Community Engagement: good practice for restoring Scotland's rainforest

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Community engagement: good practice for restoring Scotland's rainforest

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Foreword

The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest has always recognised that to be successful in rainforest restoration, we need to think big - both in space and in time. Tackling the two main threats to this internationally important habitat – the spread of invasive *Rhododendron ponticum*, and high numbers of deer preventing regeneration of the woodland – can only be done across a large area, requiring collaborative action across multiple landholdings, with a commitment lasting many years – at least a decade, ideally much longer.

Working in this way can only be effective if the communities that live and work within these projects are involved and empowered at the outset, experiencing social and economic benefit and therefore valuing and taking pride in being a part of it. Without this, projects will fail soon after the main funding phase comes to an end. This principle has become strongly established as the ASR's first Landscape-scale Focus Projects have developed. ASR partners felt that, to ensure both current and future ASR Landscape-scale Focus Projects are exemplars for rainforest restoration, it would be useful to develop guidance in good community engagement.

This document is the result. It has been written to help those leading landscape-scale rainforest restoration projects engage well with communities so their projects can be as successful as possible. This isn't a set of "standards" – since there are many standards out there – it's intended to be a helpful guide showing "what good looks like" in the context of Scotland's rainforest, and how to achieve that. The guidance has been written using the knowledge and experience of the skilled and experienced practitioners who wrote this, combined with the practical experience of ASR partners already working on the ground, engaging with communities on landscape-scale restoration projects.

That said, the journey that many are making in Scotland towards a more empowering form of community engagement is a fast-moving and exciting one. The context we're working in, combined with the learning from ASR Landscape-scale Focus Projects as they are delivered, may call for adapting this guidance before long. Therefore we will treat this as a living document to make sure it stays relevant for the long term – as long as a landscape-scale rainforest restoration project, perhaps.

So if you have any comments or suggestions to update or improve this document we would love to hear from you – please get in touch at info@savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk

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Saving Scotland's Rainforest Project Manager

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1   Introduction: community engagement and rainforest restoration in Scotland

How to use this guidance document

This guidance is designed to help address ASR's aspiration of restoring Scotland's rainforest while enriching the lives of the communities who live there. It has been written for and with partner organisations of ASR and the communities who collaborate with them. The guidance is informed by published standards, policy and research from Scotland and beyond, and by interviews and discussions with ASR partners and the communities they work with, and from other organisations with similar aims.

This **Section 1** introduces the rationale for community engagement and rainforest restoration. It sets ASR's aspirations in a global context.

> As a voluntary partnership, ASR does not lead its own projects, rather it "adopts" landscape-scale rainforest restoration projects which conform to a set of criteria. Once adopted, all ASR partners get behind these projects to help them become as successful as possible, regardless of who is leading or involved in them. Community engagement is one of the ASR project criteria.

Section 2 looks at core concepts in community engagement, and reflects on how definitions apply in the context of rainforest restoration in Scotland. There are subsections on community, community benefit, community engagement, governance, participatory monitoring and evaluation, and support for engagement. Each subsection includes a set of principles to help inform good practice.

Section 3 draws on the experience of ASR partners and communities working with landscape scale rainforest restoration. It is structured around the same six concepts as Section 2, and offers suggestions and tips, as well as examples of how community engagement has been applied in this context.

Section 4 is a checklist of guide questions. There is no one way of doing engagement. In the long timescales envisaged for landscape restoration, the relationship between ASR projects and communities will be continuous, evolving and innovating. So instead of a list of standards to meet, these guidelines offer questions for project leaders to ask themselves. These 'guide questions' are summarised in one complete list at the end.

Section 5 offers a range of other resources. Many resources are already available which set standards for community engagement, or offer methods . Some are particularly useful in the Scottish context, and in relation to landscape scale ecological restoration. A list is provided at the end of the document.

This is a living document. ASR partners have engaged in producing it, and will engage in using and reflecting on it. Contexts change, outcomes are achieved and the unexpected happens, climates shift and policy makes some things easier and other things harder. So the experience of ASR will expand, and ideas about how to do community engagement will shift, and references to supporting material and policies will need to be updated.

Sustainable communities are part of sustainable landscapes

2021-2030 is the United Nations Decame on Ecosystem Restoration, which includes community engagement as one of its aspirations. It recognises that community engagement is important because it can help to ensure that restoration efforts are effective and sustainable.

Landscape scale ecological restoration takes place across large areas, including places where people live. In Scotland, rainforest restoration in particular takes place in areas where communities often live far from urban centres, and whose livelihoods depend on the land to a greater extent than elsewhere. Sometimes the community is a landowner themselves. People are part of the landscape and restoration needs to include them in order to be successful. The way that social and ecological processes are intertwined, has been described as the 'scientific and social duality of modern ecological restoration' (see Further Resources).

Landscape scale ecological restoration takes time – the restoration process and its outcomes will likely be much longer than any conventional project timescale. The communities will still be living in the landscape, long after any project has finished.

Some might view engagement simply as a necessity to achieve restoration goals, by getting everybody 'on side'. Some might do it to comply with Scottish policy on land and community empowerment. But for the ASR projects it's already been much more than that. Engagement happens through on-going relationships which benefit from different kinds of knowledge, help to ensure sustainability and social justice, and develop and pass on skills to future generations and local people.

Community engagement is a core feature of much Scottish and UK policy.

Scotland's laws on land reform (including land rights and responsibilities), forestry, and community empowerment, and forthcoming laws on community wealth building, all ask landowners and managers to engage with communities.

Relevant policies, guidance and the National Standards for Community Engagement are listed in Section 5 Further Resources.

Community engagement is an evolving relationship

There are many definitions of community engagement, and different ways of applying it. In this context, as ASR recognises in its objectives, engagement is not just about consulting or educating. It's a collaboration with empowered communities and their members. Sometimes the communities may in fact lead the engagement, or take the initiative in forming a partnership. Communities may be landowners, or form a partnership with a landowner.

Good engagement will create benefits for communities. It makes space for communities to define their needs and goals, and some of these will include ecological restoration. But other benefits may be more urgent for communities in the rainforest zone, including jobs, housing and developing capacity and confidence. Communities are well placed to see the links between restoration and social or economic benefits.

