



GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY CENTRIC LANDSCAPE RESTORATION APPROACH IN RWANDA

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1. BACKGROUND

Globally, the area that is suffering desertification and land degradation is ever expanding. Over tillage, expansion of agricultural lands and deforestation are some of the leading drivers of land degradation that is further exacerbated by climate change causing more unpredictable rainfall patterns, longer periods of drought and consequently unpredictable growing seasons. This is thorny not only for communities who directly depend on land and water for their livelihoods, but also for life on earth as a whole.

Fortunately, all around the world promising initiatives are emerging to turn the tide. In various countries, groups of farmers and pastoralists are being engaged in participatory manner to restore degraded lands through various restoration actions including planting trees, conserving ecosystems and sustainable use of natural resources. In Rwanda for example, community engagement through Umuganda and several other initiatives in Restoration has been practiced for more than 2 decades and the results have been incredible. Towards the end of the last decade, Rwanda through, Rwanda Water Board, IUCN and Netherlands Embassy started a 4years' integrated water resource management programme in Sebeya catchment (commonly known as [Sebeya project](#)) in western province, where local communities were at the centre of the restoration efforts. The said programme was a great kicker in that it was for the first time floods and siltation were mitigated significantly in the area as communities. This is linked to the fact that communities had owned the restoration process, they were restoring degraded land, and conserving soils on of their own good. What's more, the communities were able to receive direct benefits, which include daily wages, increased crop production and quality water. The idea of engaging the communities came after realizing no impacts were being made even after the government invested heavily in the catchment in the previous years. A deliberate move to engage communities through local institutions including local government, farmer cooperatives and microfinance/SACCOS was a perfect and timely idea.

This is just one example, but similar community-based restoration and sustainable land use initiatives are happening at the grassroots across the globe and sometimes are answers to current destructive practices, sometimes as a continuation of what people have already been doing successfully for decades. They are future-proof ways to reach Sustainable Development Goal 15: '*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.*' They cannot only make a relevant contribution to addressing land degradation, but also climate change. While on the one hand they help mitigation efforts through the absorption of carbon by newly grown trees and improved soils, on the other hand they also have a positive impact on people's income, health, adaptive capacity and resilience.

Rwanda is currently focusing on scaling up the community-centric restoration approach beyond Sebeya and the renewed efforts to restore Eastern province (province worst hit by climate change) has the communities at the centre. Through programmes such as TREPA, AREECA and COMBIO the government is keen to see degraded lands restored but also improve the livelihoods of millions of Rwandans living under poverty line. For example, AREECA programme seeks to engage communities in establishing tree nurseries, tree planting and creating awareness

among farmers/landowners in Nyagatare and Kirehe Districts. The programme also seeks to engage communities in developing a local restoration financing mechanisms to ensure sustainable and a catalytic restoration drive in the country.

1.2 Justification

Community-based restoration efforts have to be based within the local communities and be adopted and implemented by the farmers/land owners. All FLR initiatives should **engage communities as restoration champions and draw on their knowledge**. When people feel ownership and see their needs met in both the short and the long run, they are more inclined to use a certain method as an alternative way. Another important feature is *inclusiveness*: all people that might be positively or negatively affected by sustainable land use or restoration activities (herders, farmers, women, and youth, ecosystems users, amongst others), should be involved in the decision-making and implementation of these initiatives. In order to succeed, scale up and spread, such efforts, several conditions must be met. First, land (use) rights are extremely important. In addition, communities, scientists and policy makers must work together and exchange both scientific and local knowledge and experiences to improve and disseminate certain land use and restoration methods. Last but not least, access to technical and financial resources is crucial to let these initiatives develop to their full potential as alternatives to current and often destructive (agricultural) practices.

Key phrases to remember:

-Local communities must be at the center of ecosystem restoration.

-Restoration planners and practitioners need to understand them as more than “workers” or “beneficiaries.” They are powerful agents of change equipped with valuable local knowledge and capacities.

