



# Restoration Policy Dialogues 2023

## INSPIRING, INNOVATING, AND DESIGNING SOLUTIONS FOR THE UPSCALING OF LANDSCAPE RESTORATION THROUGH POLICY DIALOGUES, WITH A FOCUS ON PEOPLE, NATURE, AND CLIMATE

August 11, 2023 | Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh | Compiled by: Jyoti Yadav, Srishti Kochhar, and Siddharth Edake

### INTRODUCTION

The Government of India (GoI) has demonstrated its strong commitment to restoration by pledging to restore 26 million hectares (Mha) of degraded land through its Bonn Challenge and Land Degradation Neutrality targets. As part of its nationally determined contributions and the Net Zero by 2070 commitment, it has also pledged to increase its forest and tree cover by 2030, with a goal of sequestering 2.5–3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) has implemented various flagship policies, such as the Watershed Development Component–Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana 2.0 (WDC-PMKSY 2.0), National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), to undertake large-scale restoration-related interventions in meeting the global targets. These programs can help unlock the restoration potential in Madhya Pradesh through an integrated landscape approach, with a focus on fostering public and private investment in implementing nature-based solutions that can help meet the triple challenge of recovering nature, meeting people’s needs, and staying within the global warming limit of 1.5°C. This can be achieved by enhancing rural livelihoods and job opportunities, building resilience, and mitigating climate risks through collaborations with diverse stakeholders.

WRI India’s research findings indicate that India’s policy ecosystem supports various monetary and nonmonetary incentives that promote restoration; however, implementation has proven to be consistently challenging. It is essential to convene policymakers and experts on a common platform to tackle these interconnected and multidimensional challenges and pursue effective solutions. A common platform to bring together different stakeholders was ensured through the Restoration Policy Dialogues.

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

The Restoration Policy Dialogues held on August 11, 2023, in Bhopal were convened by the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development (DP&RD), Government of Madhya Pradesh (GoMP) in collaboration with WRI India and Transform Rural India (TRI). The focus of this dialogue was on “Restoring landscapes in Madhya Pradesh for climate and communities.” The dialogues, aimed at inspiring, innovating, and designing solutions for converging existing policies and scaling landscape restoration in Madhya Pradesh, by and brought together over 45 participants, including policymakers and civil society organizations (CSOs) actively involved in restoring degraded lands.

Apart from senior DP&RD officers, participants from the department’s constituent units, namely the State Rural Livelihood Mission (SRLM); the State Employment Guarantee Council, which administers the MGNREGS; the Rajiv Gandhi Mission for Watershed Management; and the Directorate of Panchayats, took part in the discussions. Representatives from other departments, including the Department of Farmer Welfare and Agriculture Development, the Green India Mission (GIM), and the Department of Horticulture and Food Processing, also participated. Detailed participant information can be found in the annexure attached at the end of the document.

**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 Madhya Pradesh, 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.

**Anirban Ghose**, Co-lead, TRI, expanded on the opening remarks by discussing the current interventions in land and water conservation under various DP&RD schemes. However, the challenge lies in aligning these interventions with the proposed integrated landscape approach, while prioritizing the livelihoods of marginalized groups. He emphasized the importance of scaling up landscape restoration across Madhya Pradesh, with the involvement of CSOs and support from government departments.

**Mr. R. Parasuram**, former Chief Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh, and Senior Fellow, WRI India, provided valuable insights into the importance of involving people in land restoration initiatives. He emphasized the challenge of policy implementation, which can be addressed through convergence and collaboration among various stakeholders. The pilot project in Sidhi district demonstrates the convergence approach, highlighting the roles of different government departments and CSOs in conceptualizing and implementing a project. He highlighted that the Sidhi pilot project enabled the systematic streamlining of existing restoration interventions that were previously implemented in silos. By gaining the support of the state government and demonstrating stakeholders’ willingness to explore wider applicability, the Sidhi project established the proof of an internationally accepted, scientifically designed, human-centered, empirically tested, and organizationally and institutionally mature concept. He suggested developing a standardized framework for implementing landscape restoration that can be integrated into the larger state government structure. This would address the implementation challenges due to the frequent transfer of officers and ensure the long-term sustainability of initiatives.

## SPECIAL ADDRESS BY MALAY SHRIVASTAVA, ADDITIONAL CHIEF SECRETARY, DP&RD, GoMP

Mr. Malay Shrivastava, Additional Chief Secretary, DP&RD, GoMP, commenced his address by discussing the relevance of ongoing landscape restoration schemes in Madhya Pradesh. He emphasized the evolving and transitioning nature of the government's role in dealing with the contemporary challenges of climate change. Based on his experience of working with the government, Mr. Shrivastava explained the evolution of the government's approach to addressing issues pertaining to climate change. He cited an example of how in the past, water was made available to local communities in water-scarce areas, and how, with the introduction of the Jal Jeevan Mission, water is now provided directly to people's doorstep. He further highlighted the challenges associated with excess water usage and wastage, resulting in the decline in groundwater levels in certain parts of Madhya Pradesh. He also emphasized the increasing importance of improving agricultural efficiency through groundwater recharge and improved irrigation methods.