Community engagement can seem daunting because it adds an unknown element to a project or management plan. But ecological restoration itself is unpredictable, especially in a rapidly changing world. Involving local communities can also reduce risks by including relevant local knowledge and by keeping an eye on outcomes as they emerge. One 'unknown' about engagement is meeting conflict or opposition. But engagement itself is not the cause of conflict. It's inevitable that different people

will have different ideas about what's right. Community engagement done well can help to unpack different opinions, needs and benefits, and proceed more transparently and fairly.

This is why it's important to see engagement as an ongoing, evolving relationship.

Good engagement involves working with the unknown

Linked to the idea that engagement opens the project to new ideas, is the idea of uncertainty. Ecological restoration is itself an uncertain and complex system which requires adaptive management. Community engagement adds further layers to that system. Combining engagement and adaptiveness is recognised as a 'transformative problem-solving' approach called Adaptive Collaborative Management.

If engagement is an ongoing, evolving relationship, it can work through uncertainty, diversity, and changing policies and climates. That's why these guidelines focus on the value of engagement as communicative and adaptive. Landscape scale restoration takes a long time, so there is no need to hurry this initial stage of setting up good engagement.

This also means that success is a moving target – both in ecological restoration and in community engagement. Community engagement includes local people's participating in defining expectations, and in evaluating progress towards meeting those expectations. Project staff and community members may have different ways of defining, measuring and describing success. And in adaptive collaborative systems, success or failure are not really the point – with open communication and flexible approaches, everything becomes an opportunity to learn and adapt.

That applies equally to this guidance document. ASR partners have engaged in producing it, and will engage in using and reflecting on it. Contexts and communities will change, outcomes will be achieved and the unexpected will happen; climates will shift, and policy will make some things easier and other things harder. So the experience of ASR will grow, and ideas about how to do community engagement will evolve, and references to supporting material and policies will need to be updated. That's why ASR invites feedback as outlined in the Foreword.

2   Community engagement concepts

What is community?

There are many ways of defining communities. In this guidance document we are talking specifically about the communities of people who live and work in and around the landscapes where ASR Landscape-scale Focus Projects are taking place. These are a type of community known as 'communities of place'. There can also be 'communities of interest' within and overlapping the community of place (see box: Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

There are descriptions of 'community' in Scottish policy, and it is helpful to refer to those definitions. However, as landscape scale projects may cross official community boundaries and interweave with different land use areas (for example, crofts and villages), this definition needs to be used flexibly in ASR projects. Community is particular to the place, people and project.

> The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 does not define community rigidly, but instead says 'a community can be any group of people who feel they have something in common. In many cases, it is that they live in the same area. However, it can also be that they share an interest or characteristic.' Communities of interest could include faith groups, ethnic or cultural groups, people affected by a particular illness or disability, sports clubs, conservation groups, clan and heritage associations, etc."

In thinking about how to identify the community, it is helpful to think about both the people and the structures or organisations which represent them.

At a basic level, the community consists of all the people in the area. A project may need to consider everybody, and find ways to offer everybody who wants to the opportunity to engage. At the same time, communities have structures and ways of organising themselves. Some of these are official. Most notably, the community council is the basic building block of local democracy and is open to everybody. Rainforest restoration projects should always seek to engage with and through the community council. Another example, in crofting areas, is the Grazings Committee, which is open to one part of the community, that made up of crofters (see Box 2.1). There are other organisations which provide ways to reach the community, for example the local school. In addition, there may be informal groups, such as wildlife groups or music groups who help to engage in particular ways. And there may be groups who are aligned with a particular view, such as campaign groups for or against certain forms of rural development or change. It's useful to consider these groups and organisations as ways to find people, understand their perspectives, and invite them to get involved.

Being inclusive

The National Standards for Community Engagement contain a standard on inclusion. In this context, it reminds us that community engagement should identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by a landscape-scale rainforest restoration project. But the ASR strategy goes further and recognises that the community is an essential partner in restoration work, so it is important to go beyond considering the effects of a project, and involve local people proactively in designing it and its benefits. This might mean including different people, not just those 'affected' but those with ideas and capacity to share in the benefits. Inclusive processes promote equity and social justice, making restoration efforts more representative and fairer.

Within a community, there are some people who get involved in lots of community activity, and others who avoid it, often because they don't have the time, resources or confidence. And in a wider

landscape there are active communities, and those that seem to take a more passive approach. It's important to work with dynamic people and communities, but it's also important to understand why those who aren't involved, have stayed away. They might lack interest, awareness or understanding. They might feel that their contribution is not be relevant, or feel unconfident using the language of landscape restoration. They might oppose the project but want to avoid conflict. Or they might want to be involved, but are juggling work, childcare, and commuting, or are unwell, or just can't find more energy and time in their lives.

So-called 'barriers to participation' can include any of these reasons, and more: unconscious bias, power imbalances, or accessibility (cost of fuel, or transport to events; access to the internet). There's also a culture in rural Scotland of not speaking out in public, sometimes a fear of antagonising local landowners and powerful people. People don't need to engage if they don't want to, but understanding those who aren't initially engaged, will help to find better ways to engage.

Box 2.1 Crofting communities

Crofting communities are unique and distinct in their cultural, historical, and socio-economic aspects, necessitating tailored approaches to community engagement and involvement in landscape-scale restoration efforts. Understanding these specificities is crucial.

Crofting communities operate under a land tenure system that differs significantly from mainstream agriculture. Land is typically held in common, with crofters having the right to use a portion of it for their livelihoods. This communal ownership aspect adds complexity to restoration efforts, as decisions regarding land use and management require consensus and cooperation among crofters. Therefore, community engagement should prioritise facilitating open and inclusive discussions to ensure the collective ownership and responsibility of restoration projects.

Unlike landowners, crofting communities are unable to apply for carbon credits, which is a specific constraint to expanding woodland in crofting communities.

There is a multitude of information available about Scottish Crofting on the Crofting Commission [website](), including permitted activities, woodland grants and using common grazings for woodland.

Communities, place and history

A characteristic of 'community' which is specific to the area of Scotland's rainforest is its link with Gaelic culture, language and history. Of course not all community members share in this heritage but it is a shaping factor for almost every community, it influences the community memory of environment, and many of the younger people will have participated in Gaelic medium education. The links between Gaelic language, poetry, story, landscape and nature offer rich opportunities for community engagement. Any project to restore Scotland's rainforest should consider Gaelic's relevance.

