



How to know it when we see it?

A Case for Forest and Landscape Restoration Quality Standard

Key points

- The Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) movement is preparing for large-scale implementation globally.
- It is crucial to pay attention to the quality of restoration interventions and outcomes.
- Current tools for planning, assessment or best practice guidelines may not be sufficient to secure effective results.
- The FLoRES Taskforce¹ calls for the development of a Standard for FLR to capture the dynamic, multifunctional and incremental nature of the FLR process.
- To guarantee its adoption, the FLR standard needs to be developed through a broad-based, participatory process to ensure it is fit for purpose and context adapted.
- A Standard for FLR can bring multiple benefits for all stakeholders.
- The purpose of this Brief is to raise awareness and call for action.

¹ The Taskforce formed in September 2017 at a 3-day workshop organised by WeForest and hosted by the University of São Paulo in Piracicaba, Brazil. It consists of a group of international experts who gathered to discuss the relevance, viability, structure and possible applications of a standard for Forest and Landscape Restoration.

Introduction

Global calls to restore millions of hectares of degraded and deforested land over the next decades have been met with worldwide support by governments, businesses and a wide range of organisations. Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR), a planned, long-term process that aims to regain ecological integrity and enhance human well-being in landscapes that have lost forest cover, forest qualities, and forest-based contributions to people, is becoming integrated into international and national strategies to address climate change, poverty alleviation, food security, desertification and biodiversity conservation.

Embarking on a new era of implementation of ambitious commitments and restoration plans calls for additional assurances to safeguard a sustainable future. Regional initiatives, such as AFR100 in Africa and Initiative 20x20 in Latin America, have been established to assist countries in the delivery and fulfilment of FLR pledges. Tools to evaluate restoration opportunities, quantify investment and ecosystem service outcomes and trade-offs as well as to monitor progress on FLR are proliferating [e.g., the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM), the Forest Restoration Prioritization Tool (ROOT), FAO/WRI's Framework for Monitoring for FLR or IUCN's Bonn Challenge Barometer of Progress]. Yet, the lack of an internationally agreed standard may seriously compromise progress.

As we move from commitments to actions, it is vital to pay close attention to the quality of restoration interventions and outcomes. Large-scale FLR implementation efforts need to be truly effective, sustainable and successful in the long-term and bring significant benefits to people, the environment and the planet. Are we ready to face the challenges ahead?

Why are current tools not sufficient?

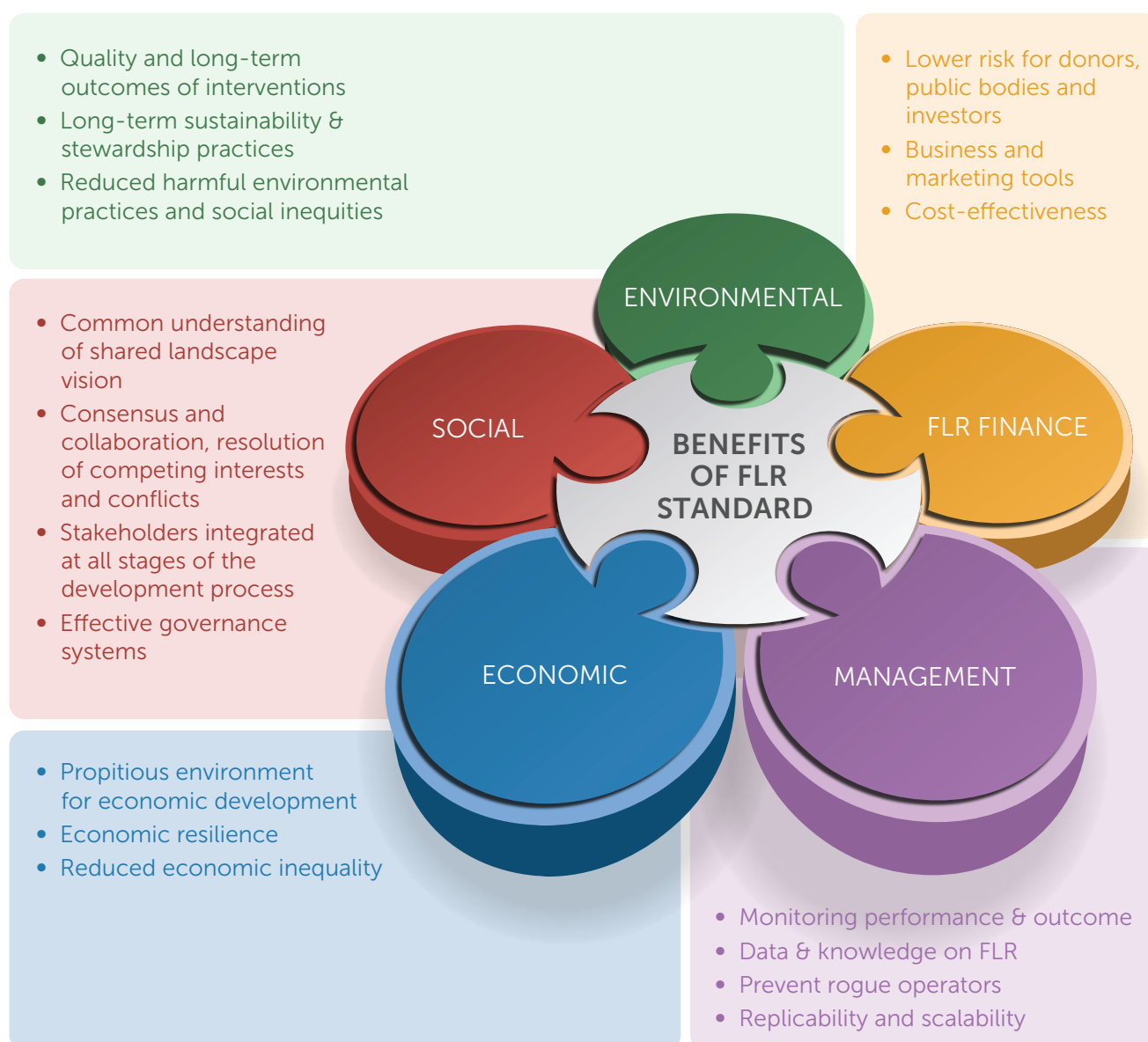
FLR was first defined in 2000. Despite FLR's inherent complexity, its context-dependent nature, the multiplicity of stakeholders and agendas, trade-offs, issues of scale and pathways, and the long-term nature of its processes have built a compelling case for FLR. However, to move from theory to practice, the FLR concept needs to be translated into agreed operational terms. On the ground, we lack the operational criteria and indicators that can help us recognise an FLR project when we see it. Without this clarity, we lack the ability to measure quality. We need a framework or operational model that can help filter out effective progress from "business as usual" tree planting approaches.