Mr. Shrivastava spoke about the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and India's commitments to them as a signatory to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He stated that although these goals are established on a global scale, their implementation at the local level necessitates strategic planning through a context-specific approach. He described the crucial role of self-help groups (SHGs) in mobilizing communities and implementing various schemes and mentioned the contribution of the *Lakshpati Mahila* scheme in improving women's income at the grassroots level. Therefore, connecting the restoration approach to livelihoods would be crucial in empowering women-led organizations and increasing women's income levels. Mr. Shrivastava recommended that incorporating a people-centric approach and prioritizing livelihoods in the design of landscape restoration would lead to the holistic development of landscapes. In addition to SHGs, he emphasized the importance of empowering and strengthening other local community-based institutions, such as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), to ensure sustainable implementation of initiatives.

Mr. Shrivastava highlighted the role of the district collector in implementing various policies and programs in a comprehensive manner. In addition, the institution of the chief executive officer (CEO), Zila Panchayat, has been strengthened over time and greatly contributes to rural development. He concluded his presentation by reiterating the important aspects of landscape restoration, such as watersheds, intercropping, and sustainable agriculture, that require focused intervention. These efforts are expected to ultimately enhance the livelihoods and income levels of local communities.

## SESSION 1: IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING AN INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE APPROACH

The session highlighted the concept of landscape and integrated approach to restoration through the pilot study undertaken by WRI India in Sidhi district, Madhya Pradesh. The discussions emphasized various methodologies and tools that have enabled identification of restoration potential, planning, and designing restoration interventions.

In this session, **Srishti Kochhar**, Program Manager, Food, Land and Water Program, WRI India, explained the concept of landscapes, which operate as interconnected mosaics or patchworks of different land uses and land cover. The landscape approach focuses on the coexistence of agricultural land, pasture, and forested land within a broad geographical landscape. Hence, this approach enables us to consider the multiple functions and co-benefits that can be obtained from different land types for a comprehensive restoration of the landscape, which can meet the needs of local communities by placing livelihoods and people at the forefront. Landscape restoration serves the dual objectives of ecological conservation and human development.

The term landscape refers to both spatial and geographical dimensions and provides a framework for an integrated approach. Thus, landscape is defined on a case-by-case basis, serving as a meaningful planning unit for each project.

Ms. Kochhar shared details of the Sidhi pilot project, which was initiated in collaboration with the district administration based on the study conducted by WRI India using a global research methodology called Restoration Opportunity Assessment Methodology (ROAM) in the Indian context. This approach addresses questions regarding who, where, and how landscape restoration should occur, as well as the associated costs and benefits. For Sidhi District, the ROAM exercise was conducted in a participatory and collaborative manner, involving consultations with over 500 stakeholders to identify and understand the scope of landscape restoration in that specific district. For the pilot project, a cluster of 13 villages, covering an area of 9,034 ha, was selected for reasons such as connectivity, watershed principles, potential for restoration, social inclusion, and the implementation status of livelihood interventions. The implementation and investment plans were designed in close collaboration with the district administration. By strengthening community-based institutions, nature-based solutions were identified and implemented, resulting in carbon sequestration for climate adaptation and enhanced community resilience against the impact of climate change.

Ms. Kochhar elaborated on the landscape approach principles that are recognized worldwide and can be contextualized depending on region-specific needs. She provided a detailed explanation of how these principles were employed in the implementation of the Sidhi pilot project. Figure 1 shows the context-specific application of these principles. Keeping the principles at the center, the Sidhi pilot project was designed in a stepwise manner, including planning and partnerships, restoration strategy design, capacity building, implementation of restoration policies, and monitoring.

She concluded the presentation by describing water, along with tree-based interventions and sustainable agriculture, as the entry point for landscape restoration. The project was implemented through the convergence of public funds from MGNREGS, WDC-PMKSY, SRLM, and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), along with corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds from private companies. The goal was to emphasize that by adopting globally recognized scientific principles within a local context, we could successfully implement landscape restoration initiatives.