Communities and landowners

It is important to consider whether landowners are part of the community, in the case of each project. In some situations, landowners are integral members of the community. In others, they may live elsewhere and make decisions affecting their land, but not participate in community decision making. A [study by the Scottish Land Commission]() finds that negative community experiences are related to poor engagement between landowners and communities. This is in turn affected by power

imbalances, with landowners having much more access to professional support and influential personal networks, and fear of repercussions (such as eviction or joblessness) if community members stand up to landowners. Genuine community engagement will need to be sensitive to these rural realities in Scotland, and explore ways of working genuinely with local people.

If the landowners are absent, it may not be appropriate to include them in community engagement processes which seek to deliver local benefits. On the other hand, an ecological restoration project may be able to (or need to) facilitate good relations between landowners and local residents, to help deliver local benefits such as land for affordable housing.

Principles: defining the community

In the context of landscape-scale rainforest restoration in Scotland:

- communities are the people who live in the landscapes where rainforest restoration projects are taking place, and the organisations involved. They are communities of place;
- the boundaries of such communities may be larger or smaller than official designations of community, such as community council areas;
- communities are complex, diverse and in a constant state of transition and succession - there may be multiple and overlapping communities of interest in the project area;
- Gaelic heritage forms part of the context for community relationship with their environment;
- landowners may or may not be part of the local community. They may need to be included in some engagement processes. Depending on the scale and values of landowners, power relations may enhance or inhibit some community engagement processes;
- inclusivity is desirable: a balance is needed between making the effort to give everyone the opportunity to engage, accepting that not everyone wants to, while also addressing barriers to engagement.

What is community benefit?

The terms benefits, values and preferences are interlinked, and 'community benefits' can mean different things to different people. Good practice guidance from the Scottish Land Commission helps to focus on what this means in land based contexts in Scotland.

> *Community benefits are packages of intentional benefits, arising from investment in natural capital enhancement, creation, and restoration projects, provided on a negotiated basis for the long-term benefit of the geographically local community.*

Resources for community benefit and community wealth building:

Community Benefit - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission

Community Wealth Building - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission

Examples of community benefits include new local jobs, improved infrastructure, funding for community groups or projects, development of new enterprises, climate change adaptation and mitigation, land allocated to local housing, local services procured, volunteering and recreation opportunities, and increased visitor numbers.

An additional component of community benefit is the relatively new concept of 'community wealth building' (CWB), an approach which empowers through strengthening the local economy. There's a focus on community and social enterprises, and on community ownership of the asset base. Community benefits, and wealth, can be increased by considering procurement through local and community enterprises, creating local jobs (sometimes also by providing training), and supporting local ownership of land and buildings, for example by providing land for affordable houses.

> **Principles: community benefits**
>
> In the context of landscape-scale rainforest restoration in Scotland, community benefits are:
> - intentional, deliberate and additional to the more general public benefits of rainforest restoration;
> - delivered to and with the community of people who live and work in the rainforest restoration project landscape;
> - an integral part of the project;
> - planned and agreed with the local community and based on an engagement process to understand local needs and priorities;
> - integrated – where possible, delivered with established constituted community groups, aligned with local strategic and development plans, and based on written agreements and legal advice;
> - clear and identifiable, monitored and evaluated, with regular public reporting on progress.

What is community engagement?

Engagement has many definitions, and is often described as varying along a spectrum from consultation to empowerment. For example:
- consultation – a project asks the community for their views but the power to make the final decision remains with the project staff
- collaborative approaches - decisions are shared between the project staff and the community
- empowerment – a project supports and enables the community to take over the decision making arrangements.

> Resources for understanding definitions of engagement
>
> IAP2 Spectrum of Participation

While there's a place for consultation (and other approaches including citizen science and education), in the ASR context where people live and work in the landscapes, a more active and empowering type of engagement is called for. This requires an on-going and evolving relationship between the stakeholders.

These conditions are reflected in the definition of community engagement proposed by the National Standards for Community Engagement:

> *a purposeful process which develops a working relationship between communities, community organisations and public and private bodies to help them to identify and act on community needs and ambitions. It involves respectful dialogue between everyone involved,*

aimed at improving understanding between them and taking joint action to achieve positive change.

This is a good starting point for those leading rainforest restoration projects. It helps to shift from a single-minded focus on ecological restoration, to one that supports the community in the landscape. There's a focus on:

- working relationship
- different stakeholders: community members, their organisations, and external bodies
- community needs and ambitions
- quality of communication
- joint decisions and actions.

The National Standard also defines *good* engagement as effective, efficient and fair. What might that look like in the context of Scotland's rainforest? The concept of *effectiveness* relates to achieving the goals and desired benefits through decision-making processes which work. The concept of *efficiency* is based on having thorough knowledge of the situation – which in turn requires local knowledge and perspectives. And *fairness* relates to the inclusiveness discussed above. Engagement with communities can be most effective and efficient by working with existing community groups, rather than trying to establish new ones. This needs to be balanced against considerations of who might not be members of existing groups and why not.

The place and time where engagement happens are important, and at least some of it should be in the rainforest itself. Engagement is not only about dialogue but also about shared activities. And dialogue too can benefit from walking and observing together.

Engagement is time-consuming, and costs money. Events need to be budgeted for, but costs of less formal meetings are less visible and still need resource. It can be helpful to consider how to help community members reach a meeting, provide refreshments, and cover the costs of attending events such as workshops, exchange visits with other communities, or training events.

At times the community will not have the capacity to engage. Capacity consists of skills and organisational structures, but also time and energy. A project may be able to support the development of skills and organisations, but will still need to respect the limits to people's time.

> **Principles: community engagement**
>
> In the context of landscape-scale rainforest restoration in Scotland, community engagement:
>
> - is at the collaborative and empowering end of the spectrum of definitions of engagement;
> - is an on-going, developing relationship;
> - is effective through good communication and governance;
> - involves practice as well as dialogue – and engages with the rainforest as well as the community;
> - is a skilled approach which may require staff training;
> - makes efforts to be inclusive, to achieve fairness;
> - may not be 'efficient' in reaching short term targets because it requires an adaptive and learning approach;
> - works with established and constituted community groups where practicable, and with local strategic and development plans, where available;

What is governance?

