# 3

# Forest (landscape) restoration governance

## Institutions, interests, ideas, and their interlinked logics

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### 3.1 Introduction

Forest landscape restoration (FLR) has gained increased international attention in the political sphere. It resonates with several United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as restoring land is expected to help tackle climate change, support biodiversity, and ensure human well-being (UNCCD 2018). In the decades leading up to the SDGs, numerous initiatives evolved focusing on or related to FLR, promoting FLR as a solution to these challenges, including regulating the hydrological cycle, protecting soil, as well as improving livelihoods of the poor. These initiatives have emerged at diverse levels from the local to the global, the latter prominently represented by the Bonn Challenge and the New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF). A full range of actors, comprising public and private actors as well as civil society, are involved in propagating, supporting, and implementing FLR.

Current FLR concepts and initiatives seek to advance century-long experience with site-level forest restoration efforts to larger landscapes or even global scales. This global FLR agenda is mirrored in a global proliferation of restoration investments and interventions and a firm belief that it is "possible to enhance the overall benefits to people and biodiversity at that scale" (Mansourian 2005, 11).

However, critical voices are questioning the win-win narratives of FLR (and other global initiatives), pointing to potential losses and losers and new conflicts of interest (Mansourian 2021; Seymour 2020). Within the forest sector, early critics concentrated on technical problems of implementing FLR such as possible unintended ecological effects (e.g., Thomas et al. 2015). Lately, concerns are growing over the social and economic implications of when FLR is translated into mere tree-planting schemes, including flaws in the governance of FLR (Pritchard 2021). One issue is the asymmetries in land access and control over resources that can lead to the exclusion of local communities, pastoralists, and minorities, specifically women (e.g., Chazdon et al. 2021; Elmhirst et al. 2017; Turner et al. 2021). Existing studies often concentrate on case studies at the local level (e.g., Baynes et al. 2019). Nonetheless, they suggest paying greater attention to how politics and often asymmetric power relations drive restoration (Elias et al. 2021; Pritchard 2021).

This chapter aims to respond to a clear gap in knowledge relating to FLR and to broaden the perspective beyond single case studies and local-level analysis. It

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contributes to the FLR debate by critically reflecting upon and discussing the international governance of FLR, understanding governance as "the formal and informal bundles of rules, roles and relationships that define and regulate the social practices of state and nonstate actors in international affairs" (Slaughter et al. 1998, 371). While this analysis focuses on international governance, we draw on examples from local and regional levels to reflect the practical and social implications and interlinkages among different levels of governance. We take a historically informed perspective and review the different rationales at play that underlie FLR and other tree-planting schemes. The chapter starts from the assumption, following Nicholls and Huybrechts (2016), that FLR as a political arena reflects power asymmetries rather than a balance of interests; it is characterized by distinct power relations and is dominated by particular rationales legitimized through specific narratives.

We analyze FLR governance and explore polymorphous power relations in respective governance arrangements. We do so with a tentative, interpretative framework drawing on literature about policy change, which highlights three overlapping and often competing dimensions: institutions, interests, and ideas (e.g., Brockhaus and Angelsen 2012; Campbell 1998; Esping-Andersen 1996; Hall and Thelen 2008; Hay 2004; Korpi and Palme 2003; Schmidt 2008; Scott 2008). With our analytical framework, we pursue the following research questions: How do institutions, interests, ideas, and their interlinkages constitute different FLR logics? Which legitimation narratives underpin each respective logic? Where are the silences in the specific narratives? Figure 3.1 provides an overview of our theoretical dimensions and conceptual lens.

Institutions, interests, and ideas serve as analytical lenses when identifying and characterizing three key logics driving FLR today, and its predecessors over time. Each logic reflects different interests, underpinned by distinct beliefs and narratives that legitimize FLR actions, while being embedded in institutional structures that are characterized by path dependencies and stickiness (Backstrand and Lovbrand 2006; Delabre et al. 2020; Hajer and Versteeg 2005; Leipold et al. 2019; Schmidt 2008). We argue that these logics are shaping current FLR processes and outcomes; hence we place them at the center of our analysis. To analyze the


**Figure 3.1** Analytical framework to unpack FLR logics

different ideas and meanings of FLR, we build on three narratives that implicitly define and legitimize the FLR logics: win-win, socio-technological implementation, and the critical FLR narrative.

In the following sections, we describe the scope and methodology of our analysis (Section 3.2), which includes a conceptualization of institutions, interests, and ideas and a particular focus on three different FLR legitimation narratives (win-win, implementation, critique). We then apply our analytical framework to examine the three FLR logics we have identified (Section 3.3). The results will be discussed in Section 3.4 and Section 3.5 concludes the chapter.

## 3.2 Scope and methodology

The substantive scope and main data sources of this assessment include relevant studies carried out within different academic disciplines including economics, ecology, political science, and sociology. In this chapter, we focus on international FLR governance, while empirical insights are derived from multiple geographical areas.

The chapter provides an in-depth 3I analysis (institutions, interests, ideas: the latter includes three legitimation narratives) of different FLR logics: (i) sustainability, (ii) community, and (iii) production. Logics may overlap and refer to multiple interests at the same time. The logics also differ from each other by highlighting different discursive elements and/or remaining silent regarding others. We identify these logics through a review of historic and contemporary scientific literature and technical reports that refer to and rationalize FLR and tree-planting schemes and that provide insights into related policies and politics. We then analyze these three FLR logics by tracing their respective institutions, interests, and ideas based on existing knowledge and literature on past and current developments related to the governance of tree planting and forest restoration. As a final step, we critically discuss the logics and the underlying power relations by asking how these logics are constituted and legitimized with different narratives.