**FIGURE 1 | Landscape approach principles**

• Continuous learning and adaptive management	→	Institutionalized governance modality, regular review meetings across state, district, and block
• Common concern entry point	→	Water identified as a common concern entry-point for landscape restoration, implementation done through watershed principles
• Multiple scales	→	Institutionalized governance modality at multiple scales across state, district, and block
• Multifunctional uses of the landscape	→	Provision of multiple functions – livelihoods, water, soil, biodiversity, carbon, food, and nutrition
• Multiple stakeholders	→	Government institutions, civil society organizations, Panchayati Raj Institutions, local user groups, and private sector
• Negotiated and transparent change logic	→	Long-term time horizon, discussion of costs-benefits, and tradeoffs among stakeholders
• Participatory and user-friendly monitoring	→	Participatory citizen science-based mobile application with geospatial monitoring framework for both socio economic and biophysical indicators
• Clarification of rights and responsibilities	→	Clearly identified roles and responsibilities between government entities, local user groups, CSOs, etc.
• Strengthened stakeholder capacity	→	Building capacities of civil society organizations through ROAM trainings, targeted capacity building of grassroots-level stakeholders

Note: ROAM = Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology

Source: Adapted from Sayer et al., 2013

## SESSION 2: LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH IMPLEMENTING AN INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE APPROACH IN SIDHI DISTRICT, MADHYA PRADESH

**Rahul Dhote**, CEO, Zila Panchayat, Sidhi District, has been involved in the Sidhi pilot project implementation since 2021. He shared his experience of working on landscape restoration interventions using a convergence model, which involved four prominent schemes: MGNREGS, Madhya Pradesh (MP)SRLM, watershed management, and forest-based interventions. He described the interventions implemented under each of these schemes, including the construction of land and water structures under WDC-PMKSY 2.0, tree-based interventions and soil-moisture conservation under MGNREGS, and the mobilization and strengthening of SHGs under MPSRLM. He stated that this was made possible through the convergence of public funds of approximately INR 5 crores (\$600,000) from CSR; NABARD funds contributed approximately 20 percent of the funding for restoration interventions in the pilot cluster, with the remaining 80 percent coming from public sources, primarily from MGNREGS.

He emphasized the multiple benefits of adopting a convergence approach, as it enables strategic planning and design of interventions, facilitates domain specialization, promotes effective monitoring and feedback, and provides technical competence and assistance. He illustrated this with examples of the scientific approach adopted by CSOs such as Action for Social Advancement (ASA) and WRI India in site selection and in designing land and water structures in Sidhi. A workshop was later organized for government engineers to enhance their technical expertise and precision in site selection. The technical support in geospatial monitoring provided by WRI India has resulted in effective feedback and implementation of monitoring measures.

Regarding the expansion and upscaling of landscape restoration across Madhya Pradesh, Dhote identified three interventions that can be scaled up in a context-specific manner.

- First, he emphasized the upscaling of soil-moisture conservation efforts, as these interventions are ongoing under MGNREGS and fall within the mandate of the DP&RD.
- The second intervention that can be scaled up is the “wadi” model, which involves agricultural-horticultural cultivation and/or plantation, which can increase income levels, provide livelihoods, and improve food and nutrition security. Upscaling of the wadi model can be executed in a systematic manner with the support and assistance of the agriculture and horticulture departments. Many SHGs can be mobilized and trained to adopt the wadi model.
- Lastly, he added that most SHGs and farmer producer organizations (FPOs) in the state lack the capacity to establish market connections, sustain their microbusinesses, and effectively utilize community investment funds (CIFs). Scaling up interventions through SHGs and FPOs should ideally take one year to enhance the capacity of beneficiaries.

Mr. Dhote summarized the lessons learned from the Sidhi experience:

- Draw a timeline for district-level coordination with a blueprint of tangible and timely targets.
- Prioritize local mobilization and coordination.
- Ensure active involvement from other departments, such as agriculture, horticulture, and forestry, to effectively operationalize the landscape approach.

Finally, Mr. Dhote proposed expanding landscape restoration interventions to more villages in the Sidhi District and suggested a context-specific approach to scaling these interventions.