Governance is a term used to describe the structures and processes by which decisions are made and put into effect. Structures include organisations and the rules and regulations that shape their activities. Processes include the ways in which activities such as meetings are conducted. Both structures and processes can be formal or informal. For example, a project may have a formal steering group and an informal network of advisors. It may have a steering group meeting where the processes (such as chairing, courteous listening, transparent minute taking) are formally observed, combined with a warm and welcoming culture, which is informal (i.e. not defined on paper).

In the context of community engagement, good governance is needed to ensure that project decisions are legitimate, transparent and accountable to everyone involved; and because communities themselves have their own governance structures and processes. Community governance differs, for example, between the democratic processes of local government through community councils, and the requirements for constitutions of asset-owning community bodies. Project governance and community governance need to work together to be efficient and effective.

Principles: governance

In the context of rainforest restoration in Scotland, good governance for community engagement:

- includes both structures and processes;
- is based on both community governance and project governance, and is therefore well acquainted with both;
- is guided by standards of transparency, legitimacy and accountability;
- recognises that the informal (cultural, behavioural) part of governance is as important as the formal (legal, written, etc.).

What is participatory monitoring and evaluation?

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) enables different participants in a project to share control over how they define, measure and respond to success. This process involves agreeing on targets or desired benefits; indicators; and processes for measuring achievement.

Different people have different goals and ways of measuring achievement. PM&E often includes qualitative indicators and processes. This means going beyond simply counting desirable outcomes, and including a more narrative and reflective approach. For example a group evaluation process might include comments such as "Now that I see what's possible, I'm happy with this project because …", or "We were hoping to have the community housing by now but we're still waiting; however we've learnt a lot about how to make it happen and formed new relationships with the neighbouring estate".

Some resources on PM&E:

PARTICIPATORY MONITORING & EVALUATION: LEARNING FROM CHANGE (Institute of Development Studies)

Participatory evaluation | Better Evaluation

It's important to include ways to measure and respond to unexpected outcomes as well as those that everyone thinks they want at the beginning. In ecological restoration projects, the intended outcomes such as restoration of soils, microclimate and landscape quality also brings unlooked for

delights such as the return of long-forgotten species, or unexpected improvements in water quality. PM&E accommodates these outcomes by evaluating retrospectively as well.

The value of PM&E lies both in the process (another strand of engagement and power-sharing), and the content (further benefits and costs identified). Standard evaluations of ecological restoration often lack any measure of social or economic impacts, thereby missing the opportunity to understand and support it. PM&E has been applied much more in international development than in Scotland, but research into community benefits in Scotland provides pointers to the kinds of targets and indicators that communities might include. Sometimes the community and the organisation leading the project may have different targets or indicators; or different groups within the community may seek different benefits. The joint process enables everyone to understand what each group is looking for, and to find ways to address different needs and hopes.

This is why participatory monitoring and evaluation is both necessary, and an evolving learning process.

> **Principles: participatory monitoring and evaluation**
>
> In the context of landscape-scale rainforest restoration in Scotland, participatory monitoring and evaluation:
>
> - is necessary because different stakeholders have different needs, perceptions and ways of measuring success;
> - defines targets and indicators jointly with all stakeholders but recognises that some targets and indicators are more meaningful to some;
> - establishes transparent communication of monitoring and evaluation processes and outcomes;
> - recognises that ecological restoration, and community engagement, both invite encounters with the unpredictable, and require flexibility;
> - is designed to accommodate learning and if desirable, revision of targets.

What is needed to support engagement?

Stepping back from the *content* of community engagement described above, it is also important to ensure that community engagement is properly resourced.

Engagement takes time – often much more time than anticipated. Community members are often engaging using unpaid time, and fitting activities in between work and family or home life; resources are needed to help them to reach meetings and cover costs.

Finally an important component of support is recognition by the organisation's line management and head office. This allows the value of community engagement not only to be recognised by local staff, but also supported by the organisation as a whole. It can be important to empower local staff to commit organisational resources to this end.

Principles: support

In the context of landscape-scale rainforest restoration in Scotland, community engagement is supported when it benefits from:

- dedicated project personnel with good interpersonal skills;
- local staff empowered to be flexible;
- budget, including resources for community time and costs;
- training in facilitation and communication skills;
- accessible venues for meetings and events;
- inclusion in plans and strategies, so that fit with overall organisational goals is clearly visible, and recognised by head office.

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3   Community engagement in practice

This section describes ways in which ASR partners and other landscape scale projects are using or aspiring to these principles in practice. Some partners are at an early stage of the engagement process, while others consider that active engagement is an integral part of project delivery. The section is organised under the same subheadings as section 2 to help with navigation, but the examples all illustrate multiple principles in action.

Box 3.1 summarises key qualities that ASR organisations and their community partners have found to characterise good engagement.

Box 3.1. Learning from practice – what does good engagement look like?

Place specific: recognising the unique ecological and cultural context of each project is essential. Tailoring restoration strategies to fit a place's specific conditions helps maximise the effectiveness and longevity of projects.

Mutually beneficial: taking a community wealth-building approach to landscape restoration brings positive outcomes for the environment and the long-term well-being and livelihoods of the people in the area. Projects aim to build local capacity rather than creating community dependency.

Inclusive: developing fair frameworks that include community members in decision-making processes helps ensure that community members – regardless of their background or circumstances - have the option to take ownership of the restoration process. A careful, responsible and un-hurried attitude ensures community members have agency without feeling overwhelmed or patronised.

Collaborative: co-creative and imaginative approaches involve community members in designing and implementing activities to help maximise their effectiveness and sense of community custodianship.

On-going: maintaining relationships and engagement with the community ensures that the benefits of projects persist, and evolve, over time. Embedding project staff in the community where they work, positions them well in terms of understanding and being accessible to the local people. Progress can necessarily be slow and unfold along similar timescales to landscape restoration.

Clear and efficient: considerate of community workload in communications and activities.

Trusting and respectful: Building trust and respecting local knowledge, cultures and timescales are foundational for successful community involvement, encouraging open dialogue, and a tolerant and constructive atmosphere.