-Successful projects combine the local knowledge with high-quality quantitative and qualitative data and methods that can help people plan, restore and monitor.

-Community development approach considers community members to be experts in their lives and communities, and values community knowledge and wisdom.

Given its robust land tenure security and governance framework, Rwanda serves as perfect country where community led restoration efforts can succeed. We are looking at a country where all lands are titled, landownership and rights are clear and supported by law. Further, in Rwanda, government land use/ management database and its governance framework allows for data-driven decision making at the district and sector level. As observed in Sebeya catchment, community-centric restoration enhances restoration ownership. It should be noted that while the approach literally means community engagement in Restoration, different localities will required a customised approach that matches the existing intuitional and governance framework. The best-fit approach will therefore consider the existing political, policy and intuitional framework which consequently defines financial management

The big question remains as to how national government to the district and then to local communities? There are existing mechanisms used in channelling such support (whether technical or financial) and can be explored to develop a typical community-centric FLR model. We have Vision 2020 Umurenge programme ([VUP](#)) which used similar approaches and can be a great example. The said Sebeya project has perfected the model bringing the context of restoration into it and has perfectly restored the fortunes of thousands of farmers in the catchment.

This concept note is therefore describing a typical community –centric restoration approach (borrowing lessons from Sebeya project) focusing on institutional framework , funds flow up to the community level , some of the potential banking institutions up to local level, community. We are also supposed to look at the role and responsibilities of the communities and expected gains/opportunities, field operations and expected time line to operationalize the funds at the grassroots.

1.3 Objectives

Community–centric restoration model may sound linear and quite simple but in its implementation, things can be a bit complex in view of institutional arrangement legal framework, financial architecture and safeguards needed to design and operationalize the model. In fact, institutional coordination and funding are the most critical parts of the approach and can only work seamlessly if supported by a strong a legal framework and discreet safeguards against abuse or failure.

This concept note therefore seeks to elaborate a typical community-centric restoration approach in the Rwandan context by describing a best-fit institutional arrangement legal framework, a funding architecture and various safeguard to ensure seamless operationalization. Note that for the purpose of describing and illustrating the model, this concept note will make reference to AREECA programme.

1.3.0 MODEL DESCRIPTION

1.3.1 Institutional framework

In an effort to catalyse and ignite, large-scale restoration in Rwanda, the government is keen on community engagement and grassroots restoration activities. The emphasis is laid on engaging the local farmer groups and or cooperatives with technical support from the districts. Citing the case of AREECA, both the target districts and Rwanda Forestry Authority are involved creating a robust local level restoration structure both for on ground interventions and monitoring. The overall project leadership is vested on the PSC while GIZ is the project management unit. IUCN is the leading implementing partner providing overall technical support in Rwanda and managing the funds meant for on ground restoration and creating an enabling conditions for scaling up. The chair is the PSC of the MoE while its members are the project consortium partners, the PMU and key government institutions including; RFA, MINAGRI, MINALOC, REMA, RAB and of course Kirehe and Nyagatare districts. RFA has special role in the project as they are supporting the implementation of various project interventions including tree planting, developing forest cadastre, distribution of ICS and developing local capacities on various aspects of tree planting and sustainable use of forest goods including wood and charcoal.

The proposed model for AREECA will therefore involve funds flow from IUCN, then to RFA, to Kirehe and Nyagatare districts and finally to the local cooperatives. There is already an existing MoU between IUCN and RFA to that effect and the same has to be initiated between RFA and the districts and then between the districts and farmer cooperatives. Any other flow from RFA to community should ensure the active participation in the project implementation (execution and monitoring). The next sections outlines the steps to be followed in the operationalization of the described approach. Note that in COMBIO RFA engages the local cooperatives directly without involving the districts in the matters funds flow and management of the project at local level.

