FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION (FLR) IN RWANDA
An attractive investment opportunity on the rise

It takes more than commitments to achieve desired restoration:

1. Huge investments are needed to achieve the ambitious restoration goals to which Rwanda committed in the context of the Bonn Challenge.

2. The main barrier to meeting the national FLR commitment and related investment targets is not the lack of investors willing to engage but rather the lack of knowledge and access to the variety of financing opportunities.

3. FLR involves both process and implementation. The government of Rwanda has established a highly enabling environment for FLR investment by putting in place a conducive policy, institutional and legal framework. All stakeholders should take this opportunity to leverage the restoration initiatives in Rwanda.

4. The main potential investment incentives in Rwanda include international financial instruments such as REDD+ and GCF as well as national private incentives which include impact investment funds and public funds such as FONERWA and other incentives. The Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and fiscal and regulatory incentives are yet to be introduced and/or operationalised.

5. A number of interventions are called for to stimulate more investment in FLR in Rwanda and develop new financing options for this sector. These include, among others, the development of a national PES strategy, the operationalization of the national Forest Investment Fund, and the introduction of new fiscal incentives (subsidies and/or tax credits for the sector).

I. Rwanda revives its momentum to restore 2 million ha of degraded land and forests

In 2011, Rwanda joined “The Bonn Challenge”, a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world’s deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020. As part of this initiative, Rwanda pledged to achieve a countrywide reversal of natural resources degradation with 2 million hectares restored (around 76% of the national territory) by year 2020. Achieving the FLR restoration goal will generate an estimated US$ 628 million per year in net benefits from watershed protection, improved crop yields and forest products, and will sequester up to 0.19 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent annually.

A study conducted in 2014 by MINIRENA in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) on Forest Landscape Restoration Opportunity Assessment in Rwanda concluded that at least 1.5 million ha are available for new restoration initiatives across the country through a number of activities ranging from agroforestry and silviculture to the establishment of protective forests on steep ridgetops and riparian/wetlands buffer zones as well as restoration of degraded areas within Protected Areas (PAs) and their buffer zones (Figure 1).

However, despite the good policy framework and efforts towards FLR, a recent review of policies, programs and investment incentives in FLR in Rwanda by IUCN and Rwanda Water and Forestry Authority (RWFA) in collaboration with the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS) shows that substantial FLR investment and incentives need to be enhanced in order to adequately integrate FLR in the national development agenda (IUCN 2017). Since its commitment to FLR, $ 458,561,802,657 have been invested in FLR related activities in Rwanda. Based on a global estimate by FAO, suggesting that $360 billions are needed to achieve the FLR global target of 150 million ha by 2020, Rwanda has achieved 11.3% of the expected national FLR target ($ 4,680,000,000).

IUCN (2017) also found that unprecedented opportunities now exist for increased investments in forestry and agroforestry related business in Rwanda. In addition, different incentives have been put in place to stimulate this sector and attract new investors. However, FLR investment in Rwanda has been largely driven by (national and international) public funds so far except for some few ad-hoc investments from private players and development partners (MINIFOM, 2010).

The present brief provides a review of existing FLR investment opportunities in Rwanda and sheds light on the various incentives that have been put in place. Its aim is to attract increased investment in this promising sector which will help drive forward the country’s green and climate-resilient economy.
II. Incentives and FLR investment insights in Rwanda

In order to address different problems that impede Forest Landscape Restoration and Sustainable Forest Management in Rwanda; there is a need for financial mechanisms and incentives to encourage farmers and investors to adopt practices and activities that will overcome obstacles for forest restoration and thus enhance better management of landscapes in general.

According to the World Bank’s Programme on Forests (PROFOR, 2004), four forms of incentives are used to foster Sustainable Forest Management across the world. These are: Fiscal incentives, financial incentives, land owner incentives and concessional incentives. The existing incentives of this kind in Rwanda are outlined in the sections below.

2.1. International Financial Incentives

**REDD++ and Voluntary Carbon Markets**

The REDD+ programme is expected to provide positive incentives to reduce Green House Gases emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. When implemented, REDD++ will incentivize investment in sustainable forestry and land-use sectors as well in sustainable management of forests and forest carbon stock conservation.

