

Editorial

# Editorial for Special Issue: “Collaboration and Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in Landscape Governance and Management in Africa: Lessons from Practice”

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A multitude of interconnected socio-economic and environmental impacts are emerging across Africa as a result of escalating anthropogenic drivers of global and local change. Land use changes, infrastructural developments, changing weather patterns, and population growth and mobility are transforming the continent’s landscapes and social-ecological systems over time, shaping the livelihoods of the people dependent on these landscapes and the critical ecosystem services they provide. Increasing levels of degradation, conflict, poor governance, competition for land and inequality, exacerbated by climate change, are adding to the burden carried by local people, especially the most marginalised. In pursuing pathways towards a more resilient future, collaborative and multi-stakeholder governance and management of landscapes have been promoted by government agencies, NGOs and conservation organisations. Meaningful collaboration can promote the inclusion of marginalised voices, ensure appropriate actions and responses aligned to local concerns and needs, broaden the knowledge base, and bring frequently disconnected actors, sectors, and government institutions together in pursuit of a common goal.

However, there is no single way to achieve effective collaboration, and different landscape projects have experimented with different entry points and engagement processes. The need to further explore the linkages between different social and ecological components of landscape governance and management, which often operate under competing uses and meanings of land, led the Interdisciplinary Research Group on Climate Resilient African Landscapes (CRAL) project and this Special Issue to consider what has, or has not, worked in engagement and collaboration processes, what could be done better, and what practical lessons can be upscaled.

This Special Issue collates ten papers, including a global systematic review of the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in landscape approaches, and case study research from five African countries (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, and Madagascar), written by 56 authors from 29 organisations (including universities, research institutes, non-governmental and international organisations, and the private sector). In this editorial, we collate key lessons from practice evident across the papers.

Nine interrelated and important lessons for supporting more resilient and equitable landscapes emerged from our analysis of collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement in landscape governance and management in Africa.

1. CO-DESIGN AND CO-PRODUCE: Most papers highlight co-design and knowledge co-production as critical to inclusive and sustainable landscape management but also recognised that there are barriers to achieving this in practice (Favretto et al. [1],

Williams et al. [2], Cockburn et al. [3], Njoroge et al. [4], Musakwa et al. [5], Kusters et al. [6]). Several of the lessons that follow highlight ways to address some of these barriers. Inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement, together with sustained and systemic knowledge exchange, can support the co-design and co-production of integrated and sustainable policies and management plans that align the objectives of multiple landscape actors. As evidenced by the case study analysis of Favretto et al. [1], the co-benefits of forestry projects in Madagascar are enhanced when objectives of multiple landscape actors are aligned through a theory of change that systematically links project deliverables, outputs, outcomes, and impacts over time. A structured and transparent approach based on co-production strengthens the shared understanding and synergies of stakeholders and enhances community buy-in toward the delivery of tangible benefits.

**2. BUILD ON WHAT ALREADY EXISTS:** Before beginning a new engagement process it is important to have a holistic understanding of the landscape in question, including its governance, actors, uses and history. By reflecting on practical lessons regarding the role of civil society organisations in fostering inclusive landscape governance, Kusters et al. [6] show the importance of building on existing systems, platforms, and networks of collaboration to enhance local involvement and ownership. Recognising that the opportunities of landscape stakeholders to influence planning are unequal, several of the papers call for the inclusion of local actors, as well as the incorporation of their knowledge systems into ongoing governance processes (Favretto et al. [1], Williams et al. [2], Cockburn et al. [3], Musakwa et al. [5], Falayi et al. [7]).

**3. ACKNOWLEDGE THE ROLE OF HISTORY AND CONTEXT:** History shapes relations and power dynamics among landscape actors, determining who gets to participate, who gets to speak, and whose knowledge is used. This is of particular relevance in Africa where most countries have a colonial past, the consequences of which are still pervasive. Evidence of this is well presented in the South African case examined by Cockburn et al. [3]. These authors found that the differences in race/ethnicity, language, and knowledge systems derived from the country's history of discrimination have caused a lasting fragmentation of social groups and a power imbalance that shapes relations among landscape actors. History can also lead to inequality, with some stakeholder groups benefiting from past policy decisions, while others suffer the damage of displacement or being criminalised for their continued livelihood practices. Musakwa et al. [5] show that while stakeholder participation and partnership in the management of national parks in Zimbabwe has served wildlife conservation purposes, the increase of elephant populations has resulted in human-wildlife conflicts and generated negative livelihood outcomes for local communities. As noted by Ayivor et al. [8] in a study of land governance in Ghana, the protected areas system has fuelled antagonistic relationships between communities and protected area officials, resulting in the criminalisation of certain livelihood-related activities essential for local people's survival. Acknowledging the role that history and context play in landscape management decisions can support the development of policies that better align with local needs and strategies and that contribute to redress past injustices (Omoding et al. [9]).

**4. FIND A NEUTRAL CONVENER:** Academics and civil society organisations can play important and neutral intermediary roles as knowledge brokers, which can help balance power dynamics between stakeholders by guiding the aggregation of information, supporting collaboration, and facilitating wider participation (Cockburn et al. [3]). In the analysis of energy transitions through landscape governance in urban informal settlements in Kenya, Njoroge et al. [4] show the pivotal role played by universities in leading the learning processes and facilitating multi-actor collaboration and engagement. The paper found that, due to the disputed nature of informal settlements, local residents are more predisposed to interact with researchers than government agents. In co-identifying and designing solutions, the neutral role of the researchers enhances trust and supports the leveraging of efforts across sectors (Hedden-Dunkhorst and Schmitt [10], Kusters et al. [6]).