### 3.2.1 Institutions, interests, and ideas in FLR

Institutions in international governance refer to the norms that define and regulate appropriate behavior. Institutions, appearing as instruments, statements, or other forms, are a central component of social structure and may vary in the degree of institutionalization (Bernstein 2000). Institutions are not "neutral" rules out there, but the outcomes of political processes in which different beliefs and discourses have been competing. We argue that institutions, interests, and ideas are intimately interlinked (cf. Schmidt 2008). While existing institutions are the (sometimes unintended) consequence of earlier institutional decisions, these typically reflect the (privileged) preferences of the most powerful or dominant actors. Likewise, existing institutions shape the preferences and power relations of actors in a given governance setting.

Interests describe the preferences of actors; depending on the distribution of resources and power in a governance setting, certain actors may be more capable of attaining and exercising their interests than others. Within international governance processes, private and other non-state actors may gain authority alongside governmental authorities (Büthe 2004; Odoom 2016), adding to the power of states and intergovernmental/international organizations (Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007; Kahler and Lake 2003).

Ideas (including beliefs and discourses) affect policy and practice, as they frame the problem and present a limited set of choices of what is "reasonable" or what is put forward as "feasible," for example, in a context of forest and climate change (Brockhaus and Angelsen 2012). With the argumentative turn in environmental governance and the study of public policy and planning (Hajer 1995), the role of discursive legitimation gained momentum. (De)Legitimation refers to the process of making particular governance goals, procedures, or outcomes (less) more acceptable or plausible to society or selected audiences (Blum 2020; Steffek 2009).

### 3.2.2 (De)Legitimation narratives in FLR

Legitimation (or delegitimation) narratives are a set of ideas that assign (or take away) relevance and legitimacy to specific governance features, scales, and subject positions, while neglecting others (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2007, 2016; Blum 2020). At the same time, (de)legitimation narratives support certain interests and thus empower and disempower specific FLR actors. Elements in these (de)legitimation narratives can be linked to narratives and discourses already established in the wider governance literature (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006, 2007, 2016), in particular, win-win promises in ecological modernization discourses, managerial and science/expert emphases in green governmentality, and critical contestations of these two narratives in civic environmentalism and climate justice. In order to unpack the power relations of how FLR is justified and positioned, we briefly outline here three FLR (de)legitimation narratives that are connected to broader meta-discourses (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006) and that will be used to critically reflect tradeoffs and goal conflicts within the dimension of ideas.

#### FLR win-win narrative

Win-win narratives of FLR highlight the multiple benefits that may be simultaneously achieved within one shared landscape, or within a mosaic of landscapes. Often, a monetary compensation logic underpins the win-win narrative, pursuing promises of ecosystem service payments for farmers or carbon credits for the private sector. In the context of the Reforestation of the Brazilian Atlantic forest both "natural regeneration" and "Brazilian livelihoods" are presented in one such win-win scenario (Silva 2021). This narrative nourishes ideas that there is a place to satisfy everyone's needs in a perfectly integrated landscape (Reinecke and Blum 2018). This conceptualization of FLR as a win-win situation resonates well with arguments of ecological modernization, which emphasize that environmental governance arrangements are a positive-sum game and that sustainable development, economic growth, and climate

protection can be achieved simultaneously (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006). Yet the possible tradeoffs and political conflicts over access and rights to land are not considered. Risks at the local level are perceived as manageable, and an optimistic view prevails that they can be addressed by well-designed institutions.

The win-win narrative holds that successful FLR projects are required to follow good forest governance principles agreed upon at the global level "considering tenure, policies, and institutions [as well as] transparency, accountability, and public participation" (Mansourian 2016, 271). FLR efforts are expected to use integrative techniques of monitoring, capacity building, and benefit sharing (Pistorius and Kiff 2017; Sayer et al. 2013), or to adopt a landscape approach, which can help to avoid conflicts and contestation. The win-win narrative suggests that different, even competing, interests need to and can be aligned across a landscape. Collaborative multi-stakeholder processes allow the engagement of relevant stakeholders. The optimistic faith in efficient multi-stakeholder governance, however, may naively underestimate preexisting power structures in which these processes are embedded (Faysse 2006; Karambiri and Brockhaus 2019).

### FLR implementation narrative

The FLR implementation narrative is embedded in green governmentality and ecological modernization discourses on forest governance (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006). It acknowledges tradeoffs that may exist between climate mitigation, adaptation, rural development, economic growth, and biodiversity conservation goals. The main challenge under this narrative is the implementation of FLR, which is, however, considered manageable. Framed as a genuine problem of implementation, the narrative focuses on the political, financial, and technical interventions that serve as key tools for fostering implementation (Mansourian et al. 2020; Reinecke and Blum 2018). Central actors are the state, the private sector, and the research and academic sector; one of the main concerns is related to the ability of establishing an institutional setting that is able to change incentive structures and attract the private sector (Reinecke and Blum 2018) (see example in Box 3.1).

### FLR critical narrative

The critical FLR narrative goes further than the concerned variation of the implementation narrative. The critical narrative considers FLR as an expression of neocolonialism. It argues that in FLR the claims tying exploitative tree plantation activities to some sort of restoration narrative in forestry can be traced back to colonial times in the 19th century (Kröger 2013a; Murray 1992; Smiet 1990). Rather than referring to a genuinely technical implementation challenge, the critical narrative rejects and delegitimizes FLR projects that are not truly participatory and community centered. In essence, FLR is fundamentally challenged and perceived as not much more than "old wine in new bottles," which will not contribute to a desirable transformation in the land use sector, including changes away from unsustainable business-as-usual practices. It is considered problematic that the reforestation of "degraded" or "non-productive" forest landscapes consists of planting trees to establish forest plantations, while ecosystems and informal land uses are neglected (Aerts and Honnay 2011; Barr and Sayer 2012; Lukas and Peluso 2020).