1.3.2 Steps to be followed

Community–centric restoration model should ensure the involvement of community in three main phases of the project namely: the planning phase, the implementation phase and the monitoring phase as depicted below:

Summary for the basics of Participatory community approach

PLANNING PHASE:

- 1) Identification of priority villages
- 2) Community meeting: Stakeholders mapping and FLR needs and challenges identification, and mapping of intervention selection of planning and monitoring team (7)
- 3) Awareness campaign: Public awareness/ informing the community (Through RWARRI)
- 4) Training of facilitators for VAP
- 5) Establish Community/village planning and monitoring committee and conduct Community planning meetings to develop action plan
- 6) Final V RAPs and costing
- 7) VAPs Validation by the districts/RFA
- 8) VAP owned by RFA, Districts to Village level Gov. bodies

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

- 1) Implementation plan will be integrated in the District annual work plan and budget
- 2) Human Resources and community Mobilisation (No service and supervisory companies here. Instead, recruit technical staff who can guide technically and supervise the work)
- 3) Organize required goods and services
- 4) Community mobilisation, capacity building and awareness
- 5) VAPs Implementation
- 6) Defined Payment modalities: The payment rates for various restoration measures (number, meters, ha) are established and agreed by the districts.
- 7) Maintenance and Sustainability

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING PHASE

- 1) Mobilize Community Planning & Monitoring Committee (CPMC) together with District IUCN, RFA staff: This committee is the eyes and the ears of villagers.
- 2)
- 3) ME& L is done through this Village level planning and monitoring committee under the guidance of District/RFA.

Note: Ones Village restoration plans finalized, it shall be incorporated and aligned with the District plan

1.3.3 PLANNING PHASE

1.3.3.1 Identification of priority areas

The landscape restoration requires huge investments. Thus, the District needs to prioritize restoration depending on the ecological and social-economic interest. Degradation maps **MUST** be the entry point in the selection of the sites followed by a participatory identification of priority sites. Degradation maps must be developed within the ROAM framework to guide on the degradation status and risk level. Other important tools to be considered in this phase include the forest cover map, erosion risk and control maps and land use master plan. Local knowledge extracted from local leaders must be considered as well.

1.3.3.2 Stakeholders mapping

Landscape restoration must engage other players and actor (all stakeholders) who have high interest and High influence in the landscape - either because they depend on it for their livelihoods or because they are involved in its utilization or management. Frequently, those who take decision to restore the degraded land are not those who have to pay for it and not even the ones implementing actions on ground or living in it. Therefore, there is always a need to engage all forms of stakeholders to determine choices and set interventions together.

Through awareness and information sharing meetings different actors within the landscape need to be involved. The stakeholders may include but not limited to: (I) primary or direct stakeholders, in particular villagers. (II) Secondary or indirect stakeholders, such as local leaders. (iii) Interest groups like cooperatives, associations, community small groups, local NGOs, artisanal miners, manufacturers and producers (hydropower, charcoal makers, cooking stoves makers, bricks makers...), irrigation schemes, water supply company , etc. an elaborate stakeholder analysis and scoping must be undertaken by the project implementers before the execution of the project.

1.3.3.3 Awareness campaign

Public awareness campaign meant to sensitive the communities of the problem and proposed solutions (through media, messaging, and an organized set of communication tactics) shall be undertaken to prior to the execution of restoration activities. The campaigns will target the stakeholders (*identified in 0.1.2*) over a specific period (as recommend by the project management). The campaigns will inform the community and stakeholders within the landscape, about the current problem and proposed interventions by highlighting and drawing attention to such in a manner that the information and education provided can solicit action to make changes. Here are some key steps in creating public awareness campaign (*reference made in Sebeya community approach model*);

1. **Consultation** with concerned institutions
2. **Determine the topic and goals of campaign** focusing on big issues.
3. **Decide on the modalities to use to disseminate the information.**