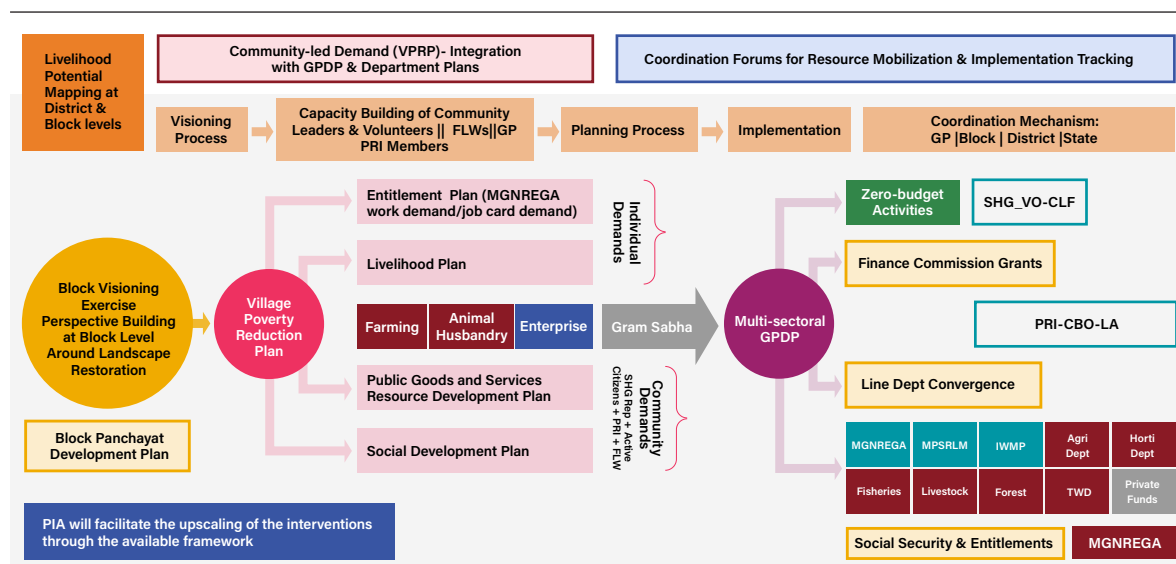
The Sidhi pilot project was appreciated by the participants and discussions included questions about the execution of a convergence approach at the district level. Mr. Dhote emphasized the role played by the district administration in enabling the convergence of schemes, funds, and resources for targeted interventions.

## SESSION 3: OPPORTUNITIES FRAMEWORK FOR THE CONVERGENCE OF PUBLIC FUNDING FOR LANDSCAPE RESTORATION IN MADHYA PRADESH

The session commenced with a presentation by **Neha Gupta**, State Lead, TRI, which examined scaling landscape restoration through a convergence framework that leverages grassroots-level institutions. Ms. Gupta provided a context for this convergence by referring to the MoRD-GoI notification issued in October 2021 for the universalization of livelihoods for women. The government notification called for the provision of a livelihood development scale for SHGs in rural areas, indicating that all rural SHG women should aim to achieve an annual income of at least INR 1 lakh within three years.

She highlighted the importance of integrated planning at the village, block, and district levels. In the present-day scenario, different departments have individual plans and work independently. For example, gram panchayats have the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), while SHGs present their demands through the Village Poverty Reduction Plan (VPRP). There is a need for effective coordination, integration, and convergence of the GPDP and VPRP, whereby schemes from different line departments can converge through the integration of these two plans. This would enable the design of a diverse range of restoration interventions that focus on livelihood generation and community development in collaboration with key institutional stakeholders.

**FIGURE 2 | Convergence framework for scaling landscape restoration**



Note: SHG\_VO-CLF= Self Help Group\_ Village Organization\_ Cluster Level Federation, PRI-CBO-LA= Panchayati Raj Institutions\_ Community Based Organisations- Local Administration, FLWs= Front Line Workers, TWD= Tribal Welfare Department, PIA= Project Implementation Agency, GPDP= Gram Panchayat Development Plan, PRI= Panchayati Raj Institution, GP= Gram Panchayat, MPSRLM= Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission, MGNREGA= Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

Source: Transform Rural India

Once finalized, the VPRP will be integrated with the GPDP, along with the MGNREGS Labour Budget. The purpose of designing this framework is to ensure coherence among the various development plans led by different institutional actors and improving the activities component of the natural resource management category under MGNREGS. The framework aims to prioritize livelihoods in designing restoration interventions utilizing SHGs and the Lakhpati Mahila scheme. This framework can be effectively coordinated and streamlined with the assistance of officials at state, district, block, and village levels.

She shared the key steps for improving planning and convergence in the upscaling of landscape restoration:

- Interlinking existing planning and review mechanisms: This involves the effective consolidation and alignment of multiple plans at the block (block development plan), cluster (cluster-level plan), gram panchayat (GPDP), and village (VPRP) levels.
- Establishing institutional mechanisms: Strengthening blocks as units for operationalization with the help of block-level committees and receiving support from state departments for effective monitoring.

Following the presentation on the convergence framework, various points were raised in response.

- Neha Gupta addressed questions related to the application of the convergence model on the ground. She shared the example of Barwani District, where more than 60 percent of activities have been implemented in the selected villages. The beneficiary entitlement targets were achieved through community-centric processes and the support of local self-government.
- Mr. Shrivastava appreciated the convergence model presented by Gupta and emphasized the important connection between livelihoods, SHGs, and the design of restoration initiatives highlighted during the presentation. He then requested L. M. Belwal, CEO, MPSRLM, to share his thoughts on the convergence model, specifically in the context of SHGs.
- Mr. Belwal provided a brief discussion on SHGs and their ability to engage in diverse livelihoods. He stated that Barwani has more potential than Sidhi, particularly for interior areas such as Rajpura. He emphasized the importance of sensitizing and planning interventions with the support of SHGs. Furthermore, he shared a restoration model from Uttarakhand, where changes in behavior among local women, such as not collecting wood, led to the restoration of forests and biodiversity. He also emphasized the need to adopt mixed cropping and horticulture rather than agroforestry and the increasing importance of reintroducing millet.