Rwanda has developed its REDD+ Readiness Proposal in 2014. However, not all required structures have been put in place to kick-start this programme and funds are being sought as part of the new National Forest Investment Plan currently being developed.

**Rwanda Reaping the Fruits of climate change financing mechanisms**

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) as an operating entity of the Financial Mechanism of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change together with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) represent a huge opportunity for financing FLR in Rwanda.

On top of these multilateral climate change financing mechanisms, bilateral mechanisms such as the German’s International Climate Initiative (IKI) have also been supporting FLR investments in Rwanda and they can be leveraged further to drive forward this sector in the country.

Finally, there exist numerous impact investment and venture philanthropy funds that can be leveraged by FLR investors to match funds to include restoration activities in their business models.

2.2. National Financial Incentives

**FONERWA: A home Grown Environment and Climate Change Fund**

FONERWA provides funding for the environmental and climate resilience projects in Rwanda and it represents a good incentive for FLR in the country.

Indeed, this government-backed fund has been driving investment in Rwanda’s natural infrastructure (forest landscapes, wetlands and watershed protection) and it is expected to set an example for private sector investment by building a business case for private investors and matching those investments to support more landscape restoration activities.

**Undertaking PES for Greater Ecosystem Protection**

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) by different users of the services (including provision, regulation, supporting and cultural services) is considered a good incentive for investment in forest landscape restoration.

Normally, it is understood that PES is mainly based on the opportunity costs; i.e. the costs incurred by the custodians to undertake sustainable practices towards the target resource which will thus preserve or restore a given environmental service, such as water services, carbon storage, and biodiversity conservation.

Thus, PES not only makes economic sense but also is ecologically beneficial. PES being largely driven by voluntary initiatives, the increasing awareness among businesses for corporate social responsibility represents a good opportunity for PES. Moreover, the policy and institutional landscape in Rwanda is conducive enough to support the development and implementation of PES schemes in the country.
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III. Shaping FLR through Conducive Policy environment in Rwanda

The opportunity for FLR investment in Rwanda is demonstrated by the existing heightened political will and commitment to support measures that constitute the national governance framework for forests, land and other aspects related to FLR.

This support is seen through the incorporation of FLR-related elements in various policies and government programs and the overall emphasis the government puts on the promotion of long-term investment in the country. The sections below outline examples of such provisions included in national FLR related policies.

**Securing Tenure for Prospering FLR**

The government has established a land system that is secure and introduced land reforms that are necessary for good management and proper use of national land resources (MINIRENA, 2012). Under the land policy implementation, laws on land were adopted (Organic Law of 2005 revised 2013).

Furthermore, a National Land Use and Development Master Plan has been developed to guide land use planning across the country and land registration covering the whole country has been conducted resulting in the establishment of a georeferenced database for every parcel of land in the whole country.

The full implementation of the land policy constitutes a big encouragement for investment in FLR because it provides a framework within which forests can be created securely and in the right places and managed for higher productivity and optimum provision of ecosystem services.

**Rwanda’s Dream For Sustainable Biomass Energy (BEST)**

BEST was prepared with the purpose to make the supply of wood and charcoal sustainable (EUEI, 2008) by focusing on four pillars: energy conservation, rehabilitation of forest plantations, fuel substitution and capacity building.

The analysis on which BEST is based reveals that the national supply/demand balance of fuel wood shows an average annual deficit of 1.8 Mt.

BEST concludes with a statement that Rwanda still has many years ahead to go until its needs in biomass fuel are met. Indeed, quick estimates indicate that by year 2020, at least 7 million people will still depend on biomass fuel (against 9.4 million when EDPRS II was developed (NISR, 2008).

BEST thus offers a realistic picture of the prospects of wood energy and proposes pathways for sustainable consideration of the biomass energy embedded in its four pillars.

The implementation of BEST constitutes a good incentive for investment in FLR because it recognizes the increasing demand for fuel wood and encourages adoption of many technologies that will stimulate the wood market in Rwanda and catalyse the development of wood value-chain in the country.

**Anchoring FLR on Public Private Partnership (PPP) Principles**

Despite a number of relevant initiatives launched and allocated funding in forest restoration, there is still a big gap to be closed to reach full landscape restoration in the country.

Rwanda considers private investments as an opportunity to bridge this gap.

