

Restoration policy dialogues 2024

SUMMARY OF RESTORING LANDSCAPES IN CHHATTISGARH FOR CLIMATE AND COMMUNITIES

September 19, 2024 | Raipur, Chhattisgarh | Compiled by: Nabajyoti Roy, Purnajyoti Khanra, Jyoti Yadav

INTRODUCTION

The Government of India has demonstrated its strong commitment to restoration by pledging to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land through its Bonn Challenge and Land Degradation Neutrality targets. As part of its nationally determined contributions, it has pledged to increase its forest and tree cover by 2030, with a goal of sequestering additional 2.5-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. Additionally, an ambitious Net Zero target by 2070 has also been adopted. WRI India's research findings indicate that India's policy ecosystem supports various monetary and non-monetary incentives that promote restoration. This is evident from several large-scale restoration-related interventions undertaken under various flagship policies implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development, such as the Watershed Development Component – Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (WDC-PMKSY) 2.0; the National Rural Livelihoods Mission; and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. These programs can help unlock the restoration potential in Chhattisgarh through an integrated landscape approach, with a focus on fostering public and private investment in implementing nature-based solutions (NbS) that can help address the triple challenge of restoring nature, meeting people's needs, and contributing to global climate objectives. According to the Restoration Atlas for India (WRI India 2018), Chhattisgarh possesses the potential to sequester between 210.68 million tons (Mt) of additional above-ground carbon through forest protection and enhancing tree cover through wide scale and mosaic restoration. This can be achieved by enhancing rural livelihoods and job opportunities, building resilience, and mitigating climate risks through collaborations with diverse stakeholders.

CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Session 1: Welcome address and context setting
- 2 Session 2: Special address on restoring landscapes in Chhattisgarh for climate and communities
- 4 Session 3: Need for integrated landscape restoration approaches
- 4 Session 4: Experience sharing on integrated landscape restoration approaches in Kanker District, Chhattisgarh
- 5 Session 5: Panel discussion on the role of government institutions in adopting an integrated landscape approach: Challenges and opportunities for convergence on restoration
- 7 Session 6: Experience sharing on integrated landscape restoration in Chhattisgarh
- 9 Summing up: The way forward
- 11 Appendix
- 12 Acknowledgments
- 15 About WRI India

These conference proceedings reflect the presentations and discussions of participants and do not necessarily represent the views of WRI India or other participating institutions.

While there are enabling policies in place, unlocking the full potential of these policies remains a challenge due to several barriers (Duraisami et al. 2022). It is therefore essential to bring policymakers and experts together on a platform to discuss these barriers in depth and explore pathways toward effective solutions. Such a platform is provided by Restoration Dialogues, which brings together different stakeholders for collaborative planning and action. This conference proceeding provides insights from the Restoration Dialogues, convened by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development (DP&RD), Government of Chhattisgarh, in collaboration with WRI India and Transform Rural India (TRI), in September 2024 at Raipur. The dialogues focused on “Restoring Landscapes in Chhattisgarh for Climate and Communities” by inspiring, innovating, and designing solutions for converging existing policies and scaling landscape restoration in the state.

The event brought together more than 55 participants (Annexure 1), including policymakers and civil society organizations (CSOs) who are active in restoration-related works in the state. While addressing the participants, Ms. Niharika Barik, Principal Secretary, DP&RD, Government of Chhattisgarh, spoke about departmental convergence and the urgent need for developing a baseline that serves as a guideline for scaling restoration efforts in the state. Senior officials from the DP&RD, and officers from its constituent units, namely Grameen Aajeevika Samvardhan Samiti (CGSRLM - Bihan), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and the Directorate of Panchayats, participated in the deliberations. Additionally, representatives from the Agriculture Development and Farmer Welfare, and Biotechnology Department, including both the Directorate of Agriculture and Directorate of Horticulture, along with representatives from the Department of Tribal and Scheduled Caste, also participated.