**Dr. Swati Moghe**, Consultant, GIM, GoMP, delivered a detailed presentation on the role of the Forest Department in implementing the GIM. She elaborated on the initiatives taken by the department for landscape restoration under the Ecosystem Service Improvement Project of the GIM. The project emphasized conducting social awareness workshops at the division level, where representatives from different departments were invited to participate in discussions regarding their contributions and support. One of the main challenges is the lack of strong leadership and ownership from the collector, which impedes stakeholder convergence. As part of the project, Dr Moghe had organized 137 awareness workshops, 71 capacity-building workshops, and 1,799 skill development workshops to enhance additional livelihoods and conducted 31 exposure visits.

## SESSION 4: EXPERIENCE SHARING ON IMPLEMENTING INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE RESTORATION IN MADHYA PRADESH

The session focused on CSOs sharing their experiences of implementing the integrated landscape approach in Madhya Pradesh. The panelists for this discussion were Purushottam Dhakar, Self-Reliant Initiatives through Joint Action (SRIJAN); Dr. Vivek Sharma, Centre for Advanced Research & Development

(CARD); Ashis Mondal, ASA; Satyasovan Das, Foundation for Ecological Security (FES); Saheb Bhattacharyya, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN); Mradul Choubey, E&Y; and Aditya Mandloi, The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The panel was chaired by Mr. Shrivastava.

The key points that emerged from this session are summarized below.

**Ashis Mondal** (ASA) presented a brief overview of the interventions undertaken by ASA to support landscape restoration. He also shared his experience of working at the grassroots level.

- At ASA, an important entry point for landscape restoration has been attempted through a livelihood framework that includes land and water resource development, financial inclusion, market access, sustainable agriculture, and technological promotion.
- He emphasized the importance of irrigation for small and marginal farmers, as well as for SHGs and FPOs, in implementing agricultural interventions. Recently, there has been increasing pressure on agricultural land, leading to a decline in soil fertility and overall crop yield. Therefore, restoring and improving the functionality of agricultural land have become critical.
- He further added that the private sector has a crucial role in promoting growth and future investments in the sector. He highlighted the pressing concern regarding climate change and its impact on all aspects of life. This offers opportunities for climate mitigation and adaptation through landscape restoration measures.
- Mondal explained the work done by ASA in the western Madhya Pradesh landscape, in seven villages and with 75,000 farmers, focusing on the restoration of natural resources, promotion of organic agriculture, and development of agricultural value chains for cotton, soybeans, and wheat. In other regions, the focus was on promoting millet production, agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, and agricultural value-chain development.

**Vivek Sharma** (CARD) shared his observations on the exclusion of a people-centric approach in development plans for environmental conservation until the 1990s.

- He explained how, over the past two decades, there has been a significant shift in natural conservation and human development. The watershed approach has become crucial in this context, and collaborative programs such as the Drought-Prone Areas Program me have contributed to improved functionality.
- He explained the concept of landscape restoration using the analogy of landscape painting, which involves combining different colors and strokes from an in-depth perspective, similar to the approach employed in landscape restoration.
- He concluded his presentation by proposing potential strategies in two relevant areas: the convergence approach to landscape restoration and raising awareness about the Panchayats (Extension over Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA Act) as well as involving communities in the scheduled areas in the restoration efforts.

**Kapil Pagnis** Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) shared details about the GIZ project aimed at promoting community nutrition gardens through a partnership with MGNREGS. Initially, they planned a pilot study of 20 gardens in four districts, of which only three were successful. The key learnings included the optimal size of the nutrition garden (1–2 ha) and the need to connect nutrition gardens with livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, the project should be adaptable to any government department project to ensure long-term sustainability. He also mentioned that they are currently working with 100 community gardens through MGNREGS, which can be scaled up through capacity building and effective monitoring with the support of CSOs.



**Saheb Bhattacharya** (PRADAN) discussed the ongoing project on landscape restoration and biochain development in 12 districts, impacting the livelihoods of over 200,000 families. According to Bhattacharya, four key components are essential for successful landscape restoration, including:

- The role played by CSOs in innovation and experimentation;
- The need for mandates and establishment of key performance indicators for landscape restoration;
- The requirement for district- and state-level convergence to bring different stakeholders onto the same page; and
- Financing of CSOs.