4. **Identify target groups.** If awareness is raising about an issue that impacts local community, ensure that the community members are engaging. Once you have engaged your community members, you now have a network of supporters to help promote your cause.
5. **Engage community leaders and develop champions.** Community leaders can share message with specific audiences that other supporters may not be able to reach. These leaders are most often top business leaders, policymakers, or influential community members.
6. **Create a Media/communications Strategy.** Determine effective types of media to use to engage the community.
7. **Develop a comprehensive implementation plan.** It is important to create a detailed document that specifically calls out SMART goals and activities to implement each step of the way of your campaign. The plan can help keep you on track and help you monitor your progress.
8. **Tie into other efforts.** Check out what other awareness campaigns exist in your community and learn from them.
9. **Resource mobilization.** You need to ensure you have all resources required.

1.3.3.4 Training of Facilitators

A group of key personnel, including; sector and cell technical staff (environmentalists, foresters, agronomists, socio-economists and GIS technicians), must be trained to facilitate the landscape restoration mapping process. Each cell or sector within the intervention area should have representatives that will lead the community during the mapping at village level. Through group discussions, the facilitator identifies a case study that he /she will give to each group and using a problem tree approach (see figure 3) , groups will identify problems, causes, effects and agreeing on actions. This also includes an estimation of quantities of required materials and implementation timelines/road map. Hence, the Landscape Restoration Plan (LRP). Working closely with village leaders the facilitators will use typical processes to conduct community meetings at village levels. Facilitators will coordinate and help villagers to identify and agree on landscape challenges and propose actions towards restoring their landscape. The participation of such meetings must be gender-sensitive, so that women and youths have an opportunity to contribute to the respiration plans.

The method applied in this process is “problem tree-analysis approach”. It is used to identify issues, causes and associated effects, as described in Figure 1.

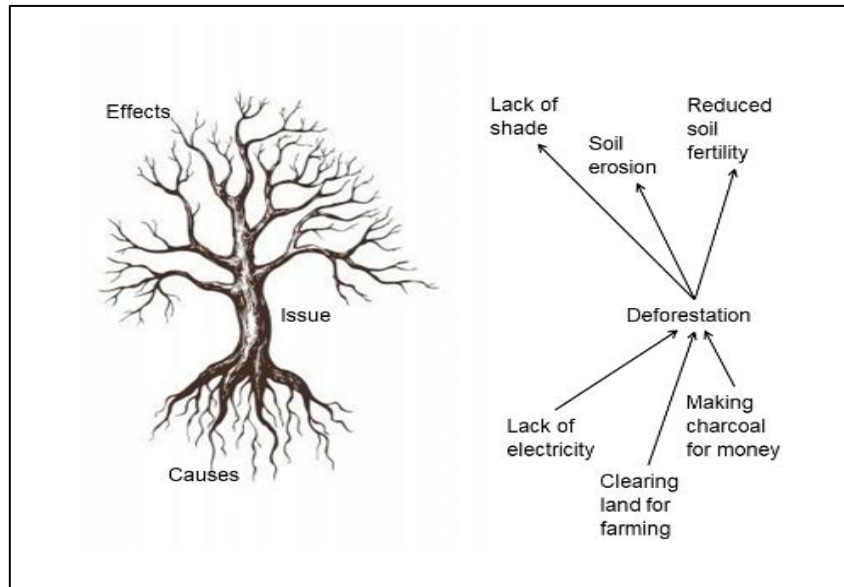


Figure 1: Problem tree-analysis approach

As part of the training, the local authorities and facilitators agree on a roadmap for LRPs process. It is advisable to group riverine villages together as they may share the landscape challenges.

1.3.3.5 Understanding the landscape characteristics

Before conducting the community meeting for LRP process, the facilitators must visit the target villages, for a rapid assessment on land use, the level of degradation alongside the socio-economic impacts. The assessment helps to guide and orient the community during the problem analysis on the problem root causes, consequences/impacts and possible solutions. During this assessment, critical areas are identified under the guidance of the village leaders or lead farmers who familiar with the landscapes. The GIS expert takes the preliminary coordinates of the critical areas to be confirmed during the meeting by the community.