Flexible and adaptable: allowing for adjustments to projects as new information emerges or circumstances change and ensuring that projects can adapt to address evolving ecological and community needs, as well as embracing well calculated risk-taking.

Transparent and accountable: open and honest communication about plans and progress fosters trust and accountability and holds stakeholders responsible for their commitments and actions. A Memorandum of Understanding can be indispensable for clarifying this. Accountability helps ensure the effective use of resources and regular review of processes.

Well-resourced: adequate financial and staff resources are essential for implementing effective and efficient community participation.

Learning from practice: Community

Section 2 defined community for the purpose of ASR projects as the communities of people who live and work in and around the landscapes where ASR Landscape-scale Focus Projects are taking place. There is significant diversity in community structures across the rainforest region, including cultural variations, land tenure systems and land use traditions. Some are part of large estates, and in other places the community owns land. Like landscapes, communities constantly change, with people moving on and new people arriving.

Box 3.2. Learning from practice. ACT "Glen Creran: Getting to the Roots of Rhododendron ponticum"

Principles illustrated: whole community approach, local champions, transparency, trust, open dialogue

Landscape-scale rainforest restoration projects require whole community support – especially when it comes to controlling invasive species such as rhododendron. This case study outlines the strategies employed by Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT) to bring residential landowners and larger estate owners on board and ensure community support for the "Glen Creran: Getting to the Roots of *Rhododendron ponticum*" project. The project is a good example of including everyone, rather than separating 'landowners' and 'communities'.

"Gardens are often a familiar and valued part of their owners' lives and proposing work within them can be a highly sensitive issue. Effectively, each landholding, whether 1000ha or 0.1ha, is a private property, and a rhododendron control project seeks to intervene on that private property. A large landholding may be held by an absentee, who rarely notices rhododendron on a remote hillside, while removing three large bushes in a small garden can have a far greater impact on the private amenity of a householder." (quoted from [evaluation report](#))

Recognising the importance of community involvement, the project followed two key strands.

1. It engaged well with the community council, and the project consultant appeared at four community council meetings, to introduce the project, get commitment from the council to act as owners of the project legacy, provide updates and report on outcomes. The community council chair also sat on the project steering group, and reported back to the council on what was a "standing agenda" item.
2. It identified and collaborated with local champions. These local champions played a pivotal role in advocating for rhododendron control, their enthusiasm and dedication inspired others to join the cause.

Clear and informative leaflets were distributed throughout the project area to educate landowners about the rhododendron control project. Additionally, project members engaged in one-on-one conversations to address concerns and answer questions, fostering a sense of transparency and trust. The local school was also invited to spend a day in the glen learning about biodiversity and the impacts of rhododendron.

Workshops and events were organised to explain the rationale behind the project and the techniques that would be employed. These gatherings served as a platform for open dialogue, enabling landowners to understand the project's goals and methods better.

Training was offered to local people to enable them to continue activities such as spraying re-growth of rhododendron for long-term management results.

Project managers find that it's a good idea to work with established and constituted community groups where practicable – and to align with local place plans and/or community action plans, where available.

Finding active residents and enthusiasts can be a helpful gateway into discovering cultural dynamics (past and present) and discovering existing organisations and methods of communication. These local champions can help achieve more community support and participation. The Glen Creran example in box 3.2 illustrates the value of a 'whole community approach' and local champions.

Some communities pointed out the limitations to their time and energy. Particularly very small communities, where a few people are highly motivated, can suffer from burn out when they take a big project forward. Finding well-resourced organisations has helped with community capacity, in some cases. Other projects highlighted the challenge of including local community members and large estate owners in the same project, pointing to long histories of cultural difference. These are situations where time and local insights are particularly valuable.

Community members highlighted the value of their own knowledge. Communities have been tending to, enjoying, and working in these woods and landscapes for generations. They haven't called them rainforests. Some embrace this new label, while in others it can be helpful to find ways to bridge the rainforest terminology and community knowledge.

Learning from practice: Community benefits

Section 2 refers to the Scottish Land Commission work on defining community benefits, highlighting that they are intentional, negotiated and measurable.

Communities (or community representatives) tend to be very busy, so when initiating contact about a project, it's good to be clear and concise about the potential benefits of involvement, and to make it clear that the community is being invited to a dialogue to explore what the benefits might be.

Box 3.3 lists examples of community benefits suggested by ASR members and community partners.

Box 3.3 Learning from practice: community benefits (actual and potential) mentioned by ASR partners.

Principles illustrated: mutual benefits, taking a community wealth building approach

- jobs related to restoration work (e.g. rhododendron clearance, deer management, fencing)
- affordable housing
- income generation from increased visitor numbers
- physical and mental wellbeing initiatives
- access to recreation, improved recreational infrastructure.
- enhanced community capacity and confidence
- balancing demographics by attracting diverse age groups into areas
- education and skills
- funding for community groups and projects
- volunteering opportunities
- local enterprises (such as venison market)
- local development jobs
- capacity building

Good engagement makes space for communities to define their own needs and goals, and some of these include restoration of functioning ecology. But communities in the rainforest zone also have more pressing needs such as affordable accommodation, depopulation, ageing demographics, lack of capacity, lack of access to transport, lack of employment opportunities, distance to services. Some communities will have already identified these issues, in the form of a Community Action Plan or Place Plan, whereas others may need help to identify areas for action.

There may be mutually beneficial objectives such as creating affordable housing. The work that the Woodland Trust and Communities Housing Trust are doing at Gleann Shìldeag (box 3.4) is a good example of how a landscape restoration project can help address a lack of rural homes.   In other cases, benefits may be include financial inputs such as those resulting from carbon finance in the Trees for Life example (box 3.5).

Box 3.4 Learning from practice: **Gleann Shìldeag project with Woodland Trust and the Communities Housing Trust**

Principles illustrated: adapting objectives, increasing community benefits, community capacity

A lack of affordable housing is an endemic issue across Scotland, causing problems for communities, NGOs and commercial interests and can be a barrier to landscape restoration projects. Recognising this, the Woodland Trust has stepped out of its traditional scope of work to explore an affordable housing project as part of its work in the Torridon/Gleann Shìldeag area. When they acquired their second estate, Couldoran, adjacent to their Ben Shieldaig estate, existing circumstances (infrastructure and tenants) paved the way for exploring a joint venture with the Communities Housing Trust (CHT), which is currently in the development stage, working on feasibility and engineering studies etc. The CHT will be the lead partner, with the Woodland Trust offering facilitatory support.