5. BE TRANSPARENT AND OPEN: Given the diversity of interests and values of landscape actors, transparency and openness should be encouraged in all stakeholder interactions, and across all decision-making processes and land governance structures. Hedden-Dunkhorst and Schmitt [10] show the importance of transparency to promote realistic expectations on livelihood improvements in biosphere reserve management. Transparency helps build trust among stakeholders and makes them comfortable about the values they hold. As expanded in the global analysis of Kusters et al. [6], clarity about goals and realistic expectations should be made at the onset, ensuring all participants are aware of the potential benefits and trade-offs of different decisions. Williams et al. [2] point out that without transparency and trust, indigenous and local knowledge is unlikely to be successfully incorporated, limiting inclusivity.

6. WIDEN THE NET OF PARTICIPANTS: All contributions touched on the criticality of 'inclusive' stakeholder engagements. More inclusive approaches can create benefits, including the alignment of a diversity of needs, stimulation of mutual learning and openness to alternative perspectives, and promotion of the participation of all social groups, including those typically marginalised. It is equally important that stakeholder groups seek a balance of voices, including those from different levels of seniority, different sectors and administrative divisions, and different geographic scales. Using social network analysis, Falayi et al. [7] examine the changing dynamics of multi-level actor ties in the degraded landscape of Machubeni in South Africa. The paper shows that inclusive participation of varied multi-scale actors enhances collaboration among government agencies, local hubs and researchers in transformative spaces, which results in enhanced knowledge sharing and coordination.

7. USE EMERGING TOOLS AND APPROACHES: Creative tools and approaches can help navigate the complexities of multi-scale and multi-actor stakeholder engagements, for example by facilitating the sharing of perspectives and perceptions among stakeholders, and to signify what is most important to them (Williams et al. [2]). Omoding et al. [9] used SenseMaker<sup>®</sup> software to analyse stakeholder perceptions of inclusive decision making to improve the governance of protected areas in Ugandan conservation landscapes. The paper shows that collaborative analysis and debate among landscape stakeholders is stimulated by the use of participatory feedback and sense-making workshops. These generate new perspectives, which are translated into actionable insights to inform decisions. In South Africa, drawing on a set of 'gardening tools' to analyse the boundary-crossing work of multi-actor collaboration across case studies, Cockburn et al. [3] show that such tools help to reveal boundaries to multi-actor collaboration that may not be immediately clear. In contexts characterised by high inequality and challenging power dynamics, the application of gardening tools can help to uncover aspirational differences and increase the broader understanding of contextual challenges, while simultaneously developing a sense of community and trust.

8. DEVELOP AGENCY, CAPACITY AND TRUST: As acknowledged in many of the contributions, enhanced agency, capacity and trust can support meaningful long-term stakeholder engagement and increase the willingness of diverse stakeholders to share knowledge and cooperate towards a joint purpose (Kusters et al. [6]). This is evidenced by Favretto et al. [1], whereby meaningful and long-term engagement of practitioners and communities has allowed the pursuit of locally relevant approaches as a stepping stone to build trust and enhance the capacity of forestry projects to address complex climate-development challenges. Similarly, Hedden-Dunkhorst and Schmitt [10] demonstrate that ensuring open participation opportunities and transparent governance structures are vital to create trust between a biosphere reserve and its user groups. Building the capacity and social capital of the less powerful actors is necessary to ensure they can organise themselves, access relevant information, learn about their rights and develop negotiation skills (Cockburn et al. [3]). Musakwa et al. [5] argue that both formal and informal opportunities must be created to build the kind of relationships that can support sustained and productive engagement. Direct consultations, capacity-building workshops, or

demonstration projects to inform local stakeholders of the potential benefits and trade-offs concerning land-use practices have proven to be valuable for giving greater legitimacy to local communities, enhancing their knowledge, and engaging them in sustainable livelihood and conservation activities (Falayi et al. [7]).

**9. BUILD COMMON AND INCLUSIVE KNOWLEDGE:** Williams et al.'s [2] systematic review stresses the importance of bringing in all sources of knowledge across science, practice and local-level realities. By fostering an environment where the different knowledge sources and systems are considered equal (e.g., through multi-stakeholder collaborations in local landscape research, the promotion of inclusive consultations, integrated and holistic landscape management, and the use and transmission of indigenous local and traditional knowledge) stakeholders are able to expand their shared understanding, learn from each other, and build common knowledge towards improved landscape management, governance, and planning (Favretto et al. [1], Musakwa et al. [5], Ayivor et al. [8], Omoding et al. [9]). Focusing on the South African experiences on landscape stewardship, Cockburn et al. [3] observe that enabling frequent interaction and collective actions among actors in smaller pockets within a landscape can help to build common knowledge and relational agency. The process requires time and skillful facilitation and meditation to include and empower traditionally marginalised voices and all knowledge holders.

This Special Issue has highlighted that multi-stakeholder processes in landscape governance and management are critical for transformation towards more equitable and climate resilient landscapes in Africa, but, at the same time, can be challenging to implement and require time, commitment, and a willingness to work differently. Landscape research is by its nature transdisciplinary, with researchers often needing to play multiple roles including that of a neutral convener. Research and practice are thus inherently intertwined in landscape approaches and our hope is that the emerging lessons from the case studies can be used to both advance transdisciplinary research on landscape governance and support practice at the local level. Our synthesis has shown that for meaningful collaboration to take place processes need to be open, accountable, inclusive, transparent, and legitimate. This requires the use of innovative approaches and tools that can bring different actors together to facilitate trust-building, reduce power differentials, allow space for marginalised voices, and permit collective learning to foster a shared understanding of landscape issues and opportunities. If this can be achieved, then the chances that such partnerships will continue to function into the future is enhanced, as is the chance for more equitable and resilient landscapes.

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