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Smallholder farmers' contribution toward forest landscape restoration: Evidence from Tchamba district, Togo

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Abstract

Forest and landscape restoration (FLR) has received significant attention over the past decade as a global initiative to combat forest and land degradation worldwide. Togo, a sub-Saharan African country, is actively involved in the FLR movement, which acknowledges smallholder rural farmers as crucial actors in achieving restoration goals at the local level. However, the restoration efforts of smallholder farmers in Togo remain unexplored, both at the individual and collective levels, hindering the ability to effectively inform the operationalisation of its FLR strategy and the implementation of planned or future restoration interventions. This research investigates restoration efforts across forest and agricultural landscapes, estimates the area of farmlands under restoration, and analyses the specific drivers and barriers to restoration. We applied a mixed-methods approach combining multivariate Tobit regression and Poisson models based on a 2023 household survey ($N = 313$ households) and focus group discussions (8) from Tchamba district, Togo. The findings reveal that, on average, households in Tchamba district restored 2.11 (± 1.28) hectares, representing approximately 36.19% of the total household landholdings. Findings also suggest that farmers employ diverse land management strategies to achieve their livelihoods, food security, and ecological restoration goals. Additionally, spatially consolidated and tenure-secured land plots lead to higher restoration efforts, while women's restoration actions are hindered by inadequate access to land. Therefore, restoration policies should prioritise land-ownership security, minimise fragmentation, and promote gender-responsive interventions. Strong local leadership, benefits for fuelwood and non-timber forest products, secure rights, and balance between energy, climate change adaptation, and ecological goals were identified as critical drivers for collective resource restoration. These results can guide restoration programmes involving collective actions and their governance.

Keywords: Adoption, restoration challenges, restoration practices