Indeed, Rwanda aims to have a private sector-led economy by 2020 and private sector involvement is poised to be the cornerstone in achieving stated objectives in all Rwandan policies.

The National Private Sector Development Strategy established in 2013 emphasizes on attracting funds from development partners as well as the private sector through PPPs.

This is a good opportunity and incentive for FLR as clear directives and structures have been put in place to guide the establishment and implementation of such ventures.
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Promising Agents of Change: Small private actors and Community Enterprises

Nature-Based Community Enterprises (NBCEs) is an emerging concept in Rwanda where many community groups operating in cooperatives engage in various profit-making activities based on nature. Rwanda recognizes the importance of cooperatives in national economy and various incentive mechanisms have been put in place to boost investment in these important economic entities.

IUCN (2017) found that cooperatives operating in the forestry sector especially those involved in tree seedlings business lack the capacity to compete in tenders while they were in the best position to resolve the low tree survival rate problem observed in national afforestation and reforestation programmes.

Fortunately, the national cooperative promotion policy is expected to remedy this issue through its provisions to develop this sector including building capacity of cooperative members, linking them with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and establishing a deposit guarantee fund to protect cooperatives against financial illiquidity.

All of these interventions will make community-based enterprises the true engine of FLR investment in the country.

Home grown solutions: an innovative framework for integrating FLR in national development interventions

Rwanda has built its reputation for concocting innovative models for achieving its development aspirations in harmony with its socio-economic and historical context. The implementation of these unique programmes has allowed the country to make strides in domains ranging from justice, to public management, transparency, pro-poor development, and social cohesion. A number of such initiatives directly support FLR and are believed to offer a framework to accelerate the achievement of national FLR commitments. These are:

- **Girinka (One cow per poor Family)** programme has the objective to root out extreme symptoms of poverty through distribution of cows to the poorest segments of the society. Girinka greatly supports FLR because its full implementation will reduce farmers dependency on chemical fertilizers and the increased application of manual will restore soils fertility and reduce their fragility to degradation.

- **Umuganda (Community Works)** is a citizen engagement programme where communities regularly come together to perform various collective projects. It constitutes a big FLR opportunity given the fact that tree planting is a popular theme among projects under the scheme.

- **Imihigo (Performance contracts)** constitutes a tool for management of public affairs and self-commitment as an individual or an institution. Given their competitive aspect, Imihigo represent a big potential for accelerating FLR because they can stimulate the local translation and implementation of national FLR commitments at district, community, or even household levels.

Taking FLR in Rwanda to the next level

Rwanda is often recognized as a model for responsiveness, innovation, and efficiency in attracting investments. Its economy grew by more than 8% per year between 2001 and 2015; corruption is low; and it has one of the best “ease of doing business” rankings in Africa.

Regarding investment in FLR sector, the very conducive environment that exists in Rwanda and many emerging opportunities make this sector the best to invest in. The following are some of the key highlights of making the FLR sector even more attractive for investment in Rwanda:

1. Private companies in Rwanda should further allocate funds to FLR through Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

2. Citizen-based initiatives such as crowdfunding platforms should be promoted in Rwanda as an innovative approach for funding FLR projects as well as other land owners across the country who will be willing to invest in forest plantations activities.

3. Ecological compensation should be emphasized on as an opportunity (or obligation when required by law) for companies to compensate their negative impacts on forest ecosystems and this compensation can be used to boost forest restoration in the landscape.

4. Green bonds restoration should be initiated in Rwanda in order to provide incentives for small-scale landowners and farmers to restore land on a large scale.

5. Coverage of risks linked to FLR investments is necessary to attract investors. Partial risk guarantee programmes can be designed for large-scale restoration projects, and insurance/reinsurance companies are called on to design adapted schemes for securing FLR investment patterns in the face of climate change and other risks.

6. More efforts should be put into gathering and sharing information on successful business models from early adopters that can inspire action from other actors.

7. There is need for increased capacity of community enterprises to effectively invest in forest-related businesses and they should be trained in various silviculture techniques and different wood processing methods.

8. Strong synergies and partnership should be built between public and private sectors and public sector should support and provide an enabling environment for FLR investments by developing and enforcing adequate regulations and legal frameworks.

9. PES Policy and Legal framework should be established to regulate and support effective investment opportunities in forest sector.