**Satyasovan Das** (FES) discussed the work of FES in promoting natural farming through demand-based planning. **Dhakar** (SRIJAN) highlighted the components of a landscape approach described as “jal, jangal, jameen” (water, forest, and land, respectively) in designing restoration interventions, adding that it is crucial to specify roles and responsibilities, establish mandates for the execution and implementation of interventions, and secure financing to adopt a landscape approach.

**Aditya Mandloi** (TNC) provided an overview of the riparian restoration work conducted in Hoshangabad and the role played by district officials in the successful implementation of the project. The riparian restoration activity is currently being implemented on 250 ha which will be completed by 2024. TNC also conducted a spatial analysis of riparian areas in seven districts which estimated a potential to restore 5,000 ha of degraded riparian land. He also emphasized the importance of strengthening community institutions, such as gram panchayats and janpath panchayats, considering not only their agency role but also their governance functions. He highlighted the importance of obtaining a public mandate and achieving convergence. The PESA Act can play an important role in enhancing the significance of the gram sabha. To promote innovation, it is important to work in areas beyond administrative boundaries. He also proposed the establishment of a project monitoring unit (PMU) at the relevant department headquarters, consisting of experts from diverse fields, such as finance, landscape, and technology. This would facilitate improved monitoring, coordination, and capacity building for key institutional stakeholders.

**Mradul Choubey** (E&Y) discussed the significance of incorporating safeguards during the planning stage, such as area-based planning and the introduction of plant species suitable for the region. For example, when farmers are given access to water, they tend to switch to water-intensive crops such as paddy. Although this may lead to an increase in their livelihood income, it can have an adverse effect on the groundwater levels in the area, thereby rendering it unsustainable in the long run. He also highlighted the necessity of allocating resources to support the growth of existing plant species cultivated under MGNREGS.

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

The session was facilitated by Mr. R. Parasuram and Mr. Malay Shrivastava on discussions around the role played by different government institutions in implementing integrated landscape restoration in a convergence approach. This session focused on discussing four pertinent questions that aimed to gather insights from the relevant stakeholders for designing a blueprint or framework for upscaling landscape restoration in Madhya Pradesh. The four issues for discussion were as follows: how to facilitate and design a collaborative administrative environment for landscape restoration, how to design project implementation architecture for state- and district-level convergence, the capacity gaps and support needed for this ambitious project, and the roles and responsibilities that can be shared with CSOs at all levels.

**FIGURE 3 | Deliberations on upscaling landscape restoration in Madhya Pradesh**



Photo credit: WRI India

The key points and recommendations that emerged from this session are summarized below:

- **S. Krishna Chaitanya**, Commissioner, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), suggested that private land should be included in restoration efforts by linking income for holistic development. In Barwani, efforts have been made using geographic information systems (GIS) technology along with collaboration between MGNREGS and the Forest Department.
- **Mr. Shrivastava** appreciated the participation and contributions of the attendees. He suggested identifying steps for a future course of action considering the suggestions and experiences shared by the participants for scaling landscape restoration to districts in Madhya Pradesh.
  - He emphasized the approach of CSOs to ensure wide coverage of the entire population.
  - He also highlighted that SHGs are a strong force working at the grassroots-level and can be optimized as a valuable resource for restoration interventions.
  - CSOs are currently operating at limited capacity, necessitating the establishment of a mechanism to strengthen their capacity. CSR funding is one potential financial avenue; however, additional sources of funding are required. Restoration interventions should be incentivized to encourage community participation. Evidence suggests that if interventions are designed by prioritizing livelihoods, community participation rates are likely to improve.
- Based on the contributions of both government stakeholders and CSO representatives, Mr. Parasuram shared the following thoughts:
  - The Sidhi model should serve as a launchpad for scalability and replicability according to the government's design.
  - He also appreciated the work done by CSOs but acknowledged the limitations and challenges faced by them in their work due to funding constraints and issues of self-sustainability. He proposed devising a mechanism that would allow the government to provide financial aid for targeted restoration interventions using a convergence model.
  - He discussed the need for a standardized framework that could establish systems within the government machinery. This framework would support the creation of an enabling environment for context-specific planning of interventions. A comprehensive framework should include the following:
    - (i) Nonfinancial convergence model
    - (ii) Decentralized, noncompetitive environment

