure works best in what landscape, and then evaluating these structures over time, is key to landscape sustainability.
Evolve from panacea solutions	It is important to acknowledge that a landscape approach is not a silver bullet. A landscape approach will not be the most effective strategy all the time, and what works in one landscape may not be appropriate in another. The need for contextualization is fundamental to success.
Engage multiple stakeholders	Ongoing, inclusive and participatory negotiation processes will enable stakeholders to identify objectives, develop synergies, account for trade-offs and best align local sociocultural and global environmental concerns.
Embrace dynamic processes	The individual components of a landscape do not remain static. As such, a landscape approach as a framework needs to be dynamic to increase resilience to stochastic, counter-intuitive or unpredictable changes.

**Figure 1. Key action points identified from case study examples of landscape approaches, highlighting contributing factors toward successful outcomes of peer-reviewed (n = 13) and gray literature studies (n = 66).**

Our review of the theory literature revealed that multiple authors found consensus around a few key points that they considered to be fundamental for effectively implementing a landscape approach (Table 1).

Meanwhile, our findings from case study examples of landscape approaches in the tropics supported many of the recommendations illustrated in Table 1. Community

engagement, institutional support and principles of good governance were considered to be the three most significant factors contributing to effective landscape approaches (Fig. 1). Where possible, we also examined the governance structure in place in each of the case study sites. In almost 60% of cases, a multilevel structure was preferred. Such structures are increasingly supported and adopted because they marry top-down authoritarian

systems with more democratic bottom-up processes. The perceived advantages of such structures are that they provide a voice to previously marginalized stakeholders at the decision-making table and maintain a good level of institutional and bureaucratic capacity. These findings reinforce the perception that to effectively implement and achieve ongoing commitment to landscape approaches, a clear focus on context and stakeholder engagement is necessary from the outset. In addition, institutions should be in place to maintain regular and ongoing processes for discussion and negotiation.

The year 2015 represented a milestone for the global climate and development agenda. The commitments made toward the Sustainable Development Goals in New York, followed by the climate announcement in Paris, have provided countries with a specific set of objectives to work toward. Now comes the task of turning these remarkable commitments into tangible action. As policy makers attempt to formalize national strategies to achieve these objectives, they will face the difficult challenge of having to align globally conceived commitments with more local realities and capabilities (Reed et al. 2015). Furthermore, policy makers must continue to ensure domestic growth while fulfilling commitments toward biodiversity loss and emissions reductions. By integrating policy and practice, a landscape approach provides an enabling framework that, as our research has shown, can better balance the inherent trade-offs that will inevitably arise.

Recommendations

Policy makers must recognize that without landscape approaches, progress toward climate and development commitments will likely be inhibited. They should therefore utilize the landscape approach framework to formulate coordinated national strategies.

Landscape approaches are neither prescriptive nor panacean. Implementation will be heavily influenced by context and should be a multistakeholder process from the outset. An independently facilitated platform to engage stakeholders operating at and across different scales should be encouraged, with progress likely to be expedited if multilevel governance structures are adopted.

A landscape approach must be considered a process, rather than a project. Therefore, objectives, aspirations and systems for monitoring need to be regularly negotiated amongst all stakeholders.

Short-term objectives will be useful in assessing progress, identifying where losses and gains are being made, and utilizing principles of adaptive management to re-assess and re-evaluate. Long-term objectives will need to be regularly re-visited and negotiated in recognition of the dynamic nature of tropical landscapes.

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