Heads and other representatives of several leading CSOs, including Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), the Foundation of Ecological Security (FES), the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF), Chaitanya, Sahabhagi Samaj Sevi Sanstha (SSSS), Commonland, Agricon, the Agrocrats Society, the Samerth Charitable Trust, Sangata Sahabhagi Gramin Vikas Sansthan (SGVS), CARM-DAKSH, Shamayita Math, and the National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF), participated in the dialogues.

SESSION 1: WELCOME ADDRESS AND CONTEXT SETTING

Dr. Ruchika Singh, Executive Program Director of the Food, Land, and Water Program, WRI India, commenced the proceedings with a welcome address. She highlighted the opportunity to implement and expand landscape restoration in Chhattisgarh, which would help meet global commitments and national targets. Emphasizing the importance of bringing together various stakeholders to discuss and take action toward sustainable restoration of landscapes, she focused on identifying landscape restoration opportunities and planning interventions collaboratively to achieve sustainable development of natural resources and livelihoods. In this context, Dr. Singh briefed the participants about the larger rationale for organizing the restoration dialogues, highlighting its objectives—to create a collaborative learning platform through knowledge sharing on landscape approach to restoration and key policies; to discuss key barriers and data-backed innovative solutions and identify solutions that can bolster the implementation and scaling of interventions like agroforestry to enhance rural livelihoods; and to build resilience and mitigate climate risks. She further highlighted the need to focus on systems change to strengthen the ecosystem for restoration.

SESSION 2: SPECIAL ADDRESS ON RESTORING LANDSCAPES IN CHHATTISGARH FOR CLIMATE AND COMMUNITIES

Bhim Singh (IAS), Secretary, DP&RD, Government of Chhattisgarh, highlighted the urgent need to restore the state’s degraded lands, which affect over half the population. With 50 percent of the land degraded, he emphasized the need to adopt a multifaceted approach involving species selection, interdepartmental collaboration, community participation, and market-driven initiatives. By selecting

tree species suited to local ecosystems, fostering cooperation between the Department of Forest and MGNREGA, and engaging community institutions like Cluster Level Federations (CLFs), Chhattisgarh can ensure the long-term success of restoration efforts. He noted that while agroforestry, which has remained underutilized since the 1990s, could offer economic benefits, it requires stronger incentives and financing support. To address the decline of millet farming and promote sustainable livelihoods, he suggested turning to market-based approaches and collaborating with local institutions. With 75 percent of restoration funding potentially coming from MGNREGA, Mr. Singh highlighted the importance of water conservation, afforestation, and involving National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) women and self-help groups in converting degraded lands into productive assets. He also proposed integrating restoration into infrastructure projects, such as green highways under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, and establishing a dashboard for monitoring. Mr. Singh concluded by suggesting the replication of successful efforts from Sidhi, Madhya Pradesh, in the districts of Chhattisgarh. He also proposed selling carbon credits to support sustainable restoration efforts and community income.

Dr. K. Subramaniam (I.F.S. Retd.), Member, Rajya NITI Aayog, Chhattisgarh, addressed the need for ecological rehabilitation and sustainable development in the state. He highlighted the degradation of forests caused by invasive species, soil erosion, and the decline of indigenous flora and fauna. Despite Chhattisgarh's 44 percent forest cover, much of it consists of vulnerable coppice forests. The overuse of chemical fertilizers in agriculture has exacerbated these challenges, impacting ecosystems and farmer livelihoods. Dr. Subramaniam stressed the importance of indigenous knowledge and community participation in restoration efforts and of mitigating man-animal conflicts. He emphasized capacity building and skill development among farmers to address climate change and promote sustainable agricultural practices. He also noted the potential for diversifying income sources through food processing and highlighted the importance of using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing for land use identification and restoration planning. The role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in fostering community participation and the potential of indigenous species, such as custard apples and tropical fruits, to drive economic growth, were shared. He emphasized the need for better market access for farmers and to reduce supply chain intermediaries to improve livelihoods. With 36 percent of land under assured irrigation and 82 percent of farmers being small or marginal, he pointed out that many farmers become landless laborers with limited livelihood opportunities. He called for intercropping and multiple cropping to prevent land degradation occurring from monocropping, suggesting that restoration efforts could provide skills and opportunities to reduce migration. In conclusion, Dr. Subramaniam outlined that sustainable agriculture and community-led restoration efforts are crucial means to mitigate the challenges of environmental degradation.