- (iii) Scalability: Guidelines and framework
- (iv) Strengthening of existing institutions
- Targeted capacity building for SHGs and FPOs is required.
- Belwal emphasized the importance of capacity building and prioritizing the assessment of SHGs. Their participation in landscape restoration initiatives can be optimized by providing incentives through livelihoods. Activities such as natural farming, kitchen gardening, and food processing should be encouraged through regular training workshops and awareness campaigns. Local knowledge and inputs from women at the grassroots level are critical for designing interventions, and SHGs must be included in the planning stage.
- Mondal suggested that MGNREGS has the potential to be a powerhouse and that a decentralized approach would result in more effective implementation. Providing each panchayat with autonomy, rather than receiving orders based on demand, could enable the creation of a supply-driven model in association with MGNREGS using a watershed framework.
- Dr. Moghe mentioned that the Forest Department could only achieve 2 percent of the GIM target area for soil and moisture conservation. The department faced challenges in convincing communities to cultivate certain plant species. She suggested that CSOs and Divisional Forest Officers have significant roles in establishing trust with local communities and ensuring their participation. She also highlighted the importance of integrating horticulture and agriculture and promoting skill development and capacity building among *van samiti* members and SHGs by the Forest Department.
- **Yogesh** (Samarthan) stated that there is a need to identify a landscape and consider it as a single unit. This unit can serve as an example for other panchayats by bringing together various departments. The two underused institutions are the janpad panchayat and the zila panchayat, and the roles and functions of the elected representatives of these bodies need to be strengthened. In addition, he suggested the establishment of a landscape-level committee with *janpad adhyaksh*, with the youth playing a critical role. The current GPDP only focuses on construction work and lacks long-term vision and a participatory approach to improve villages.
- **Kshama Shukla**, Farmer Welfare and Agriculture Development Department, provided information regarding existing constraints in the implementation of schemes, including detailed project reports (DPRs) that do not align with government parameters and guidelines. As a result, the department is unable to support the applicants; for example, when DPRs are submitted for specific crops that are not mentioned in the crop diversification scheme mandate.
- **Jitendra Pandit**, TRI, emphasized the need for establishing a state-level PMU to facilitate effective convergence nodes and develop a matrix or framework that can support the scaling up of restoration interventions.
- **Sanket Aher**, TRI, highlighted that, through capacity building, village- and cluster-level engineers could help strengthen the implementation of MGNREGS using the landscape approach. He added that labor budget planning should be both short and long term and should include matters such as check dams and infrastructure requirements for soil and water conservation.
- **Kajal Jawla**, DP&RD, GoMP, emphasized the importance of ensuring the sustainability of existing plant saplings under MGNREGS rather than developing new species. Considering that most of these tree species have a long gestation period, it is crucial to consider the factors that enable their survival and sustainability. She provided an example of interventions in tree plantations and innovative solutions implemented by Farmers for Forests in Maharashtra, such as carbon credits to promote the long-term sustainability of plantation interventions.
- All the panelists highlighted the significance of promoting community-based institutions for restoration initiatives.

- Community-based institutions, particularly SHGs and gram panchayats, play a crucial role in the mobilization of local communities to conduct restoration-based development work.
- To ensure sustainable local restoration interventions, it is necessary to enhance the capacities of these institutions and involve them at all stages of the restoration process, from planning and design to execution and monitoring.
- Providing enabling conditions and incentives for community-based organizations to operate as independent units and ensuring a sense of ownership are crucial.

## SUMMING UP: THE WAY FORWARD AND CALL TO ACTION

Facilitated by Dr. Ruchika Singh and Anirban Ghose, the Restoration Policy Dialogues 2023 concluded with closing remarks from the Chair, Mr. Shrivastava, and Mr. Parasuram. They reached a consensus that a brief strategic vision document showing the way forward should be finalized to expand the outreach of landscape restoration to other districts in the state, which can serve as guidelines for future action by the department in collaboration with all stakeholders.

**FIGURE 4 | Participants in the Restoration Policy Dialogues 2023 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**



*Photo credit : Shweta Prajapati/WRI India*

### **Action points for strengthening and expanding the use of a landscape restoration approach in projects across the state.**

The following key points were identified for the implementation and scaling of landscape restoration interventions:

#### **Designing a blueprint and framework for upscaling landscape restoration interventions:**

- A nonfinancial blueprint and framework for upscaling the Sidhi landscape restoration model to other districts should be finalized. The framework should be designed to promote synergistic convergence with the state government's development and welfare programs, particularly facilitating the distribution of funds to beneficiaries in project areas.
- The framework should be broad enough to be contextualized to the specificities of the districts where projects are undertaken, while bearing in mind the restoration principles and objectives.

- A needs and opportunity assessment of landscape restoration for identified project areas across the state can be conducted through district administration-led brainstorming sessions by inviting the participation of experts and functionaries from government departments, PRIs, NGOs, and community-based organizations.
- The overall approach should involve a combination of a top-down and bottom-up flow of ideas.
- The design should incorporate strong participatory stakeholder groups such as SHGs, FPOs, gram panchayats, and other village-level organizations.
- Capacity-building requirements should be carefully assessed, and skills should be upgraded.