Critical research on FLR focusing on political and social questions is only beginning to emerge, together with first practical implementation experiences (Fleischman et al. 2020; Reinecke and Blum 2018). A review of this literature suggests that certain issues and concerns known from environmental policy and governance initiatives preceding FLR are in fact resurfacing in the debates on FLR (for an overview see Brockington and Igoe 2006; Delabre et al. 2020; Mansourian 2016; McDermott and Ituerte-Lima 2016). These overlapping issues and concerns include: (i) the focus on carbon rather than on the entire socio-ecological system (Lewis et al. 2019), (ii) the risk of green grabbing, where, for instance, rural people are resettled or denied access to make space for industrial restoration projects (Erbaugh et al. 2020), (iii) the prioritization of approaches oriented to productivity and top-down governance (Fleischman et al. 2020; Reinecke and Blum 2018), (iv) the anthropocentric focus on wilderness prevailing in the "Global North" and misunderstandings of ecosystems (Bond et al. 2019; Vetter 2020), (v) the lack of acknowledgment of local communities and traditional knowledge (Erbaugh et al. 2020; Fleischman et al. 2020), and finally, (vi) the lack of consideration of justice and legitimacy (Fleischman et al. 2020).

## 3.3 Three logics of FLR

Building on the reviewed literature, we shed light on three different logics that—as we argue—currently dominate FLR: the global sustainability logic, the community logic, and the production logic. We analyze how institutions, interests, and ideas constitute these logics and—as in relation to the ideas dimension—we reflect on how they are discursively legitimated via different narratives as identified in our analytical framework. Figure 3.2 gives an overview of the investigated logics and introduces specific

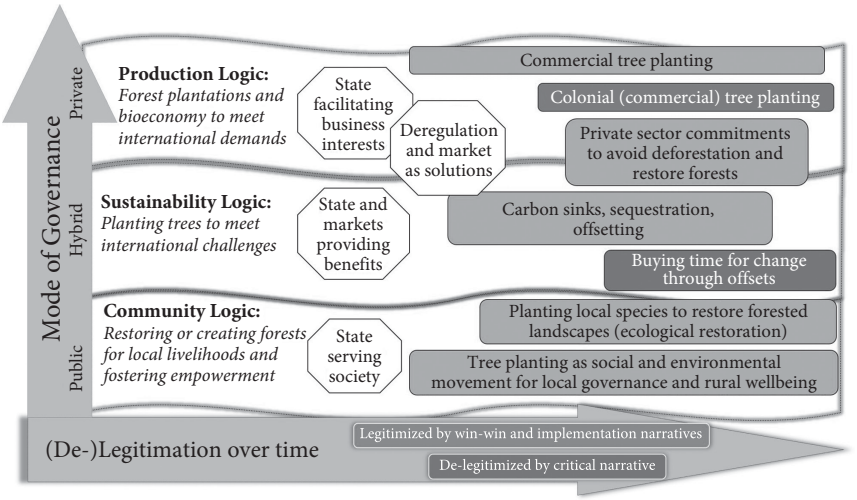


**Figure 3.2** Logics and discursive elements promoting tree planting in the Global South over time and under different modes of governance

justifications and objectives related to these. The figure also highlights the evolution of these logics over time and implications for governance by state, markets, and society as well as core elements of the legitimation narratives.

### 3.3.1 The global sustainability logic: Planting trees to meet international challenges

Afforestation, reforestation, and forest restoration have been popular responses to the global environmental crisis for decades; tree planting as panacea features prominently on international and domestic policy agendas (Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006).

#### Institutions

In 1987 the Brundtland Commission published the "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future,"[1] marking the first major global initiative to promote restoration of forest landscapes. The report recommended a set of international policy measures for sustainable land use, including restoration of degraded areas. Building on this report, the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit gave rise to three international conventions: Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD),[2] United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD),[3] and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).[4] While the three sister conventions are not focused on forests and their restoration as such, they offer an international framework of global norms for forest restoration and forest plantations.

Within this historical context, and due to its embeddedness in the institutional environment of UN conventions, the Bonn Challenge can be described as a landmark for FLR (Laestadius et al. 2015). It builds on the science-driven process in the early years of the millennium to jointly develop and pursue a concept for FLR (for an overview see Mansourian 2021). The Bonn Challenge is a policy-driven, multi-stakeholder platform promoting FLR in global environmental governance. It was launched by the Government of Germany in 2011, led by the Ministry of Environment and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) with support from the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration (GPFLR). The Bonn Challenge aims to restore 150 Mha of the world's deforested and degraded land by 2020. Building on the NYDF, its target was extended to 350 Mha to be restored by 2030 (Mansourian 2021).

These processes paved the way toward the UN's Declaration of a "Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030" (UN Decade), as adopted by the UN General Assembly in March 2020. Supported by more than 70 nations, several international organizations (including United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), and IUCN, and other global initiatives), the UN Decade shares the same FLR goals as the Bonn Challenge and NYDF. The UN Decade aims to facilitate a broad public appreciation for healthy ecosystems to strengthen measures designed to restore degraded ecosystems while contributing to the goals of the three UN Conventions (UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD) as well as to the SDGs.

FLR is embedded in the paradigm of sustainable development, which is formalized via the UN's SDGs. Specifically, FLR is meant to support the SDG target 15.3, which calls on countries to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) by 2030. This goal is supported by the UNCCD, which integrated and adopted LDN at its 12th Conference of the Parties in October 2015 (UNCCD 2015a, decision 3). Moreover, FLR is closely linked to SDG 2—no hunger, improving food security, and promoting sustainable agriculture—as it builds on the integrated landscape approach, which promotes the sustainable use of both forest and agricultural land (FAO 2022a; IUCN 2015). An important part of the global sustainability logic is the vision of improving food security by enhancing land productivity, creating regional value chains, and improving local food supplies.

### Interests

The global FLR initiatives draw on and are supported by a broad set of multinational organizations that promote sustainable development, however with different agendas: for example, UN Environment focuses on nature and climate; the FAO, sustainable agriculture and conservation; the World Bank (WB), economic development. All of these organizations are involved directly or indirectly in the Bonn Challenge or its regional spinoffs, the UN Decade, the NYDF, etc. Following the working logics and interests of these organizations, FLR is meant to contribute in multiple ways to the achievement of the SDGs and the three major UN conventions. Restoring forests and landscapes is a practical way to increase food and water security, sequester carbon, enhance adaptability and resilience to climate change, and minimize the risks associated with conflicts over natural resources and large-scale migration.