FIGURE 1 | Deliberations on scaling landscape restoration in Chhattisgarh



Photo Credit: WRI India.

SESSION 3: NEED FOR INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE RESTORATION APPROACHES

Siddharth Edake, Senior Program Manager at WRI India, talked about the importance of landscape restoration in achieving India's global commitments, such as the Bonn Challenge and the Sustainable Development Goals. Mr. Edake shared details of the Sidhi pilot project in Madhya Pradesh, which was initiated in collaboration with the district administration and the local implementation partner, Action for Social Advancement (ASA), based on a study conducted by WRI India using the Restoration Opportunity Assessment Methodology (ROAM) within the Indian context. This global research methodology addresses the key questions regarding where, how, and by whom landscape restoration should be implemented, along with the associated costs and benefits. For Sidhi district, the ROAM exercise was carried out in a participatory and collaborative manner, involving consultations with over 500 stakeholders to identify and understand the scope of landscape restoration in the district. A cluster of 13 villages, covering 9,000 hectares, was selected for the pilot project, governed by factors such as connectivity, watershed principles, restoration potential, social inclusion, and the implementation status of livelihood interventions. Implementation and investment plans were designed in close collaboration with the district administration, focusing on strengthening community-based institutions and using NbS for carbon sequestration and climate adaptation to enhance community resilience. The pilot project was designed in a stepwise manner, including planning, partnerships, strategy design, capacity building, policy implementation, and monitoring. Water was identified as the entry point for restoration, followed by interventions such as tree-based initiatives and sustainable agriculture. The project was implemented through the convergence of public funds from MGNREGA, the WDC-PMKSY, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, along with CSR funds, demonstrating the successful application of scientific principles for landscape restoration in a local context.

Nabajyoti Roy, Program Manager at WRI India, elaborated on the organization's engagement in Kanker district, Chhattisgarh, where a district-level inception meeting on landscape restoration was conducted. He spoke about generating awareness and building capacity of the community and the PRI representatives through block-level training programs across seven blocks. Mr. Roy also described the establishment of the Local Restoration Hub, which involves seven CSOs, aimed at enhancing collaboration and coordination among them for landscape restoration in the district.

SESSION 4: EXPERIENCE SHARING ON INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE RESTORATION APPROACHES IN KANKER DISTRICT, CHHATTISGARH

Sumeet Agrawal, CEO of Zila Panchayat, Kanker, Chhattisgarh, addressed the pressing need for landscape restoration in the region, highlighting the irregular rainfall patterns, declining groundwater levels, and drought conditions. He emphasized the district's adoption of a scientific and community-participatory approach to restoration. Mr. Agrawal highlighted the district's strategy of converging various schemes, such as CGSRLM - BIHAN, MGNREGA, and the departments of agriculture and horticulture, to enhance restoration efforts and achieve sustainable results. To strengthen interdepartmental collaboration, he facilitated the formation of District-Level Coordination Committees (DLCC) and Block-Level Coordination Committees (BLCC), improving coordination and integration across departments. He also spoke about gender-inclusive participation by involving self-help groups and community-led initiatives, which strengthened community engagement and ensured equitable outcomes. Under Mission Water Conservation, Kanker has made significant progress in water resource management, with a goal of allocating 65 percent of MGNREGA funds for water conservation. TRI and WRI India have supported the district by providing GIS-based mapping tools for land use planning and conducting capacity-building initiatives for officials working on the ground. These efforts have supported the adoption of sustainable farming practices, including climate-resilient cropping systems like millet, less water-intensive crops, and multi-layer farming, aimed at boosting agricultural resilience and productivity.