Providing affordable rural houses helps to enable local long-term jobs and should have a lasting legacy that bears fruit beyond the specific objectives of the landscape restoration project.

Box 3.5 Learning from practice: **Trees for Life**

Principles illustrated: increasing community benefits, money for local projects

Trees for Life is selling carbon units for tree planting at their Dundreggan Estate in Glenmoriston and deeding a percentage of the funds to two local community groups. The units are generated from the new planting of 250,000 native trees at Allt Ruadh in a restored native woodland. TfL has shared income with the West Glenmoriston Community Company and the Glenmoriston Improvement Group. Selling carbon for £60 per carbon unit results in £20 per unit being deeded to the community groups, approximately 33%. It is anticipated the sale of carbon units will realise approximately £75,000 for local causes, such as the running costs of the local groups, playground equipment and community environmental schemes.

Some potential benefits need careful planning and negotiation to ensure communities aren't overwhelmed. For example, an increase in visitor numbers might enhance income generation potential but might also place burdens on sometimes fragile rural infrastructure.

It's likely that objectives will evolve over time, and that new benefits or disbenefits will emerge, so it's important to have a monitoring framework and take a flexible and adaptable approach.

Learning from practice: Engagement as relationship

Section 2 describes how engagement involves processes of communicating and working together. Effective engagement, especially in complex and evolving systems, requires an on-going relationship between the project and the community.

Three areas which ASR partners highlighted were the value of local knowledge and good communication, the value of working with existing community organisations, and making engagement interesting, useful and relevant. There was widespread agreement that a slow and steady approach should be taken to building relationships, between organisations and communities, and between different types of communities such as landowners, other residents, or deer management groups. Many people in local communities are from families who have lived in the area for generations and may experience projects as 'outsiders' dictating to them. Tips which partners shared for good communication are summarised in Box 3.6. Project staff highlighted the value of living locally, being part of the community (see Box 3.7).

The arts can be incorporated as integral aspects of engagement, planning and evaluation; they don't need to be separate activities. Organisations and communities find that hosting a diverse range of events - not focusing solely on ecological and practical aspects of restoration - can be a useful doorway to engaging more people in the community, as well as being culturally enriching. Some people don't feel like they have the necessary expertise to comment on technical aspects of the project or are nervous that their views aren't relevant. This can be a barrier to engagement in consultations or decision-making. There are also people who, for health reasons, are unable to get involved in some aspects of restoration work. More cultural events can help to maximise opportunities for inclusion and gather interest in the project from a broad representation of people. Gatherings around food are particularly popular, whether formal meetings and discussions or recreational events. Box 3.8 highlights examples and general activities that partners mentioned.

Box 3.6 Learning from practice: tips for good communication

ASR partners shared the following:

- **start slowly** - perhaps avoiding one-off events accompanied by lots of fanfare;
- clearly communicate *how* the community can be involved and *why* they might benefit from being involved – focus on what is in it for them and **be clear and honest about what's in it for the organisation/landowners/project partners;**
- **build a strategy for engagement *with* the community** and set up a **communications protocol.**
- **make it accessible** – both physically and intellectually. Bear in mind factors unique to remote rural communities, such as the need to communicate by letter where internet connections are not available to everyone;
- **consider one-to-one conversations** as well as public meetings because many people are reticent about speaking up in a public forum;
- **communication is two-way** and it's important for everyone to take an active listening approach in discussions;
- **regular check-in sessions** – to mark progress, tackle challenges, and explore evolving opportunities. These can be walks and talks, formal meetings or use other formats;
- **record keeping and handovers** – keep records and conduct good staff handovers to avoid reverting to square one when a new staff member takes over.

Gaelic heritage can be a rich source of inspiration and connection for community relationships with the landscape, and meaningful rainforest projects can arise out of Gaelic language, story, music, place names etc. ASR partners shared hopes for the potential of this, and also noted the need for such initiatives to be grounded in the local community to avoid the sense that well-meaning aspirations are being introduced from outside.

Box 3.7 Learning from practice: being embedded in the community

Principles illustrated: engagement is an on-going relationship, developing trust and respect, empathy, accessibility.

Building relationships with the community is important for maximising the chances for the long-term success of restoration projects. Many project officers work directly from the community hub and/or live in the community. Some had experienced housing difficulties at first hand, and found it frustrating that they had to commute to the project area. When project staff can live in the community where they work, they can take part in other community activities, volunteering, and local events as a way into community life. This arrangement fosters a sense of community inclusion rather than external involvement. Through active engagement and consistent presence, they become a recognised, accessible, and trusted presence within the community.

Box 3.8 Learning from practice: tips for diverse, dynamic, imaginative engagement and events

Principles illustrated: inclusivity, good communication, engaging widely with the community

Examples of cultural and creative aspects of engagement include:

- **walking theatre**: Cormonachan Woods hosted Walking Theatre events for all ages, including: *'The Celtic Tree Walk', 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', 'The Wonderland Adventure' and 'Macbeth the Red'*;
- **arts workshops and arts trails:** a treasure trail was created at Loch Arkaig - incorporating myths of the past, pressures of the present, and ambitions for future restoration;
- **rainforest ceremony:** Indigenous People from the Amazon Rainforest performed a sacred blessing ritual in Scotland's rainforest;
- **climate beacon:** a collaborative project between ACT and Cove Park focused on raising awareness of Argyll's unique Rainforests;
- **exhibitions:** the Awake@Roots exhibition at the Balnakailly Rainforest, Isle of Bute reflected on the ancient past and the possibility of a greener future;
- **community meals and picnics**
- **interdisciplinary science and arts projects**: Làn Thìde is a collective of arts, heritage, community, environmental and third-sector organisations based in the Outer Hebrides working on projects around climate adaptation.