#### **Institutional mechanism and convergent action:**

Landscape restoration provides an opportunity to unite various key departments with different roles and functions to foster cooperation and action. The dialogues highlighted the role played by gram panchayats and SHGs as crucial nudge units for the implementation of policies at the grassroots level. The gram panchayat and SHG models are leveraged as follows:

- The convergence of development plans, such as the VPRP, which is a community-demand plan prepared by the SHG network, can be further integrated into the GPDP to facilitate collaborative public funding of resources, and ensure coherence in the implementation of landscape interventions.
- The Livelihood and Resource Development component of the VPRP contributes to landscape restoration in villages and gram panchayats. The inclusion of these activities in MGNREGS's Shelf of Projects is the major source of funding for implementing these plans.
- Convergence prototypes guided by the principles of landscape restoration can be developed to facilitate convergence among the relevant schemes of the departments. In addition, other development plans, such as the District Action Plan and Block Development Plan, can adopt an interdisciplinary approach to designing and leveraging restoration activities. The district- and block-level convergence committees under the MoRD and MoPR guidelines will be activated to monitor the implementation of the decentralized plans.

#### **Livelihood generation is a key incentive in designing landscape restoration interventions by empowering SHGs:**

- To address the challenges posed by climate change, it is crucial to develop an ecosystem that promotes sustainable livelihoods and the responsible use of resources. This can be achieved by strengthening the roles of SHGs, FPOs, and other village-level institutions.
- There is significant potential to leverage the Lakhpati Mahila scheme in mobilizing and creating opportunities for livelihood for SHGs through various landscape restoration initiatives such as the wadi model, development of agriculture value chains, and food processing. The SRLM department will be instrumental in establishing processes and identifying the scope of work in this regard.

#### **Setting up a project monitoring unit (PMU) at state level:**

- The establishment of a dedicated PMU for landscape restoration at the departmental level with direct reporting lines to the Additional Chief Secretary, DP&RD, GoMP, will help in the design and simultaneous implementation of projects across the state.
- This will also facilitate the creation of project units led by collectors at the field level with sufficient autonomy to decide on implementation issues at their level.
- Details will be worked out with the MGNREGA Commissioner, nominated on behalf of DP&RD, GoMP, to take this initiative forward.

**Capacity building of stakeholders at all stages of implementation with the help of CSOs:**

A capacity-building program can be initiated with the help of CSOs for relevant stakeholders at the state, district, and block levels to enable them to play their roles in planning and implementing restoration interventions. Moreover, efforts should be made to secure alternative funding sources to cover the expenses of grassroots-level CSOs supporting this initiative, beyond government funding.

**Replicability and scalability:**

The Sidhi pilot implementation project can serve as an example for other districts adopting common but differentiated restoration initiatives. Harmonious synergies between governmental modalities and grassroots strategies are crucial for scalability and replication. A learning document on the implementation of the Sidhi landscape restoration would be a useful resource for introducing government stakeholders to the methodology and process adopted in the pilot project.

The Restoration Policy Dialogues 2023 was significant in facilitating the sharing of knowledge between government departments and CSOs, thereby aiding the processes of policy convergence, streamlining of institutional mechanisms, capacity building, and the financing and monitoring of restoration interventions to achieve statewide mainstreaming and implementation of this approach.

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## 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](http://www.wri-india.org)

### **Our challenge**

Natural resources are at the foundation of economic opportunity and human well-being. But today, we are depleting Earth's resources at rates that are not sustainable, endangering economies and people's lives. People depend on clean water, fertile land, healthy forests, and a stable climate. Livable cities and clean energy are essential for a sustainable planet. We must address these urgent, global challenges this decade.

### **Our vision**

We envision an equitable and prosperous planet driven by the wise management of natural resources. We aspire to create a world where the actions of government, business, and communities combine to eliminate poverty and sustain the natural environment for all people.

### **Our approach**

#### COUNT IT

We start with data. We conduct independent research and draw on the latest technology to develop new insights and recommendations. Our rigorous analysis identifies risks, unveils opportunities, and informs smart strategies. We focus our efforts on influential and emerging economies where the future of sustainability will be determined.

#### CHANGE IT

We use our research to inform government policies, business strategies, and civil society action. We test projects with communities, companies, and government agencies to build a strong evidence base. Then, we work with partners to deliver change on the ground that alleviates poverty and strengthens society. We hold ourselves accountable to ensure our outcomes will be bold and enduring.

#### SCALE IT

We don't think small. Once tested, we work with partners to adopt and expand our efforts regionally and globally. We engage with decision-makers to carry out our ideas and elevate our impact. We measure success through government and business actions that improve people's lives and sustain a healthy environment.



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