With IUCN at the heart of its organization, the Bonn Challenge is furthermore nurtured by strong conservation ideas. Based on the concept of "ecosystem restoration," as supported in particular by the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), planting trees should recover native ecosystems and prioritize nature-based solutions (Ecosystem Restoration Thematic Group 2021; SER International Science & Policy Working Group 2004). The Bonn Challenge explicitly references Aichi Biodiversity Target 15 of the CBD—to restore 15% of all degraded land by 2020—reaffirming the ecological focus of the convention.

The need to protect or restore forests has been increasingly linked to the global agenda to address climate change. As a consequence, the Bonn Challenge and many FLR projects are closely tied to national strategies of climate action on deforestation. Forests play a critical role in UN framework agreements, for example, the Paris Agreement under UNFCCC, and are addressed in political instruments like afforestation and reforestation projects under the Clean Development Mechanism or Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+, where restoration may fall under "+" activities or the second D). The NYDF, agreed at the 2014 UN Climate Summit, has been endorsed by more than 50 governments, more than 50 companies, and more than 50 societal groups. It takes up the aims and implementation of the Bonn Challenge and links them with the climate logic of carbon mitigation. With the declaration the engagement of the private sector becomes a strong motive supported by the involved national governments, nourishing the idea that

global sustainability goals, such as ecological restoration or rural development, can go hand in hand with business development and exploring new markets.

Ideas

The global sustainability logic shares key arguments and framings with the "Win-Win" narrative, with one "win" referring to people and their livelihoods, the second win referring to nature and climate. The promise of simultaneously enabling rural development for local people, mitigating climate change, and improving ecosystem health makes FLR an attractive idea for several UN communities and funding organizations. From the perspective of the critical narrative, this neglects possible tradeoffs or goal conflicts (Griscom et al. 2017). FLR links to other global logics such as REDD + or tree plantations for global carbon offsetting. The global logic to effectively mitigate carbon emissions by planting trees has often led to a decrease of biodiversity due to industrial tree plantations (Overbeek et al. 2012). Goal conflicts are suspected to arise, for example, between climate change, biodiversity benefits, and other needs—specifically those of the current users of "degraded" or "abandoned" land (Mansourian 2021). In the NYDF context, the aim of mitigating carbon through ecological restoration prominently ties the FLR agenda to ideas of marketability and economic development (i.e., carbon credit benefits). In this sense, a logic that highlights carbon mitigation may be in greater alignment with traditional aims pursued in timber or biomass markets than with the ecological restoration and biodiversity motives.

Finally, there is a risk that promises of planting trees tomorrow might legitimize deforestation today or distract from efforts to keep forests and trees standing (Seymour 2020; Verchot et al. 2010).

### 3.3.2 The community logic: Restoring or creating forests for local livelihoods and fostering empowerment

Since the 1970s global forest governance has embraced community-based forestry as a new paradigm, with tree planting being encouraged on private and community lands to advance participation and democracy and to serve environmental and economic aims (Gilmour 2016)—although with limited success (Karambiri and Brockhaus 2019). Yet, planting trees is also part of a (postcolonial) struggle for place and political belonging, with the Green Belt movement led by Wangari Maathai as an example (Hunt 2014).

Institutions

The norms of the community logic are linked to values such as justice for, participation with, and empowerment of local actors, values also prominently pronounced in FLR policy arenas. Erbaugh et al. (2020) find that 294.5 million people live on tropical forest lands considered suitable for restoration. Findings from the field show strong hopes that agroecological agroforestry (Ollinaho and Kröger 2021) may help alleviate poverty and promote (rural) development, ensuring food and energy security for local and forest-dependent people (e.g., Reed et al. 2017; Reij et al. 2009). In this

logic, local communities are to play a central role as key stakeholders and beneficiaries in building up FLR institutions. The logic builds on existing local institutions in implementing FLR planning, activities, and monitoring. This FLR logic requires that local communities are assigned corresponding rights in decision-making, multi-stakeholder participation, and project implementation (Reinecke and Blum 2018). Regarding inclusiveness and empowerment goals, this logic aspires to involve more women in FLR initiatives as a way to enhance gender-balanced participation in rural development and local democracy (Adams et al. 2016; Erbaugh and Oldekop 2018; Sijapati Basnett et al. 2017).

### Interests

The community logic represents the interests of different types of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), funders, and community actors to gain development-related project funding by involving and supporting local actors. Local associations in partnership with transnational conservation NGOs form the key actor coalitions that drive extensive livelihood-focused, forest restoration initiatives in the Global South. Up to 2.5 billion people in smallholder agriculture directly benefit from forest resources and services, with almost one billion engaging in the collection of fuelwood from forests (FAO and UNEP 2020). In some cases, planting trees has even turned into a social movement and is narratively promoted as an expression of reclaiming (local) rights over land. The Green Belt Movement initiated in 2006 by Wangari Muta Maathai as Trillion Trees partnership is a prominent example of such local–international collaboration with a strong focus on and purpose grounded in livelihood and empowerment motives. This illustrates that local NGOs often play a crucial role in facilitating the community logic and are pursuing altruistic and strategic interests simultaneously. Box 3.1 provides more information about the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative. Such initiatives are also an expression of criticism against FLR processes that do not take people and their needs and rights seriously but are just "repeopling" supposedly bottom-up initiatives that are in fact mainly driven by public organizations or corporate interests. Sporadically, coalitions have formed between local associations, transnational conservation NGOs, and opinion leaders, supported by private firms as part of their corporate social and/or environmental responsibility programs (Van Oosten et al. 2014). Bilateral and multilateral development cooperation have added to such multi-stakeholder coalitions by providing the financial or environmental/development projects' infrastructure.