Learning from practice: Governance

Section 2 defined governance as the structures and processes by which decisions are made and put into effect. Diverse tenure and ownership structures, existing community organisation arrangements, as well as cultural norms have an impact on the opportunities and challenges for governance arrangements in the rainforest zone. Examples of innovation across the rainforest projects include several which increase community agency in planning and decision making. Examples include the Memorandum of Understanding between the Woodland Trust and Arkaig Community Forest (Box 3.9), and the governance framework at Argyll and Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT) (Box 3.10). Governance, management regimes and ownership may also evolve over time, as with Cormonachan Community Woodland (Box 3.11).

Box 3.9. Learning from practice: Arkaig Community Forest and Woodland Trust

Principles illustrated: establish clear agreements, work with existing community governance structures, two-way communications, trust and respect, accessibility, participatory monitoring via community feedback.

The Woodland Trust and Arkaig Community Forest agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a communications protocol at the start of the project. Community members and project staff all pointed to these documents as helpful in their partnership. Frameworks such as these are indispensable for effective partnership endeavours, collaboration and co-operation. An MOU outlines mutual goals, responsibilities, and expectations, fostering clarity and preventing misunderstandings among partners. The Arkaig MOU specifically covers: intent; parameters of the woodland purchase; purpose of the acquisition; future management and governance (including an advisory board); community use and a public relations protocol. The appointment of an independent advisory board with a wide range of expertise and interests to cover the environmental and social aspects of the project offers shared oversight and the ability to offer external advice if and when required. The communications protocol establishes guidelines for information exchange, ensuring respectful interaction and timely two-way updates.

Box 3.10. Learning from practice: Saving Argyll's Rainforest – Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT)

Principles illustrated: agency, formally include community members in decision-making, embedded engagement

ACT works in partnership with communities, public agencies, third sector and private organisations to design and implement projects that make a difference to people and landscapes. The framework encompasses a structure of 12 board positions, with a notable stipulation that eight of these positions are to be reserved for community representatives, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity. Additionally, the framework includes a diverse panel of 20 advisors from agencies and community groups. At the heart of this arrangement lie six primary projects, each overseen by a steering group. These groups consist of a blend of project personnel and representatives selected from the advisory assembly. The governance framework is a model of robustness, intentionally devoid of 'passengers' within the steering groups. This framework is a forward-looking, collaborative, and purposeful approach to effective governance and project implementation.

Box 3.11 Learning from practice: Cormonachan Community Woodland

Principles illustrated: Community-led project, evolving governance.

The Cormonachan Woodland project commenced in 1998, when a collaborative effort was initiated by a dedicated group of community stakeholders to restore and conserve a precious section of Scotland's rainforest. This joint endeavour brought together Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (formerly owned by Fife Council), Lochgoil Community Development Trust, Lochgoil Primary School, and Forest Enterprise Scotland, acting on behalf of The Scottish Ministers, who were the original custodians of a 20-hectare portion of these woodlands.

Formalised in May 2006, an agreement was established to empower this partnership to enhance the woodlands' biodiversity and transform them into an educational asset. Over the years, the project's scope expanded. In December 2016, a new agreement was reached between the Cormonachan Woodlands Association, founded in 2015, AOEC Trust Ltd. (Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre, now a social enterprise trust), and Forestry & Land Scotland (formerly known as Forest Enterprise Scotland). This agreement was initially set for a ten-year term, concluding on December 31, 2026. The management area was also extended to encompass 63.9 hectares, which included an 8.9-hectare area of Priority Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), stretching from Cormonachan Burn to Clach Bhadach near Lochwood on the western side of the road.

As of April 1, 2020, the organisation transitioned into a not-for-profit limited company by guarantee, known as Cormonachan Community Woodlands Ltd. A dedicated volunteer Board of Directors governs this entity. In the autumn of 2020, a significant milestone was achieved: a 20-year lease for the woodlands was exchanged, replacing the earlier Memorandum of Understanding with Forestry and Land Scotland, the land managers. This lease solidifies the community's commitment to the long-term stewardship and restoration of the rainforest.

Learning from practice: Participatory monitoring and evaluation

Section 2 discusses the concepts around PM&E in Scotland's rainforest, but ASR partners and communities shared several experiences which provide pointers.

Some approaches to informal monitoring are helpful with enabling flexibility. One project has regular 'walk and talk' meetings to catch up, combined with more formal attendance at each partner's respective meetings a couple of times a year. These regular touchpoints ensure both positive opportunities and tricky matters are dealt with quickly, openly, and efficiently. In contrast, long gaps between communications, and formal methods for monitoring, can miss opportunities to identify misunderstanding or unintended consequences.

Communities identified this as an area which would benefit from more attention. Some expressed a willingness to be more actively engaged in monitoring project impacts and benefits. Training sessions for things like rhododendron management are helpful, but they need to be included in developing formal plans for long-term monitoring, such as periodic surveys of regrowth leading to treatment by the local team. More involvement in monitoring and management helps secure and sustain the improvements delivered by the project.

One area of participatory monitoring that has received more attention is citizen science. A lot of research has explored the ways in which species data collected by birdwatchers, butterfly enthusiasts and members of the public more generally, can help to monitor environmental change. This is not the same as PM&E, because it does not involve community members in defining goals and indicators, but it does offer some insight into methodologies which provide opportunities for different participants to monitor change. The [Woodland Herbivore Impact Assessment Method User Guide](#) is an accessible and tested method for assessing and monitoring the impact of large herbivores on habitats that are already wooded or may develop woodland. Methods have also been developed to help non-specialists assess the [epiphyte component](#) of habitat condition in Scotland's rainforests. To reiterate, citizen science is only one component of PM&E, and it does not include the decision-making roles that are so important in community engagement, but these examples provide indications of some progress towards involving people more widely in monitoring rainforest condition.

It is an important area for further development, to pioneer community involvement in defining goals, benefits, indicators and methods for measure progress towards those goals, in the restoration of Scotland's rainforests.

Learning from practice: Resourcing and embedding engagement

Communities and organisations across the partnership highlighted the need for dedicated resources to carry out community engagement as a core activity. Several pointed out that projects did not take off until local staff were allocated in the project areas. Communities noted a need for funding for local development workers to be able to dedicate time and skills to community projects, and project staff highlighted the need for adequate budgets and time to embed community involvement in projects. Several provided examples of the value of line managers understanding the breadth of local contexts for community involvement in landscape restoration projects and including this in centralised planning and strategies. Some partners mentioned a need for training in community engagement.