1.3.3.6 Community meetings and preparation of Landscape Restoration Action Plans.

The community meeting is core in the LRAP process. Such meeting must involve all layers of community leadership within the landscape and in particular; village, cell and sector leaders, The participation should consider all aspects such as gender, age, social, professional occupation, public sector, private sector, civil society, religious organization, etc. The following key participants are mandatory for the community meeting;

- Members of Village management leaders/executives
- The farmers who live or own lands within the target landscape/village.
- The farmer's promoters

- Representatives of farmer's cooperatives
- Representatives of breeder's cooperatives
- Representatives of local SMES exploiting natural resources
- Representatives for National women council
- Representatives of National youth Council
- Ubudehe committee
- Local NGOs
- Private investors exploiting resources directly related to land and water resources
- Representatives of religious organizations.

Depending on the similarities of landscape challenges and the number of facilitators in a given landscape, 2 to 3 villages can be grouped together in one community meeting. Therefore, with the lead of facilitators, villagers should produce their own base maps, identify the landscape problems, their causes and consequences and propose actions towards the landscape restoration.

Through technical support from District, RFA and IUCN, a community-based participatory mapping process shall be undertaken (priorities sites informed by degradation maps and districts annual plans) to identify restoration sites and suitable restoration measures. The communities led by the village leaders must own the mapping process. The resulting interventions maps help to elaborate an implementation plan to be referred as the Landscape Restoration Action Plans (LRAPs)

A LRAP map should be hand-drawn and can be translated into GIS based maps/plans at later stage. In order to capture all ideas, it is advisable that the process is done in two different groups. This is done by gender, and there will be one map for men and one for women. During this first planning meeting, participants map, identify and agree on problems causes and actions, and fill in the action.

Output from the community meeting

Heading

1. Collection of demographic data for the villages: Total population by gender and Households
2. Number of participants in the meeting by gender
3. Date of the meeting

Key tables:

4. Problems tree analysis
5. Village landscape restoration action table

1.3.3.7 Final report of LRAPs and costing

The LRAPs process delivers agreed (by village, cell, sector, District and the partner institution) actions. This plan consists of:

1. Narrative part describing the landscape key features and landscape challenges
2. List of proposed LR interventions (action table)
3. Implementation maps
4. A set of technical specifications, based on the agreed actions;
5. A budget for implementing the actions based on the technical specifications;
6. Identifying specifics and localised issues that needs further technical assessments to be addressed
7. A process for simple monitoring and learning as part of *Imihigo* capacity building.

Based on the LRAP, additional data and analysis may be needed. For example, studies to address certain issues villages might raise, or assessments that might be required. Such demand driven studies will be carried out through specialised service providers such as consultancy companies and universities & research groups for knowledge management data.

1.3.3.8 Validation of LRAPs

During the community meetings, collected data help to draft LRAPs. Additional collection of information will lead to elaboration of final LRAPs which are validated jointly by District and all concerned stakeholders. In this process of refining LRAPs, some changes can happen but ideas of the community should override. Final LRAPs are communicated to the community just before the implementation starts.

1.4 IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

1.4.1 Implementation plan

The implementation of LRAPs is integrated in the District annual work plan and budget of each District (District Imihigo). This is done in the national planning calendar under the coordination of the Ministry in charge of Planning and Finance (MINECOFIN) and the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC).

Depending on the source of funding the process of annual work plan is guided by the following steps;

- **External funds to the District (Donors or NGOs)**

There are several ways of implementation, depending on the donor. These include the elaboration of LRAPs, such plans inform the district on the priority interventions to be done in a given fiscal year, with quantities and estimated cost, according to available

resources. Thus, the District reviews and approve the proposed budget according to its absorption capacity. This brings in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the District and the partner institution, defining (i) the responsibilities of each part, (ii) the duration of the MoU, (iii) the modalities of funds transfer, and (iv) the reporting system.