Smriti Sahu and **Ashwini Soni**, CLF Coordinators, shared their insights from training programs and village-level discussions on restoration approaches and natural resource management. They highlighted the impact of training provided to Gram Rojgar Sahayaks and PRIs, which resulted in the development of detailed restoration plans, including key "ridge to valley" initiatives. A significant achievement was the integration of village panchayat plans through the Village Panchayat Resource Planning app, marking the first-time implementation of water conservation measures at the village level. The CLF coordinators appreciated the support extended by PRIs and their rural cadres, which not only facilitated the restoration efforts but also unlocked future livelihood opportunities. Although they initially faced challenges, including family conflicts, their dedication eventually earned family support, highlighting the positive influence of these restoration activities on both the environment and the community's well-being.

SESSION 5: PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN ADOPTING AN INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE APPROACH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONVERGENCE ON RESTORATION

The panel discussion focused on exploring key strategies to create a collaborative administrative framework for landscape restoration in Chhattisgarh, with an emphasis on fostering convergence between various government departments at the state and district levels. Moderated by Shrish Kalyani, Associate Director at TRI, the session aimed to address several critical aspects of the project, including the design of an effective implementation architecture, identification of capacity gaps, and the support required to drive this ambitious initiative. Additionally, the panelists suggested the roles and responsibilities that CSOs could assume at different levels to ensure the success of restoration efforts across the state.

The key points emerging from the session are summarized below.

- **Dr. K. Subramaniam – Facilitating a collaborative administrative environment and the role of academic institutions in landscape restoration:** Dr. Subramaniam talked about the importance of departmental integration for landscape restoration, suggesting that one department be designated as the nodal agency for monitoring efforts. He highlighted the need for impact assessments to evaluate the return on investment, citing both successes and challenges from past interventions. While districts like Jashpur and Surguja have seen negative impacts from interventions, Jagdalpur demonstrated positive results due to strong convergence among departments such as MGNREGA, Agriculture, Horticulture, Collectorate, and the Zila Panchayat CEO. He emphasized the necessity of utilizing diagnostic tools to assess landscapes prior to restoration, gathering temporal data, and documenting processes for policy development. He also mentioned that central and state schemes should converge, with policy adjustments made based on the local context.

Dr. Subramaniam pointed out the crucial role of academic institutions in the restoration process. He highlighted the need to assess soil conditions, including pH and salinity, with the support of institutions like the National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning and the Water and Land Management Institute. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of assessing local species and their environmental relationships, suggesting that state-level agricultural universities and Indian Institutes of Technology take a larger role in these efforts. He also advocated for increased involvement of CSO partners to align with government schemes like PMKSY and MGNREGA, ensuring that the restoration work benefits both the environment and local communities.

- **Rajat Bansal, Commissioner, MGNREGA – Project implementation architecture for smoother convergence:** Mr. Bansal discussed the importance of district- and panchayat-level convergence as a key driver for improving project outcomes in landscape restoration. He highlighted the successful construction of 20,000 farm ponds through MGNREGA in Chhattisgarh in 2024, demonstrating

the positive impact that convergence can have when multiple departments work together. However, he acknowledged that despite the presence of best practices, scaling these efforts remains a major challenge, particularly in ensuring consistent and effective collaboration across various government departments and schemes. He also pointed out the critical role of CSOs in maximizing the impact of these initiatives, particularly in underserved areas where interventions are limited. By partnering with CSOs, the state can fill existing gaps in human resources and build local capacity to support long-term, sustainable restoration efforts. Mr. Bansal stressed the need to redefine MGNREGA's objectives, moving away from a traditional focus on employment guarantees and instead prioritizing asset creation and development of sustainable livelihoods. He shared that MGNREGA should be seen not only as providing short-term employment but also as a tool to create valuable assets. This can help people become less dependent on MGNREGA in the future, ensuring that the program contributes to long-term economic resilience rather than recurring cycles of dependence. Additionally, he highlighted that MGNREGA can serve as a critical touchpoint for the convergence of other government schemes related to water conservation, agriculture, and rural development. By aligning these efforts, the state can unlock its full potential, particularly with the support of CSR funding and private partnerships.

