

ISDRS – IUNCBD Policy Brief on Sustainable Landscapes Initiatives: Expectations & Challenges

Addressing the UN Biodiversity Conference 2018

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Input from ISDRS Topic group 5d

1. Issue to be addressed

Unsustainable and expanding production of agricultural commodities, such as beef, soy, and cocoa, is a key global driver of deforestation and biodiversity loss. One of the most common solutions, sustainability standards and certification schemes, have expanded (Lernoud *et al*, 2017), but there are limits to their effectiveness as a sole mechanism for effecting wider change, particularly on environmental sustainability issues and poverty reduction (Vermeulen, 2015; Nelson, Rueda and Vermeulen, 2018). At worst, weak standard systems reinforce poor practices (Changing Markets Foundation, 2018). Sustainable Landscape Initiatives (SLIs) have emerged in recent years, partially in response to the limitations set out by the body of work on standards' impacts. There has been a convergence of market demand from global corporates for risk-reduced sourcing options and partnership collaboration beyond standards and focused upon the landscape level, and integrated conservation, environment and development initiatives, including those linked to REDD+ (Wolosin, 2016; Nelson and Phillips, 2018).

SLIs tend to involve new governance institutions aligned to the landscape level, incentives to change behaviour and enhance ecosystem services as well as monitoring and learning components. Great expectations of companies, donors and sustainable commodity specialists also require significant caution and empirical research. Governments have a role to play in providing the right enabling environment and supporting their implementation. Below we set out the key research and implications for policy-makers.

2. Key findings in recent scientific research

- Sustainable Landscape Initiatives are emerging as a means of balancing competing land use demands for sustainability objectives, including forest protection (Scherr *et al*, 2017). Global agribusiness companies seek to de-risk land investments, differentiate themselves in the market and to secure supply and this market demand can potentially catalyse change, including responses from national and sub-national government entities. Conservation and development actors working on integrated sustainable land use approaches, often linked to climate finance, such as REDD+ schemes, have been working on instituting multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms in specific territories. Analysis of 39 subnational jurisdictions in 12 countries, covering 28% of the global tropical forests, with variable deforestation rates/remaining forest levels, found formal commitments to act on forest protection/restoration and support innovative policies '*innovative policies and programmes...prioritizing indigenous peoples, local communities and smallholder farmers as key beneficiaries*' and '*deforestation has declined in half (19 of 39) of*

the jurisdictions below official projected subnational forest reference levels' (Stickler et al, 2018, p1).

- There is much still to learn about whether Sustainable Landscape Initiatives (SLIs) are effective in practice and for whom. Multi-stakeholder initiatives have been promoted in sustainable agriculture for some time, but questions have been raised about their effectiveness, participation and framing, with possible risks of reinforcing global value chain power inequalities (Nelson and Tallontire, 2014; Nelson and Phillips, 2018; Krauss, 2018) and their capacity to tackle deforestation is still uncertain.
- A key pre-condition is strong land tenure security and land rights for local communities and indigenous communities, and innovative legal empowerment of communities to defend their land rights and negotiate with companies exist (Cotula, 2018). Beyond governance innovations, conditional incentive-based mechanisms are required (involving value chain changes) that, in combination, can change landscape actors' behaviour (Haggar et al, 2014), plus disincentives to protect standing forests.
- It is not yet established that SLIs can outweigh the competitive dynamics which shape corporate strategies in global production networks (Yeung and Coe, 2014), plus the rise of polycentric trade and Asian consumption, given the lower demands for sustainability standards in these markets (Horner and Nadvi, 2018).
- SLIs require long-term support: Building political electoral support is crucial at sub-national levels, as well as national level. National or provincial electoral political turnover is a challenge given the longer-term timeframes required for forest protection (Boyd et al, 2016). There are risks that value chain and landscape power inequalities and existing land use conflicts could be exacerbated (Nelson and Phillips, 2018; Krauss, 2018). Sustainable agricultural intensification policies are needed at landscape levels (Stickler et al, 2018).
- Practical challenges revolve around significant public and civic capacity gaps (Boyd et al, 2018), given the work required to build multi-scale, effectively articulated, governance mechanisms, which also give adequate space for community-level voices and participation. Additional studies and work can help support the latter. Facilitation is an intensive process, requiring strong and sustained facilitation support and organizational capacity strengthening. Attention to corruption issues is also required. Capacity strengthening e.g. producer organizations and civic actors, is needed to support agricultural smallholder producers, community members in negotiation processes to increase the chances of fair outcomes. This should include consideration of food security issues (Ros Tonen et al 2015). Value chain actors and companies also lack expertise in specific areas, such as complying with Free, Prior and Informed Consent processes.
- Lambin et al (2018) identify the major limitations of recent corporate commitments on zero deforestation, including limited transparency and traceability, selective adoption, smallholder marginalization and leakage risks. On the latter, leakage risks are significant for sustainable supply chain initiatives, including SLIs, e.g. deforestation could be displaced to neighbouring landscapes and jurisdictions without such initiatives in place. More scrutiny is needed of how corporate sourcing strategies and governments respond to this issue vis-à-vis SLIs, including jurisdictional approaches. A global framework linking '*aspiring*', jurisdictional approaches is suggested (Stickler et al, 2018), but research is also required that tracks how corporate sourcing practices in agriculture change in practice.

3. Implications for policy makers

The CBD programme entitled, 'Economics, Trade and Incentive Measures' addresses the incentives for trade in products that promote biodiversity conservation. A clear policy is needed from

governments to support Sustainable Landscape Initiatives and ensure that they are effective in achieving environmental goals, such as forest protection, especially targeting of biodiversity hotspots, and restoration and sustainable intensification in mosaic landscapes, but are also that they have equitable outcomes.

- Supplier country governments should fully support Sustainable Landscape Initiatives, including governance and incentive-mechanism innovations, by ensuring that they create appropriate laws and regulations, ensure their enforcement and support land use planning with targeted of high carbon stock and high biodiversity value areas. Investment in education on forest conservation is important.
- Jurisdictional sourcing standards of adequate stringency should be supported. Public procurement should be aligned.
- Governments and donors can support capacity strengthening for smallholder producer organisations and negotiation capacity with companies, for community-based forestry systems and community legal empowerment. Producer governments should scale up support for secure land rights for rural communities and indigenous peoples. Free and Informed Prior Consent processes are essential where companies are sourcing or investing. Legal empowerment support from donors, civil society and governments is urgently needed to ensure that SLIs are equitable in process and outcome.
- Supplier country governments should engage in regional initiatives, with neighbouring governments, to develop joint roadmaps, and tackling issues of leakage.
- Governments and donors should support real time monitoring and critical reflection on what works with especial consideration for issues of community voice and the equity of processes and outcomes.

These proposals should be added to the discussions on [Item 22. Mainstreaming of biodiversity within and across sectors](#) and [Recommendation SBI-2/3](#) and [Recommendation SBI-2/4](#)

4. Lead author(s) and related research institutes

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