A central motive in the community logic is rural development. Land tenure, particularly its insecurity, seems to mark a major concern for proponents of this rationale. Tenure, and hence the question of who controls the land, defines who will make decisions about how the land is used. Most of the lands used by local communities, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, are managed under customary or other informal rights regimes, which often lack formal recognition by the state. Another related disincentive for communities to plant trees or restore forest ecosystems is that rights to land and rights to trees are often legally separated (Chomba et al. 2020; Warnholtz et al. 2017). Yet, interest in tenure and rights seems to have shifted from a community focus toward a concern over tenure security for those investing in nature-based solutions, as a recent analysis of REDD + governance found (McDermott et al. 2022).

## Box 3.1 The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative

Following the 1970s drought in the Sahel, the African Great Green Wall (GGW) for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative was launched by the presidents of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, during their 7th session in 2005 in Ouagadougou, and backed by the African Union in 2007. The GGW aims to plant a tree wall 8000 km long, 15 km wide across 11 countries,[5] in the Sahel from Senegal in the west to Djibouti in the east to combat desertification. The Pan-African Agency of the GGW (PAAGGW) including representatives of national governments, international organizations, private sector, and civil society was established in 2010 to oversee and coordinate the initiative's implementation. The UNCCD, the European Union, WB, IUCN, FAO, and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) are among the key international investors in the GGW.[6]

The core idea of the GGW to halt desertification, that is, the spread of the Sahara Desert, took root in French and British colonial legacies. They put forward an environmental narrative that blames indigenous people, their lifestyles (e.g., pastoralism) and livelihoods (e.g., shifting cultivation) for desertification through overgrazing, deforestation, and land degradation.[7] The GGW vision does not challenge these claims but rather echoes them, as pointed out by Bellefontaine et al. (2011), including the assumption of idle lands in the Sahel, while the region hosts mosaic landscapes with integrated agro-sylvo pastoral schemes governed by diverse traditions.

Over time, shifts in the vision and narratives surrounding the GGW have occurred. Desertification is no longer considered an isolated environmental mismanagement by the Sahel dwellers, but rather, is seen as embedded in the global climate crisis. This new narrative is that countries who are historically responsible for carbon emissions should help the most vulnerable countries adapt to adverse effects of climate change (Behnke and Mortimore 2016). Additionally, countries (and non-state actors) perceive GGW as a globalized opportunity to meet their ambitions and nationally determined contributions (NDCs) with regard to the Paris Agreement boosted by the diverse forest landscape restoration initiatives. Moreover, the GGW vision has broadened from tree-belt planting to mosaic landscape restoration and integrated ecosystem management with high ambitions.[8] Thus, the new vision integrates a diversity of land use and production systems, natural assisted regeneration, and sustainable land and water conservation to improve people's livelihoods.[9] It also has turned into an emblematic resource: for example, during the One Planet summit in January 2021, the GGW was referred to as the first flagship of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and its projects were praised as nature-based solutions that the UNEP, the Global Environment Facility, and other donors support.[10]

Furthermore, mixed development aid, and market-driven governance and funding structures are emerging, justified by the lack of performance of the GGW so far, with estimates of 4%[11] to 15%[12] of targets achieved since its inception. Nongovernmental and development agencies are mobilizing funding to scale up restoration in drylands to support the GGW, for example, with the project

"Closing the gaps in the Great Green Wall."[13] The private sector investment in the GGW is still minor, but there is growing interest and efforts to bring them onboard as they are said to be critical for the achievement of the GGW targets.[14]

These developments call for more serious efforts to investigate—and eliminate—the colonial echoes in narratives that legitimize claims over land and resources; otherwise the GGW risks simply reproducing inequalities deeply engrained in the land sector in the Global South.

However, it must be acknowledged that success stories of local empowerment have been observed, for example, in the case of Nepal (Laudari et al. 2022).

Ideas

In the community logic, FLR is justified with empowering local people via land tenure and rural development and links to the win-win logic: reforestation (first win) and empowering local people (second win). At the same time, tenure rights can also be framed as a legal "implementation challenge," which neglects the political struggles. Setting this focus, governments are often presented as legitimate actors and key agents in FLR processes, reaffirming a top-down rationale of implementation rather than enabling and fostering social movements as FLR "from below." Within this dominant focus on the state, local governments and communities serve rather as beneficiaries and recipients of "proper" political processes. However, numerous actors, including policy actors themselves, share doubts about central governments' capacities and political will to successfully change land-use practices and power imbalances (Laudari et al. 2022).

### 3.3.3 The production logic: Forest plantations and bioeconomy

Planting trees and restoring forests to ensure the provision of goods and services to the benefit of those owning or claiming the land has a long tradition: planting trees in swidden forest gardens or ladangs managed by local communities, planting and restoring claimed land as hunting grounds by bishops and kings, and establishing large-scale tree plantations by church, (colonial) states, or corporations (Bryant 1998; Sargent and Bass 1992). Ongoing primary forest loss coupled with increasing demand for timber and biomass have served as justification for the establishment of large-scale plantations and restoration initiatives (Sargent and Bass 1992; Solberg et al. 2014), including a more recent focus on tree plantations for purposes of carbon sequestration.

Institutions

The production rationale as it unfolds in FLR shows strong parallels to the way the concept of bioeconomy has gained traction internationally in the institutional context of forestry over the last two decades (Pülzl et al. 2014). Under the production logic, dominant actors and existing practices of large-scale tree planting and management

shape institutional arrangements for FLR (or bioeconomy respectively), by connecting to environmental concerns and objectives of FLR while fostering timber production by expanding forest plantations on degraded lands. Plantations are the most popular restoration plan of the Bonn Challenge and other schemes, "planting vast monocultures of trees as profitable enterprises," in countries such as Brazil, China, Indonesia, and others (Lewis et al. 2019, 26). For instance, India has restored 9.8 Mha since 2011 and has committed to restoring 21 Mha of degraded land by 2030; largely this area results from tree plantations and agroforestry (Borah et al. 2018). While some claim the restoration objectives have been largely reached (FAO 2022b), others point to social and ecological problems with these large-scale restoration schemes (He 2014; McElwee and Nghi 2021; Vetter 2020). Lamb et al. (2012, 15) provide an explanation for why plantation monocultures persist: it is the dominant restoration activity, as it is the "simplest type of new forest." It can be managed on short rotations and, as such, is perceived by landowners as more profitable and easier to manage. Even though there is an expectation that these forests are managed differently than traditional plantations, with greater attention to biodiversity and other goods and services at later stages, this approach still seems to be in conflict with global interests in FLR, where FLR claims over degraded land have mainly been triggered, or at least justified and legitimized, by environmental concerns.