The way forward is to focus on quality in ideation, implementation, and planning stages, as well as the usage of resources—these are softer behavioral aspects of land use that also require a proper mechanism to be set in place, through active participation of CSOs and academic institutions. Mr. Bansal called for a comprehensive state-level plan to guide this convergence, where responsibilities are clearly defined, and CSOs, academic institutions, and government agencies collaborate on a shared platform. This collective approach would not only ensure effective policy implementation but also facilitate capacity building and scaling up of restoration efforts across the state.

- **Bhupendra Pandey, Deputy Director, Horticulture Department – Views on convergence in the restoration process:** Mr. Pandey commended the support provided through MGNREGA for the development of nurseries. He pointed out that innovative interventions, such as plantations of fruit-bearing plants, have positively impacted restoration efforts. These activities were made possible through the convergence of MGNREGA and the District Mineral Foundation demonstrating the success of collaboration between various schemes.
- **Dr. Ruchika Singh – Convergence in Madhya Pradesh between CSOs and government:** Dr. Singh emphasized the importance of governance modalities in achieving effective convergence at the district level in Madhya Pradesh, highlighting the need for a common, shared understanding of landscape restoration to harmonize efforts among stakeholders. She pointed out that establishing clarity fosters collaboration between government agencies, CSOs, and local communities, enhancing overall effectiveness. Dr. Singh underscored the pivotal role of CSOs in planning and designing strategies that resonate with local needs, focusing on capacity building to equip local stakeholders with the skills necessary for effective participation. Additionally, she stressed the development of robust monitoring mechanisms, which empower local communities to take charge of their projects and ensure continuity, even if organizations phase out their involvement. This capacity-building approach fosters resilience and long-term sustainability in restoration initiatives. Furthermore, she noted that sustainable livelihoods can be achieved through well-planned business models integrating local economic needs, with CSOs playing a crucial role in these efforts. This dual focus on ecological health and economic stability creates a holistic approach to landscape restoration that benefits both the environment and the communities dependent on it. It underscores the critical intersection of governance, community engagement, and sustainable practices in successful landscape restoration in Sidhi, Madhya Pradesh.

SESSION 6: EXPERIENCE SHARING ON INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE RESTORATION IN CHHATTISGARH

The session focused on CSOs sharing learnings from their experiences of implementing the integrated landscape approach in Chhattisgarh. The key points from the discussion are summarized below.