Why is an FLR Standard needed now?

The FLR movement has turned a corner. Globally, governments and organisations are planning ambitious FLR programmes. The technical knowledge on how to execute FLR is available. Monitoring frameworks to capture and report on changes have started to develop. But we still need to identify ways to ensure that implementation efforts address trade-offs, lead to quality outcomes and sustainable long-term success at landscape scales. A standard that can measure success and progress in ways that capture the dynamic and incremental nature of FLR would fill this gap.

Experience of standard development in other areas have shown that they can foster positive change. But existing standards for establishing criteria defining good practices and success typically focus on commodity production from forestry or agriculture, or ecosystem-based goods and services (e.g., Forest Stewardship Council, GoldStandard), do not consider the full scope of FLR principles, or do not adopt a landscape approach (e.g. Society for Ecosystem Restoration International Standard). No standard so far seems to capture the dynamic, multifunctional and incremental nature of the FLR process.

An FLR Standard could offer insight into the series of changes observed on the ground, their trajectory and deviation from an established reference, and should inform whether any FLR processes or outcomes are being achieved so as to facilitate adaptive management.



How can the FLR Standard be used?

Through a process of consultation and consensus with relevant organisations and user groups, an FLR Standard could be used as:

- A free self-assessment tool for programme enhancement to evaluate progress and improve the quality of outcomes without the pressure to report
- A way to attract investors seeking lower risk and broad social and environmental outcomes
- A tool for national or international foundations or donors selecting FLR projects to support
- A way to promote knowledge exchange among regions and ecosystems, as a shared framework and data generation, and as a robust tool for reporting on restoration commitments
- A tool for independent validation and verification
- A way to build credibility, transparency, and stakeholder trust in the FLR process

How to create the standard

For an FLR standard to be useful it must emerge from cooperation and consensus. Organisations and groups with an interest or expertise in FLR need to come together to initiate a consultative process.

Research compiling evidence on metrics would need to incorporate additional forest biomes and contexts. A technical committee would draft the standard with the support of an International Body.

Improving the FLR models as we learn from pilot testing may be essential.

How to move forward

In September 2017, the Forest Landscape Restoration Standard (FLoRES) Taskforce initiated the process to develop a FLR standard, a set of benchmarks for motivating better outcomes and practices, essential for reaching the scale of Bonn Challenge commitments and other national and regional restoration targets.

To ensure we move in the right direction and that a FLR standard emerges out of a truly global effort, we would like to hear from you. Please tell us what you think, and become a part of this broad-based and inclusive process to help make FLR happen.

Photo: IPE, Brazil

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WeForest is an international NGO advancing innovative, scalable and lasting solutions to restore forest landscapes for climate, people and planet.