The idea of using forest plantations as a restoration strategy has a long history (Wenhua 2004) well before the Bonn Challenge. In this tradition, restoration has a timber and biomass production focus to derive economic benefits through plantations (Laestadius et al. 2015). Planting new trees was a necessity deriving from the overexploitation and radical degradation of forest land in different regions of the world, driven by exactly the same mercantile use of forest resources and emerging global commodity markets that built the core motive for later on restoring those productive capacities. In Box 3.2 in this chapter, a critical perspective on "productive" forest industry FLR projects in the Global South provides some examples. In Finland, these dynamics arose with the rise of tar capitalism, a process that devastated large forest areas to produce export tar from pine trees; this process lasted until the early 20th century, replacing many common swidden forestlands with privatized land holdings devoid of forests (Toivanen and Kröger 2019). Elsewhere in Europe, such dynamics were driven by industrial use and commodity markets, including agriculture (Mather 2001). A similar situation occurred in imperial China (Marks 1996). A global rush for forests in the tropics occurred to satisfy the growing demand of industrialized and growing economies. Colonial powers intensively exploited forestlands in the Global South, often expropriating lands from local populations and exporting the goods to developing European economies, for example, the British Empire establishing teak plantations in Burma (Bryant 1998).

### Interests

Historically, this logic of mercantile use of forest was jointly implemented by colonial administrations and a network of pro-colonial private companies (Hardin and Bahuchet 2011; Peluso and Vandergeest 2001). Additionally, local chiefs were used as the extended hand of colonial power (e.g., Western Africa (Amanor 1999)). At the time of independence for most developing countries (between 1950 and 1980), the

## Box 3.2 A critical perspective on "productive" forest industry FLR projects in the Global South

Tree plantations have been framed as being part of FLR initiatives, especially by large tree-plantation, expanding pulp, charcoal, and carbon credit corporations (Kröger 2014). These corporations are based not only in Sweden, Finland, Canada, the USA, Japan, and Singapore but also, and increasingly, include the core regions and key sectorial corporations within Global South countries like Suzano from Brazil, and Chilean pulp corporations (Kröger 2012; Kröger 2013a). These schemes, which replace pampa landscapes with eucalyptus monocultures, for example in Uruguay, have thus been called forestry extractivism (Kröger and Ehrnström-Fuentes 2021), a subcategory of agrarian extractivism, rather than a form of forest restoration or maintenance.

The tree-planting industries emphasize that they are also setting aside or even restoring some degraded forests, for example, in the Atlantic rainforest areas of Brazil. Critics point out, however, that the corporations themselves did massive deforestation in these rainforests, especially before 1993 (Kröger 2013b) and have not recomposed these areas with native forests as ordained by courts (Kröger 2013b). Such tree plantation conflicts also include cases from Africa, especially in energy-wood and carbon credit tree plantation expansions, where locals that have been dispossessed have occupied large areas, similar to the landless and indigenous movements' thousands-of-hectares plantation occupations in Brazil's Bahia and Espirito Santo states (Gerber 2011; Overbeek et al. 2012).

Development cooperation funds from Nordic countries are involved in these conflicts through their funding of tree-planting schemes, especially in Africa (Bergius et al. 2018; Lyons and Westoby 2014). Local people have expressed frustration from being excluded from these enclave investment areas, seeing local food prices rise, and water levels decrease, among other grievances (Kröger 2014).

The dynamics of tree plantation expansion have been somewhat different in China, where smallholders and villages have been able to secure comparatively more control over the process. Mega-pulp investment projects have been remolded into other kinds of investments, for example in the Guangxi province, which witnessed heavy conflicts around Stora Enso (Xu 2018). Currently, there is massive expansion of all kinds of tree plantations, not just eucalyptus, in China. Digitalization, like the mobile app Ant Forest with over 500 million users, suggests there is an ongoing financialization and datafication of tree-planting schemes, which is becoming more deeply entrenched in the carbon-neutrality aims of countries and corporations.

Growing awareness that forest restoration schemes can have possible negative socio-ecological impacts, e.g., on biodiversity or subsistence of communities, has led to suggestions for more careful considerations of local knowledge and experiences. These sounder schemes should strive toward agroforestry to restore entire deforested, pasture-ravaged areas (Ollinaho and Kröger 2021). For instance, in some areas where the several landless movements in Brazil's Bahia state have managed to win through their struggles with pulp corporations such agroforestry schemes are currently expanding, partly assisted by technical experts funded by

corporations through state-mediation of the conflicts. However, sometimes such schemes are not recognized or supported by international forest governance, due to a narrow (corporate-influenced) definition of deforestation and forest restoration.

Many tree-planting areas are currently experiencing rising conflicts around land ownership and control. These result from the 1970s–1980s authoritarian regimes giving leeway or ordering illegal land grabbers to lay ground for establishing plantations for corporations, by grabbing indigenous lands, e.g., in Bahia pulp companies claim to have land ownership without formal land ownership titles. Yet, they are still expanding and driving indigenous groups to the margins. In particular in contexts like in Latin America the de jure and de facto respect for ethno-territorial rights depends on the given government and larger governance setting, including constitutions and regionally dominant political economic groups (Kröger and Lalander 2016).