- **Manoj Kumar, State Lead, PRADAN – PRADAN's engagement in landscape restoration:** Mr. Kumar shared that PRADAN is working with a district-level approach to landscape restoration through the High Impact Mega Watershed Program, involving 12 different partners and several government departments in Chhattisgarh. These efforts have successfully restored approximately 300,000 hectares of land and conserved about 200 billion liters of water annually through the construction of ponds under MGNREGA and the program. These interventions have played a crucial role in securing livelihoods and ensuring sustainable incomes for numerous households. Mr. Kumar discussed the importance of maintaining a balance between water demand and supply, noting that behavioral change is essential to achieving this. Additionally, PRADAN's farm pond model across Chhattisgarh has optimized the use of medium lands and lowlands for paddy cultivation, significantly contributing to both water conservation and agricultural productivity. This model showcases the integration of land restoration with community-driven water conservation for sustainable outcomes.
- **Basant Yadav, Sahabhangi Samaj Sevi Sanstha (SSSS) – Community engagement in Lac cultivation and water conservation:** Mr. Yadav shared Sahabhangi's experience working in the Kanker region, particularly in promoting lac cultivation through tree-planting initiatives under MGNREGA and water conservation efforts. To secure active community participation, Sahabhangi initiated a five-acre tree-planting program under MGNREGA, focusing on species like Semialata (*Flemingia semialata*), Ber (*Ziziphus mauritiana*) and Kusum (*Schleichera oleosa*). This involved tribal villagers, Cluster Level Federation didis (federation members) under NRLM, and representatives from PRADAN and Krishi Vigyan Kendra, and utilized voluntary labor (*shram-dan*) to promote community ownership over five acres of Community Forest Resource Rights land under the Forest Rights Act. Through village meetings, responsibilities were distributed among community members, resulting in the planting of around 5,000 saplings, which was later expanded to 20,000 saplings. These efforts have significantly boosted annual income generation, with households earning an estimated 4–5 lakh rupees from lac cultivation on these host trees. Key takeaways from this process include the importance of community engagement for the sustainability of tree-planting activities and maximizing income generation. Sahabhangi also incorporated cultural elements, such as beginning the planting process with a tree associated with a tribal deity, fostering deeper community connections, and promoting genuine participation and ownership in restoration efforts.
- **Namita Misra, FES – Roles for community, government stakeholders, and CSOs for effective restoration:** Ms. Misra drew on her three decades of experience in ecological restoration. She emphasized that private and common resources are interconnected, as their viability relies on mutual support. Recognizing the significance of indigenous knowledge, Ms. Misra noted that communities possess specific insights about their landscapes, which can evolve to reflect broader ecological contexts. She stressed the need for a planned approach that begins at the panchayat level, progresses to the block level, and ultimately culminates at the district and state levels. This framework necessitates strong community leadership and capacity-building initiatives for local leaders. She highlighted the vital role of technical institutions, such as the State Institute of Rural Development and other academic entities, in extending their expertise to support these efforts. She underscored the importance of a tripartite enabling structure, where communities take ownership of restoration initiatives while supporting organizations and enablers collaborate effectively. Without strengthening this cooperative framework, she warned, restoration interventions may struggle to make meaningful progress.

- **Jayant Karnik, Joint Director, AERF – Building sustainable value chains:** Mr. Karnik talked about the organization's extensive work on creating value chains for non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and emphasized the importance of establishing market linkages and certification for these products. Over the past ten years, AERF has focused on increasing awareness among communities about which species are suitable for plantations, particularly those that can generate income while also contributing to ecological health. He stressed the significance of planting non-edible species that are not attractive to ruminants, advocating for local and valued species such as acacia and lemongrass. These choices not only provide economic benefits but also enhance carbon sequestration efforts. Furthermore, he highlighted the biodiversity importance of *Pongamia Pinnata*, known in India as Karanja, which adds value while supporting local ecosystems. Mr. Karnik outlined the necessity of conducting market studies to understand the potential for buyback arrangements with buyers, ensuring that farmers are informed about the final products from their plantations. He pointed out that if farmers are to dedicate their land to plantations for a decade, it is crucial that they understand what species are being planted and what the expected outputs will be. This comprehensive approach integrates sustainable harvesting, processing, and marketing of NTFPs with broader ecological restoration goals, reinforcing the link between economic viability and environmental stewardship.
- **Deepak Singh, Landscape Coordinator, Commonland – Collaborative landscape restoration approach:** Mr. Singh explained Commonland's approach to landscape restoration, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts involving CSOs, government departments, community leaders, and businesses working toward a shared vision. In Kawardha, Commonland has initiated a landscape restoration model through partnerships with Samerth and Agricon as primary implementation partners, while PRADAN, FES, and Network for Conserving Central India contribute as technical partners, focusing on knowledge-sharing and capacity building. Commonland follows the 4 Returns Framework, which includes social, natural, financial, and inspirational returns. Social returns focus on strengthening social institutions, natural returns aim to restore biodiversity, financial returns promote sustainable businesses and inspirational returns give people hope and a sense of purpose connected to the landscape. They emphasize the importance of business community involvement in landscape management, highlighting the need for a shift from ego-sensitivity to eco-sensitivity, as emphasized by the phrase, "When Ecology drives the Economy, everyone thrives." Their process involves five key elements: building partnerships, establishing a shared vision, creating a landscape plan, collective implementation, and monitoring and learning. Viewing the landscape from ridge to valley (*choti se ghati*), they divide it into three zones: natural, combined, and economic. As an example, Mr. Singh shared a recent "Landscape Community Dialogue" held in Kanker, where they brought together government departments, CSOs, and community leaders to exchange development ideas and knowledge. He stressed that initiatives at the state, district, or block level should be shared at the community level to ensure alignment with the overall vision.
- **Jyoti Yadav, Sr. Program Associate, WRI India – Integrated approach to landscape restoration:** Ms. Yadav discussed WRI India's integrated approach in working with various CSOs to address the challenge of working in silos. She talked about the importance of understanding land use patterns, identifying land use challenges, and designing restoration activities while planning for biodiversity conservation. These processes should leverage support from district administrations to effectively influence public policy on restoration. She also mentioned how landscape plans need to be developed in collaboration with the community, followed by mainstreaming through the DLCC and BLCC. This should lead to the government sanctioning the plans, followed by implementation and monitoring with the assistance of CSOs. She underscored that convergence among departments is crucial in this context to ensure a cohesive approach to landscape restoration efforts.