4   Checklist of guide questions

Section 2 lists principles of community engagement. Section 3 illustrates ways in which it has been used in practice in rainforest restoration in Scotland. In this section we provide a list of questions which can help to address all the principles, drawing on the experience of partners.

Community engagement is an iterative process. While you need an idea of who makes up the community before inviting them to engage, you also can't understand who is in the community without some engagement.

So this checklist is intended to be used in an interactive and multi-directional way, working back and forth between steps, and not as a one-way roadmap to success.

Community

1. What is the location of the local community? How has the community been involved in defining the geographically relevant area?
2. How well do we understand the organisations, culture and socio-economic dynamics of the communities involved?
3. Have we sought to engage with the main organisations representing the community including the community council and (where there is one) community development trust or similar?
4. Who is getting involved, and who is holding back? Are there reasons for non-inclusion, that we can address?

Community benefits

5. To what extent have we identified with the community project benefits that are intentional, deliberate and additional to the more general public benefits of landscape scale rainforest restoration?
6. To what extent do those benefits contribute to community wealth, including assets and enterprises?
7. How effectively have we defined and aligned mutual objectives with the local community? Are there any areas where clarification or refinement is needed to ensure a shared vision and purpose?

Engagement

8. Is our approach to engagement sincerely collaborative? Do we see it as a two-way partnership and do we have effective processes in place to make sure that happens?
9. Do we have good open communication and mutual understanding between our team and the community?
10. How much agency does the community currently have in decision-making processes? Do they feel this level of responsibility is sufficient, too much, or in need of adjustment? What steps can we take to ensure meaningful community participation in shaping project decisions?
11. Are there any tensions or conflicts that are difficult to address? How can we better understand the causes of these? Are processes for resolving challenging issues functioning? Are there any areas where it can be improved or refined to ensure that conflicts are addressed constructively and that all stakeholders are heard and satisfied with the outcomes?
12. Have we considered creative approaches, including approaches which link with the community's Gaelic heritage? To what extent are we supporting the community's own creativity in approaching engagement?
13. How is our relationship with the community evolving?

14. Which elements are going well, and how can we support those?
15. What barriers have we encountered in engaging and including the local community and how do we plan to address those?

Governance

16. Are we aiming to deliver those benefits with existing community structures and processes where possible?
17. Do we have mechanisms in place to ensure we're working together transparently, in legitimate and acceptable ways?
18. Do we have agreements in place which provide us with standards and objectives to which we can all be accountable?
19. Are we attending to the informal dimensions of governance – such as a friendly welcome culture – as well as the formal structures?
20. What are we doing to ensure sustainability not dependence on the project?

Participatory monitoring and evaluation

21. Have community members and organisations been involved in defining goals, targets, indicators and ways of measuring progress?
22. Having defined and set measurable goals for community benefits, how do we plan to monitor indicators to ensure that our project aligns with these objectives over time?
23. Do we have processes for learning and adapting our goals and indicators?
24. Have we incorporated processes for 'learning with hindsight' which recognise that we may not have got all the indicators right at the beginning?
25. What insights and feedback are we receiving from the community about the effectiveness of engagement efforts in the landscape restoration project? How can we use this feedback to improve and better meet the community's needs and expectations?

Resources

26. How well are all the people involved, including the community, our team, and partner organisations, resourced for their roles in the project? Are there any resource gaps or areas where additional support is required to ensure the success of the project?
27. Do project staff feel supported by line management and organisational policies and strategies?
28. How can we support community capacity, to work towards sustainability?

5 Further resources

Policy

[Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement](#)

[Engaging Communities in Decisions Related to Land](#)

[Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital](#)

[National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#)

[Community Wealth Building](#)

[Responsible Natural Capital and Carbon Management Protocol](#)

Standards and Protocols:

[IAP2 Spectrum of Participation](#)

[National Standards for Community Engagement](#)

[Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land](#)

[Transparency of Ownership and Land Use Decision-Making - Good Practice – Scottish Land Commission](#)

Land Commission good practice guidance

[Community Benefit - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission](#)

[Community Wealth Building - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission](#)

Manuals and Toolkits:

[VOiCE – Scottish Community Development Centre](#)

[Involving Your Community - DTAS](#)

[Place Standard Tool – Our Place](#)

[SP=EED – Planning Advisory Service](#)

[Engaging Communities – West Lothian Council](#)

[Making Socio Ecological Art and Science Collaboration Work A Guide – Changing Treescapes Project](#)

[Talking About Our Place Toolkit – NatureScot](#)

[Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A PRACTICAL TOOLKIT (anu.edu.au)](#) – an excellent landscape scale engagement manual from Australia

[PARTICIPATORY MONITORING & EVALUATION: LEARNING FROM CHANGE](#) (Institute of Development Studies)

[Woodland Herbivore Impact Assessment Method User Guide](#) – example of participatory monitoring approach for habitat condition

Case studies and experience

[Glen Creran | Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (act-now.org.uk)](#)

[Native Woods and their Communities: Community Woodlands Association - YouTube](#) – a playlist of videos profiling the social and economic benefits of community native woodland

Cultural engagement:

[Cormonochan (Walking Theatre Events, Heritage Paths, Sacred Blessing Ritual)](#)

[Làn Thìde -](#) Engaging with Climate Change in the Outer Hebrides through arts, language, heritage, culture and community

[Community Engagement - Good Practice - Our work - Scottish Land Commission](#) – report on a survey of communities and landowners relating to their experience of community engagement

[Land management plan consultations - Forestry and Land Scotland](#)

Plans and agreements – examples

[Torridon Place Plan](#)

[ARKAIG COMMUNITY FOREST (arkaigforest.org)](#) – for their Memorandum of Understanding with the Woodland Trust

Social dimensions of ecological restoration and adaptive management

[Adaptive collaborative management: criteria and indicators for assessing sustainability - CIFOR Knowledge](#) – approached developed by the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

[A New Era for Collaborative Forest Management: Policy and Practice insights from the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program](#) – a wealth of evidence for the effectiveness of the approach

[CARE](#) project management for adaptive management – not specific to ecological restoration but a helpful guide for incorporating this approach into project management

[Ecological restoration as a social and scientific concept](#) – academic paper (open access) in Restoration Ecology

6   Acknowledgements