# Mapping social cohesion in restoration landscape in western Rwanda: Evidence from Rutsiro and Ngororero restoration sites

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## Abstract

Restoration is key to sustainable development. Ecological degradation is linked to societal factors, and therefore, restoration can be challenging in practice, especially in tropical regions. However, most restoration approaches have emphasised technical knowledge, leaving behind the socioeconomic and societal outcomes of restoration. This created a disconnection between science and practice. Additionally, it resulted in conflicting views between involved actors, whereby policymakers and practitioners often feel that researchers do not understand their needs or the impact of economic limitations and stakeholder perspectives on restoration projects. Many practitioners believe that research topics are irrelevant to their work or overlook important social, political, and logistical factors. Particularly, the local community is an important category that cannot be overlooked. There is a need for transformation in the design and governance of current restoration approaches. Adopting a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders offers an opportunity for sustainable restoration outcomes. It is important to consider the interests of all involved actors, which is a starting point for building a strong network of shared interests. To that end, social cohesion among stakeholders presents a vital research opportunity worthy of exploring for its potential to bring and keep different actors together. We argue that the high-quality communication, collaboration, and mutual trust among the stakeholders, the more cohesive the network is, and the more likely the restoration efforts will deliver sustainable outcomes.

By using a case study, this research identifies different actors involved in restoration in Western Rwanda. It will map out the communication, collaboration, and trust among them using Net-map-based interviews and focus group discussions. Net-Map enables mapping exercises with stakeholders to create an influence network map and generate data about actors' roles, motivations, and power at the restoration site. The integrated maps showcase stakeholder locations, types, and relationships, including their respective interests. These maps also facilitate comparisons of actor networks, influence, and communication follows. Stakeholder maps and knowledge produced help assess collaboration and trust levels, improve relationships within the network, and inform future governance frameworks.

**Keywords:** Mapping, net map, opportunity, restoration, social cohesion

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