- **External funds to the community (Donors or NGOs)**

The elaboration of VLRAPs, such plans inform the district on the priority interventions to be done in a given fiscal year, with quantities and estimated cost, according to available resources. This brings in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the community representatives (e.g. Cooperatives, groups of people, etc.) and partner institution, defining (i) the responsibilities of each part, (ii) the duration of the MoU, (iii) the modalities of funds transfer, and (iv) the reporting system.

This approach requires the collaboration of the District and the funding agency to ensure the monitoring is facilitated and the district is highly involved in the project implementation. Where possible the agreements signed between community and partner institution should be witnessed by the District.

1.4.2 HR Mobilization

The staff to be employed in the community participation method are in three categories:

1. **Employee on daily basis**; such as manpower, Capita or chef of Manpower team (for example 30 labors) and data entry clerk in charge of entering man-powers data to ease the process of payment.
2. **Staff on short term contract**; including Site Technicians (in charge of providing the technical guidance for a team of 5-10 Capitas, and surveyors to provide the spatial guidance of where and the quantity of activities to be implemented) and the Assistant Accountant (to assist in beneficiaries recording and pre-payment process).
3. **Staff on consultancy framework**; Depending on the nature and complexity of works, a needed service with a profile that cannot be found in the District organic structure and the implementing institution, the District can proceed to the recruitment of a consultant following public procurement regulations.

Categories 1 and 3 are regulated by the institution in charge of the Public Procurement, while recruitment of category 2 is regulated by the Ministry in charge of public services and labor. The requirements for the proposed technical staff are determined by the District Project Coordination Committee (DPCC) to be established as part of project implementation arrangement at District level

Note: Interns, youth volunteers and other youth clubs available in the district and/or landscape can be used to reduce the project cost.

1.4.3 Procurement of goods and services

The success of the community approach will depend on the ability to procure services and goods on time and within the law. The authority in charge of public procurement establishes regulations on public procurement including the community participation approach.

Procurement of goods and services will be based on law governing public procurement. The tender document should define the modalities for the verification of goods or services either at the place where they are manufactured or during the time of delivery. The procuring entity should establish a team responsible for verifying, approving and receiving goods or services. Successful bidder continues to be responsible for the supplies he/she delivered until supply reception report is signed by the procuring entity. Goods or services must be delivered to the procuring entity in accordance with the provision of the tender documents. The contract for the supply of goods or services must define the payment modalities. The law provides that each a provider at community level cannot execute work with value more than 60,000,000 Rwf. For more details about the provisions of hiring local communities.

MINISTERIAL ORDER N° 002/20/10/TC OF 19/05/202 ESTABLISHING REGULATIONS ON PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Article 57: Execution of the tender by community participation

When, in delivery of services, it is established that the method the community participation may contribute to the economy, create employment and enhance community members' involvement in the activities of which they are beneficiaries, the population may participate in execution of works that have a value not exceeding forty million Rwandan francs (40,000,000 FRW). In that case, the procuring entity and the beneficiary population conclude a procurement contract signed between the two (2) parties.

However, when it is a work related to radical terracing anti-erosion ditches or planting trees, the beneficiary community may participate in execution of works that have a value not exceeding sixty million Rwandan francs (60,000,000 FRW).