FIGURE 2 | Participants in the Restoration Policy Dialogues 2024 in Raipur, Chhattisgarh



Photo Credit: WRI India.

SUMMING UP AND THE WAY FORWARD

- **Dr. Ruchika Singh** provided a comprehensive overview of the topics and conversations that unfolded throughout the day, summarizing the key themes and insights that emerged from the various discussions. She also introduced the screening of “Unfolding Sidhi’s Restoration Story,” a film showcasing the inspiring journey of landscape restoration in the Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh, where its people united to restore their landscapes through NbS. With collaborative efforts from WRI India, the Government of Madhya Pradesh Sidhi District Administration, and local implementation partner, ASA, the restoration of Sidhi’s landscape is yielding multiple benefits for people, nature, and climate, including strengthened valuable ecosystem services, improved food and nutrition security, and enhanced jobs and incomes.
- **Niharika Barik, Principal Secretary, DP & RD, GoC**, highlighted the pivotal role of local ownership in ensuring the success of restoration projects. She emphasized that planning must occur at multiple levels—ranging from micro-level village initiatives to macro-level landscape strategies—ensuring that interventions are both locally relevant and scalable. Citing successful examples from Kanker, she reinforced the need for the development of a comprehensive policy paper that would serve as a guiding document for the department’s future planning efforts. Ms. Barik also shared the importance of creating a baseline data document specific to Chhattisgarh, which would identify regions with high levels of land degradation and low water tables. This document, she suggested, would enable more targeted and effective restoration interventions. She proposed that this document be developed collaboratively, incorporating inputs on the types of degradation, required interventions, and specific, area-based restoration plans.

Acknowledging the limitations of the government in leading community-based restoration efforts, Ms. Barik praised the crucial role played by CSOs. She noted that community involvement is essential to foster ownership and pride, both of which are key for the long-term success of restoration projects. By

fostering collaboration between the government and CSOs, Ms. Barik envisioned a more sustainable and impactful restoration landscape for Chhattisgarh, where local communities take pride in preserving and restoring their natural environment.

- **Neeraja Kudrimoti, Associate Director, TRI**, delivered the Vote of Thanks, expressing gratitude to all the dignitaries, panelists, and participants for their contributions. She acknowledged the key insights shared throughout the event and thanked the government officials, CSOs, academic institutions, and experts for their roles in the discussions. Ms. Kudrimoti highlighted the importance of ongoing collaboration and urged all stakeholders to continue working together for effective landscape restoration in Chhattisgarh.

