Institutional design of forest landscape restoration in central Togo: Informing policy-making through Q methodology analysis

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Abstract

Forest landscape restoration (FLR) is a promising tool for restoring ecological functionality and improving human well-being in degraded landscapes. The success of FLR efforts depends on the interests, perceptions, and actions of local communities, extension services, Non-Governmental Organisations, and policymakers. While much research focuses on the direct ecological and economic impacts of FLR, limited attention has been given to how stakeholder perceptions influence the design and implementation of restoration efforts. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for shaping effective policy interventions and ensuring long-term FLR success. This study uses Q methodology to examine stakeholder viewpoints on key considerations and priorities for designing and implementing FLR in Tchamba Prefecture, Togo. The analysis reveals three distinct perspectives: (1) Incentive-Driven Restoration, emphasising financial incentives and private-sector partnerships as essential for FLR success; (2) Comprehensive and Collaborative Restoration, advocating for an inclusive, multidisciplinary approach that integrates community participation and long-term monitoring; and (3) Incentive-Driven Community Restoration, highlighting the importance of economic incentives in fostering local engagement. Across all perspectives, stakeholders strongly agreed on the importance of biodiversity conservation, stakeholder involvement, and conflict resolution in land use. The findings underscore the need to tailor FLR policies to local contexts and stakeholder preferences, suggesting that flexible, participatory approaches can enhance sustainability and effectiveness.While Q methodology captures diverse viewpoints, the relatively small sample size (15 respondents) may limit the representativeness of certain local perspectives. Future research should involve a broader and more diverse group of stakeholders to strengthen the robustness and policy relevance of the findings. This study contributes to developing inclusive, adaptive restoration policies and highlights the need to integrate behavioural insights into policy-making to foster long-term stakeholder engagement.

Keywords: Community engagement, forest landscape restoration, policy design, Q methodology, stakeholder perceptions

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