Article 58: Organisation of community participation

For the purpose of provisions of Article 57 of this Order, the procuring entity organises the community participation as follows:

1^o assisted by local authorities, the procuring entity organises a meeting of the beneficiary community whereby the latter is informed of the activity, the scope of their participation and the benefit to the community in return;

2^o during the meeting the procuring entity organises for the beneficiary community, the representative of the procuring entity explains to the community the document containing obligations of both sides, the appropriate payment, the period after which participants are paid, payment modalities and any other details related to works execution;

3° after the meeting the procuring entity organises with the beneficiary community, the procuring entity establishes a list of community members committed to participate in works execution and everyone affixes the signature or fingerprint;

4° the procuring entity requires the community to avail their representative in all communication and transaction processes of the procuring entity and the community;

5° the procuring entity must avail technical equipment needed for the execution and must inform the community of ordinary equipment they may bring themselves for the execution;

6° for the supervision of works execution, the procuring entity uses its public servants and may hire a consultant to technically assist the community if considered necessary;

7° if it is a work related to radical terraces, anti-erosion ditches or planting trees that have a value from forty million Rwandan francs (40,000,000 FRW) to sixty million Rwandan francs (60,000,000 FRW), a procuring entity hires for this community a supervising consultant as per the law and regulations in public procurement;

8° assisted by supervisors, every participant signs on daily basis in the register or on a card prepared for that purpose;

9° the procuring entity pays participants and before execution every participant provides his or her full identification and if necessary his or her bank account where the payment may be deposited;

10° in case the procuring entity is unable to monitor the community participation; it delegates another public body capable to manage that activity.

A procuring entity that wants to use a community participation method must use it in respect of the requirements to use that method through e-procurement.

1.4.4 Community mobilization and capacity building

The community mobilization is an important aspect of **Community-Centric Forest Landscape Restoration Approach (CCFLRA)**. It creates LRAPs process awareness in order to gain community interest and ownership. It also supports sustainability and learning as the actions are implemented by building community capacity for monitoring and learning.

Based on the VLRPs process, aspects for capacity building are identified. Therefore, all concern units should prepare and provide capacity building packages for projects beneficiaries through trainings/ workshops. The landscape restoration may bring in (i) the agricultural practices such as agroforestry, smart agriculture, organic farming, terrace lay out, grass strips, etc. and (ii) tree nursery management and soil conservation packages. Inputs may be needed, for example, equipment, planting materials. This is done in agreement with implementing partners and the districts.

In this case, for AREECA, take RWARRI could as an example who could take community mobilization. Sub contract Agreement should be taken between executive entity and such organization to undertake community mobilization.

1.4.5 Implementation of LRPs

Based on the annual work-plan agreed at the District level (as defined in 0. 1.4.1 Implementation plan), communities are mobilized to implement the actions planned through LRPs. Key interventions may include not limited to; progressive terraces, moisture conservation technologies, grass strips, check dams, agroforestry, forest restoration on hill tops and conservation measures. Again, there must be gender consideration at the implementation phase.

1.4.6 Payment modalities

The payment rates for different restoration measures (numbers, meters, ha,) are established and agreed by the District or project implementing partners. The Capita updates the attendance list of man-power employed in VLRPs implementation at daily basis. Man-powers are paid every fortnight based on the lists established from the sites and approved at District level. The payment modalities will be done as follow:

1. Capitas establish the attendance lists on daily basis
2. Sites Technicians verify the lists established by Capitas (first verification)
3. Project officer or District Focal person
4. Executive Secretary of Sector, approve the lists verified by the sector agronomist and request the community payment to District office.
5. The lists are typed in excel sheets and payment synthesis made (an intern may be hired to facilitate in beneficiaries recording and prepayment process)
6. District Accountant verify the lists and prepare the payrolls
7. Director of Finance and E.S of District approve the payment

1.4.7 Maintenance and sustainability

Farmer-led monitoring committees should work with sector, cell, capitas and site technicians to decide on the required maintenance activities and the number of manpower to be employed for each task. The decision should be taken in community meeting that may be taken at landscape level

1.4.7. 1 MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (MEL)

Farmer-led monitoring, evaluation and learning is important. As it provides (i) a means for the project to monitor progress at the farm and landscape/village levels; and (ii) support the monitoring of the village Imihigo.