These problems of expanding tree plantations are not just limited to the tropics but are also visible in North America, such as in British Colombia (Simard 2021), and in Europe, such as Finland and Sweden, where natural, seminatural and even the most species-rich forests are being removed under the guise of a bioeconomy discourse (Kröger 2016; Kröger and Raitio 2017). These forest removals, followed by monoculture planting of spruce mostly, are being increasingly contested in social and conventional media, as well as in physical protests; for example, in 2021 different environmental NGO activists started to block and denounce the cutting of the last remaining forest patches in Finland.

dominant forest ownership held by colonial powers was transferred to the newly established postcolonial state. While the new states started establishing state-owned logging firms in post-socialist countries to pursue timber extraction, other public and private companies in the tropics developed fully commercial forest plantations (rubber, cocoa, teak, eucalyptus, palm oil, etc.), often using the narrative of reforestation or restoring degraded forest lands (Feintrenie 2014; Laungaramsri 2012). In the 1980s several critiques were raised by different social movements about the establishment of such (large-tree) plantations, for example, in India, Indonesia, Chile, and Vietnam, where campaigns by environmental NGOs and rural people tried to prevent the clearing of natural forests for tree plantations. Despite contestations, claims of positive implications for large-scale tree plantations—for example, in terms of labor effects or local income generation—persist (Malkamäki et al. 2018; Nolte and Ostermeier 2017), and are repeated within the FLR context, even though contested too (Elias et al. 2021; McElwee and Nghi 2021).

Following the logic of forest product markets, international organizations with a "business-friendly" agenda still support forest plantations for FLR, especially in the Global South, for example, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the WB (ITTO 2022; WB 2017). Actors supporting this logic argue that green supply chains are essential for realizing a bioeconomy approach for FLR, highlighting the importance of FLR and its linkages to value chains, livelihoods, markets,

investments, and financing mechanisms (ITTO 2022). This market-focused logic is also supported by the United Nations Forum on Forests, the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forest 2017–2030, and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (UNEP and FAO 2022). All of the above-named organizations do in fact acknowledge that conventional plantations are unlikely to provide multi-functional and integrated outputs as aimed for by the FLR concept.

Ideas

Critics warn that large-scale plantations (of exotic tree species) may fall short of other expectations tied to FLR, for example, concerning carbon sequestration and/or biodiversity conservation (Bastin et al. 2019; Brancalion et al. 2019). In response, technical discussions are ongoing about how plantations may be modified to deliver additional goods and services without significantly compromising the primary function of economically viable roundwood production.

The logic resonates strongly with the win-win narrative, as it emphasizes productivism and seems to ignore goal conflicts (Kleinschmit et al. 2014; Kröger and Raitio 2017; Ramcilovic-Suominen and Pülzl 2018). Moreover, the core ideas of bioeconomy, to rely on bio-based resources and to replace fossil-based products with renewable products, are linked to the production logic of FLR. Critics argue that the bioeconomy concept is being (mis)used to relegitimize "policy goals from previous industrial forestry eras," safeguarding and prioritizing timber production over ecological concerns (Kröger and Raitio 2017, 6). These interlinkages of bioeconomy and FLR assumptions and ideas can be observed in Kyrgyzstan, for example. In the country's Green Economy Program 2020–2023, reforestation and fast-growing tree plantations are among the core points to foster its bioeconomy (Partnership for Action on Green Economy 2019). We argue that FLR's productivity logic shares problematic ideas with the bioeconomy approach as both increase the economic pressure on forests and are likely to cause new conflicts, which are so far neglected in the debate.

## 3.4 Discussing the dominant logics of FLR

The aim of this chapter is to better understand and critically reflect on the international governance of FLR by unpacking logics driving restoration efforts and the underlying power relations embedded in the specific institutions, interests, and ideas of each of these logics. We ask how these logics are constituted and legitimized with different narrative, some more powerful than others. Our analysis illustrates that in multilevel governance settings policy levels may not always be perfectly separable; significant power asymmetries exist within and between levels, which lends discursive power to different narratives. Acknowledging the limitations of categories as simplifications and generalizations of practically complex and even interwoven interpretations of FLR, three key logics are identified and analyzed: (i) the global sustainability logic: planting trees to meet international challenges, (ii) the community logic: restoring or creating forests for local livelihoods and fostering empowerment, and (iii) the production logic: forest plantations and bioeconomy. These logics are characterized by different levels of popularity and predominance. In Figure 3.2 these

logics are visualized, embedded in their mode of governance and providing an idea about the time of existence.

The sustainability-focused logic of planting trees is currently very prominent in the international FLR governance arena. With the rise of initiatives like the Bonn Challenge and the NYDF, which are connected to UN-led programs related to the SDGs and the UN Decade, the focus is primarily on regaining ecological functions of forests including biodiversity conservation and carbon capture. The dominance of this logic rests in the support of powerful international and transnational actors, like UN organizations and governments, but also actors from academia, civil society, or the private sector supporting the implementation of pledges through technical or financial resources. The logic tends to follow the assumption that planting more trees is good in principle; yet it uses problematic concepts such as "abandoned land" or "terre vacant," with the majority of such "idle or degraded" lands being in the Global South. Such framing reinforces formalized and "legal" approaches to land use, with claims of such lands by the state, justified by the notion that the land is not used otherwise. In many contexts, we see the problem that FLR then risks neglecting informal or customary land use practices such as swidden and mobile husbandry, firewood collection, or subsistence farming on supposedly empty land. Moreover, there are also potential biases in producing and relying on global mapping of restoration potentials in arid land (see Fagan 2020). Recently, calls for a rights-based approach to FLR have become louder, questioning the simplistic assumptions about abandoned landscapes with little value (Mansourian 2016; Van Oosten and Merten 2021).