APPENDIX A

List of participants

Niharika Barik, Principal Secretary, DP&RD, GoC

Bhim Singh, Secretary, DP&RD, GoC

Rajat Bansal, Commissioner, MGNREGA

Dr. K. Subramaniam, Member, Rajya NITI Aayog, GoC

Sumeet Agrawal, CEO of Zila Panchayat,
Kanker, Chhattisgarh

Bhupendra Pandey, Deputy Director, Directorate
of Horticulture

Umesh Singh Tomar, Deputy Director, Directorate
of Agriculture

Swarnim Shukla, Department of Tribal and
Scheduled Caste

Dinesh Agarwal, Joint Director,
Directorate of Panchayat

Vinay Gupta, Superintending Engineer, MGNREGA

R.K. Jha, DP&RD

Pradeep Tiwari, DP&RD

Dr. S. Sahu, Central Ground Water Board, Raipur

Rohit Prakash, NCNF

Sudheer D, NCNF

Jyoti Patil, Chaitanya

Rahul Dutta Roy, Chaitanya

Saurabh Namdeo, Chaitanya

Manisha Motwani, Chhattisgarh Agricon Samiti

Anand Shukla, Samerth Trust

Pileshwar Singh, Samerth Trust

Manoj Kumar, State Lead, PRADAN

Preetam Gupta, PRADAN

Renuka Sahu, PRADAN

Dr. Harsha Vashistha, PRADAN

Jayant Karnik, Joint Director, AERF

Karn Mahadik, AERF

Pankaj Bhure, AERF

Rajnish Gupta, ASORD

Namita Misra, FES

Nandkishor Bhagat, Shamayita Math

Bhupendra Singh, SSGVS

Dip N. Benerjee, CARMDAKSH

Deepak Singh, Landscape Coordinator, Commonland

Basant Yadav, Sahabhagi Samaj Sevi Sanstha

Smriti Sahu, Cluster-Level Federation Members

Ashwini Soni, Cluster-Level Federation Members

Jamuna Rana, Cluster-Level Federation Members

Neeraja Kudrimoti, Associate Director, TRI

Naveen Kumar Verma, TRI

Palash Agarwal, TRI

Ashutosh Nanda, TRI

Prashant S, TRI

Rishi Meena, TRI

Rashmi Kumari, TRI

Sharan B, TRI

Shrish Kalyani, TRI

Purnajyoti Khanra, TRI

Arvind P, TRI

Dr. Ruchika Singh, WRI India

Siddharth Edake, WRI India

Nabajyoti Roy, WRI India

Jyoti Yadav, WRI India

Anjali Koppala, WRII

Meenakshi Kakkar, WRI India

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank all the participating individuals, organizations, and government departments for their valuable input during the Restoration Dialogues, which were critical in identifying and prioritizing the key barriers and pathways for scaling landscape restoration in Chhattisgarh. We thank our colleagues at WRI India and TRI, who helped finalize this report, including the communications team that helped with the editing and design.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Jyoti Yadav, Senior Program Associate, Food, Land, and Water Program, WRI India
Contact: Jyoti.Yadav@wri.org

Nabajyoti Roy, Program Manager, Food, Land, and Water Program, WRI India
Contact: Nabajyoti.Roy@wri.org

Ashutosh Nanda, Senior Practitioner, Transform Rural India
Contact: ashutosh.nanda@trif.in

Palash Agarwal, Practitioner at Transform Rural India
Contact: palash@trif.in

REFERENCES

Duraisami, M., R. Singh, and S. Chaliha. 2022. "Roadmap for Scaling Trees Outside Forests in India: Learnings from Select States on Policy Incentives, Enabling Conditions, and Barriers." Working Paper. Washington DC: World Resources Institute.

WRI India. 2018. Restoration Opportunities Atlas: State Reports. Mumbai: WRI India. Accessed October 16, 2024. Restoration Opportunities Atlas State Reports_Highres.pdf.

ABOUT WRI INDIA

WRI India, an independent charity legally registered as the India Resources Trust, provides objective information and practical proposals to foster environmentally sound and socially equitable development. Our work focuses on building sustainable and livable cities and working towards a low-carbon economy. Through research, analysis, and recommendations, WRI India puts ideas into action to build transformative solutions to protect the earth, promote livelihoods, and enhance human well-being. We are inspired by and associated with World Resources Institute (WRI), a global research organization. Know more: www.wri-india.org



WRI INDIA

LGF, AADI, 2 BALBIR SAXENA
MARG, HAUZ KHAS,
NEW DELHI 110016, INDIA
+91 11 40550776
WWW.WRI-INDIA.ORG