MEL has two main activities:

1. Monitoring, evaluating and reporting the progress of implemented actions based on what was planned as of performance contract (Imihigo).
2. Learning based on experience and exchange visits.

MEL will be done basically by villagers and project team supported by the Imihigo monitoring team at the district level.

1.4.7.2 Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Community monitoring is seen as an important aspect of promoting community led action. Monitoring of VLRPs implementation will be done by the community through “Comite de suivis” at village level, under the guidance of District officer (project focal point). Whilst the village/landscape action plans are aligned with District Imihigo, its monitoring has also to be in line with Imihigo monitoring supported by the community. In addition to quantitative monitoring, the community work will be referenced spatially using GIS mapping, with the help of the District officer in charge of Forestry who will work closely with the project focal point and make sure that these activities are progressively reported.

There will be follow-up visits done by the project team together with the local community, for the duration of the project. It is likely that villagers will become confident in planning and monitoring, which is important for sustainability. Such process may also help in updating the LRPs based on experience (adaptive planning and implementation).

1.4.7.3 Establishment of Planning and monitoring Committee

Community planning and monitoring committee is the eyes and ears of villagers. It helps to increase the accountability and quality of implemented LRPs, as well as to contribute to the management of restored landscapes. Drawn from or part of the community/village Planning and monitoring committee. The committee will be responsible of;

- Planning and conduct regular monitoring activities per quarter base on the ongoing landscape restoration activities
- Reporting the quality and quantity of actions to the project team/ District.
- Report the local community views to the project team
- Building lessons and report to community assembly

During the first community meeting with the District, villagers will elect a group of five people (gender balance) composed of chair, co-chair, secretary and 2 members. This committee will work closely with project team in charge of community mobilization as well.

1.4.7.4 Learning from actions

The community led monitoring will not only help in accurate monitoring but prior to this, villagers will learn from their own implementation. This supports local ownership and sets the scene for further implementation. Involving rural men and women in learning from the actions they plan and implement, (i) brings together diverse views to form a common understanding around a planned action; (ii) recognizes rural people learn

from how they manage and improve land management through farmer experimentation; (iii) and involving rural men and women empowers them to learn, plan and implement. *This is crucial in supporting sustainability beyond project cycles.* Such learning builds a robust evidence base over time.

Positive changes (social, implementation) are likely to be longer-term than project cycles. Repeated learning can help rural people, who may have different views of success, reflect on what change and success should look like.

In addition to the progress monitoring, the project will facilitate the exchange learning within a landscape and other landscapes. The project team will assist in (i) designing the learning case studies, (ii) ensure that lessons and experiences from activity implementation are identified, captured and synthesized, (iii) generating the knowledge and disseminate them using various channels. Lessons from VLRP implementation will form the basis for knowledge management. The lessons will be discussed through existing community assembly.

1.5 CONCLUSION

The Community Participatory Approach has a strong fit with Rwanda's decentralization strategy, where *Imihigo* is the key approach. The Community approach focuses on identifying the landscape challenges and propose the required actions towards the restoration. This guideline is flexible but has a focus on what the villagers and farmers can plan for in a short period of time, so they do not have to spend large amounts of time planning ("you cannot eat plans"). Rather a focus is placed on getting priority actions agreed to and starting to be implemented in a short space of time.

As such, it is important to see what villagers learn from the work they identify and implement. This is important to document and share as part of a) village ownership and improved understanding of how such work improves farming practice; b) as a basis for further action and improving existing action; c) supporting long term ownership and sustainability; and d) providing communications materials for policy influence and public relations. Such learning can take place as part planning, action, monitoring and learning, and can be organized by small committees at the village level to work with farmers on what they learn.

The Community Approach creates or re-enforces the importance of farmer and village ownership of the plan and the actions they have agreed to. Farmer and village monitoring and learning strengthens community empowerment and ability, which in turn contributes to longer term sustainability and reduced dependence on external support. These guidelines show how the community approach can be implemented in practice.



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