We argue that the global sustainability logic naively underestimates persistent tradeoffs between climate goals, local food production, and biodiversity conservation, as well as ignores important considerations about who will benefit from FLR and how FLR needs to be implemented accordingly, e.g., bottom-up vs. top-down governance. Based on our analysis, we see the need to move away from "business as usual" approaches in forest (restoration) projects, which tend to reproduce existing power relations and neglect tradeoffs and potential conflicts. The currently dominant FLR logics are likely to produce many "win-lose" or "lose-lose" projects if historical power structures are not recognized and addressed. In order to create space for transformative change away from unsustainable tree planting and to overcome the domination of a "Western Gaze" to policy, valuing, and thinking, different logics need to emerge (Ramcilovic-Suominen 2022). Alternative approaches to study and inspire sustainability governance and FLR include decoloniality (Escobar 1995; Mignolo 2011; Rodríguez and Inturias 2018; see also Chapter 4), just socio-ecological transformations (Martin et al. 2020; Menton et al. 2020), convivial conservation (Büscher and Fletcher 2019), and local democracy (Ribot 2006; Walters et al. 2021). These conceptualizations all highlight the importance of local actors and social movements in bringing about desired changes for people and the environment.

The second logic of FLR—the community logic—highlights local livelihood and empowerment and has been promoted in the Global South, for example, as community-based forestry by development agencies since the 1970s. Likewise, it may be seen as a reactive logic, responding to the tradeoffs and conflicts arising from the practices pursued under the two other logics. This is particularly the case when community-based

forestry is applied as a top-down approach. In contrast, FLR as a bottom-up approach is driven by social, often ecofeminist movements. While the overall community logic and related narratives have gained popularity over time, the more radical strand related to social movements is represented by rather marginalized actor groups. However, attention within the FLR arena is increasing, as the tenure rights of marginalized groups, especially indigenous peoples, youth, and women, have been acknowledged as relevant for sustainable (forest) land and resource use. The actors behind the wider logic and its respective stakes include not only local actors, but also international and local movements, NGOs, development agencies, and social scientists, among others. While this logic underpins singular flagship projects like the Green Belt Movement or Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, considerations of livelihoods and rights have begun to inspire FLR institutions that adhere to SDGs and an ecological logic, contributing to the appearance of global FLR programs offering a compelling vision to unite the global community in its aim to regain ecological integrity and enhance human well-being. Furthermore, triggered by fundamental critiques in science and civil society, and fostered by stakeholder engagement and consultation, the integration of local people to effectively implement FLR has raised awareness.

The third logic, production and bioeconomy, reflects the mainstream global FLR movement that presents productive plantations as an opportunity for the restoration of multiple landscape functions (Sayer and Elliot 2005). Creating regional value chains should, according to this logic, directly benefit local people and enable an economy based on renewable materials. While we consider value chains and local livelihoods as crucial, the question of who benefits most from these new value chains demands to be addressed. This productivity-focused logic follows the same historically dominant and persistent exploitative economic logic behind global timber production and neocolonial trade relationships among world regions.

We recognize that the FLR concept is evolving. It has structures in place that in principle should allow for learning, e.g., large global exchange events such as the Global Landscapes Forum. However, the question remains: who is given a voice in such events—and given by whom? Learning requires information exchange beyond echo chambers (Malkamäki et al. 2021); what can be considered still a largely peripheral debate on tenure rights is expected to gain more prominence and to be taken on board in FLR agendas. Yet, market interests should not be underestimated in this debate: the rise of the issue of tenure on the FLR agenda is not only advocated by NGOs and social movements, but also actively driven by private sector interests in safeguarding their investments. Whether concerns like tenure rights will fundamentally change FLR practices or will only create mostly symbolic changes remains an empirical question yet to be answered.

For FLR to move away from business-as-usual rationales of exploiting forests, forest resources, and people, and in order to overcome the pitfalls that seem inherent to its current design and implementation, decolonizing the mindsets and ideas shaping FLR governance requires much more space on the global FLR agenda. This chapter's critical review of motivations and expectations in FLR and an acknowledgment of the tradeoffs and potential losers of international FLR policymaking is only a first step in this direction.

## 3.5 Conclusions

Three key distinct logics that, to varying degrees, drive FLR policy and practice today have been identified in this chapter: (i) the global sustainability logic: planting trees to meet international challenges, (ii) the community logic: restoring or creating forests for local livelihoods and fostering empowerment, and (iii) the production logic: forest plantations and bioeconomy. Currently FLR follows two dominant logics, focusing on global sustainability and production arguments. The former underestimates persistent tradeoffs between different goals and ignores the essential question on who will benefit from FLR. In contrast, the production logic follows a historically dominant and persistent exploitative economic logic behind global timber production and neocolonial trade relationships. Currently the FLR concept is further evolving and learning opportunities are in place recognizing trade-offs and conflicts. However, if FLR follows the dominant logics, it might produce as well in the future many "win-lose" and/or "lose-lose" situations. The question of inherent historical power structure in FLR design and implementation and the question of who benefits are not addressed.

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## Notes

1. https://www.unccd.int/issues/land-and-sustainable-development-goals.
2. https://www.cbd.int/
3. https://www.unccd.int/
4. https://unfccc.int/
5. The 11 countries of the GGW are Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Tchad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti.
6. https://www.unccd.int/publications/great-green-wall-implementation-status-and-way-ahead-2030
7. https://theconversation.com/africas-got-plans-for-a-great-green-wall-why-the-idea-needs-a-rethink-78627
8. https://www.oneplanetsummit.fr/en/coalitions-82/great-green-wall-accelerator-193
9. https://www.unccd.int/publications/great-green-wall-implementation-status-and-way-ahead-
10. https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/good-news-africas-great-green-wall
11. https://earth.org/great-green-wall-in-africa-4-complete/
12. https://www.greatgreenwall.org/about-great-green-wall
13. https://www.iucn.org/theme/ecosystem-management/our-work/global-drylands-initiative/gdi-projects/closing-gaps-great-green-wall-linking-sectors-and-stakeholders-increased-synergy-and-scaling

14. https://www.iucn.org/theme/ecosystem-management/our-work/global-drylands-initiative/gdi-projects/closing-gaps-great-green-wall-linking-sectors-and-stakeholders-increased-synergy-and-scaling

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