

Meeting Climate and Sustainable Development Goals through Integrated Landscape Strategies

New Policy Imperatives

Opening Comments

Vimlendra Sharan, Director of the FAO Liaison Office for North America

Sara J. Scherr, President of EcoAgriculture Partners

Speaker

Paula Caballero, Global Director, Climate, World Resources Institute

Panelists

Kathleen Merrigan, Professor of Public Policy, Executive Director of Sustainability, and Director of the Food Institute at the George Washington University

Ann Bartuska, Vice President for Land, Water, and Nature, Resources for the Future

Leonard Jordan, Acting Chief, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service

The land agenda for global development and environment

On February 12th, 2018, EcoAgriculture Partners and the FAO Liaison Office for North America held the inaugural event of a new High-Level Speaker Series, Toward Sustainable Landscapes. The event brought together influencers and policymakers in the DC area to catalyze conversation on how to integrate and coordinate action around the SDGs and climate goals.

Sara Scherr provided the context for the discussion by explaining that for more than a century, public policy for natural resource management, agriculture, and economic development has been organized in competing siloes. However, with a growing global population, growing economies, and the resulting pressures on our natural resource base, this type of structure inhibits our ability to effectively address the interlinkages and dependencies between all sectors. As a result, there has been enormous innovation happening around the world to develop integrated strategies that better serve

our needs. With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations General Assembly and the Paris Climate Agreement at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015, efforts to search for integrated policy solutions have accelerated in the last few years.

Now, attention has shifted from dialogue to action, particularly around how integrated approaches can be implemented in practical terms. Integrated Landscape Management (ILM), an umbrella term used to describe approaches to managing land at a subnational level through long-term collaboration among stakeholders from multiple sectors, has emerged in various forms around the world as a promising approach. The speakers explored the policy challenges that need to be addressed to scale up integrated landscape approaches, key factors that have made these types of landscape initiatives successful, and what our priorities should be moving forward.

Recognizing the importance of integrated landscape management

The ambitious goals set by the Paris Climate Agreement and the SDGs present a challenge that elicits concerted action on a global scale. Paula Caballero stressed that land management plays a critically important and often under-recognized role in achieving both of these global agendas. Both conventional mitigation technologies and carbon removal technologies are necessary to limit global temperature increase to 1.5-2 degrees above pre-industrial levels as set by the Paris Climate Agreement, therefore it is imperative that we utilize tried and tested negative emissions solutions—agricultural



The speakers, from left to right: Kathleen Merrigan, Vimlendra Sharan, Paula Caballero, Leonard Jordan, Sara Scherr, Ann Bartuska.

soil carbon and forest carbon. As agriculture accounts for 20-30% of greenhouse gas emissions, improved landscape management is an area where the intersection of the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement is particularly apparent, as it is essential for both poverty eradication and for carbon removal. A landscape, when recognized as a multi-functional mosaic and managed intelligently, can provide a host of economic, social and environmental benefits. For example, the FAO strategy on sustainable land management implicitly recognizes and internalizes the systemic nature of the challenges we face and is predicated on an integrated approach, according to Vimlendra Sharan's opening remarks. FAO's strategy is focused on improving the efficiency of food systems, conserving natural resources, building livelihoods, improving human wellbeing, enhancing the resilience of communities and ecosystems, and promoting good governance.

In order to achieve all of these goals, Caballero emphasized that the global community must plan for them simultaneously. It is critical that we increase awareness of the decisive role that integrated landscape management plays in providing not only climate benefits, such as removing excess carbon from the atmosphere through afforestation, restoration and agroforestry, but economic and social benefits as well.

Additionally, land use decisions must be considered in the context of climate change adaptation, in addition to mitigation. Kathleen Merrigan recommended that we consider how climate change will shift where crops can be grown, and invest and plan for this shift in a way that protects the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers.

Achieving cross-sector and multi-scale policy coherence

Despite widespread recognition that integrated strategies are critical to achieving the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, resource areas (such as water, agriculture, and forests) are still often segmented under different government authorities. This poses a challenge for improving policy coherence and creating an enabling policy environment for implementing integrated approaches. Ann Bartuska highlighted multiple innovative examples where there has been success in breaking down siloes between government agencies. For example, the Service First partnership authority in the U.S. allows all agencies under the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Interior to share their authorities when their sphere of influence overlaps. In some cases, such as in the Mississippi River Basin, a regulatory agency has obliged states to come together to develop a common approach.

Policy-relevant research

Researchers, scientists and thought leaders must also ensure that they are adequately communicating the information that policymakers need to make informed decisions by ensuring that the scale of analysis is commensurate with the scale of decision-making. We must better link science with management to ensure that decision-makers have the data they need in a form that they can utilize for practical application. Bartuska described the large ecosystem assessment processes that were carried out in the early 1990s in an effort to

improve ecosystem management and noted that some cases were more successful at influencing management decisions than others. For example, the Southern Appalachia ecosystem assessment was directly utilized by the government agencies and states involved because the scale was understandable and the information was relevant for decision-making. Yet in other cases, such as the Columbia Basin ecosystem assessment, the scale of assessment was so extensive, complex, and misaligned with jurisdictions of action that the information generated by research was not utilized by decision-makers.

Policies that support successful outcomes in landscape initiatives

In places where integrated landscape approaches have been tried and implemented, policies that support strong involvement and collaboration from the community and other local actors have been critical in driving success. Integrated Landscape Management is predicated on empowered local decision-making. Communities have a vested interest in the health of their land and must drive the identification of key issues, the setting of priorities, and the development of solutions.

Leonard Jordan noted that the extensive effort across 11 states in the western U.S. to protect and restore the habitat of the greater sage-grouse was possible due to the involvement of private landowners and ranchers, who put voluntary conservation systems in place in the interest of protecting their livelihoods. This effort has conserved sage-grouse habitat while benefitting local rural economies, ranches, wildlife, and rangeland health, and ultimately prevented the listing of the greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

Within communities, land ownership and tenure is a critical part of the equation. Paula Caballero noted that securing land tenure for local community actors is

essential to incentivize good stewardship and improvements in land management. Caballero highlighted an example of a massive restoration movement in Niger, where five to six million hectares were restored in 20 years due to tree ownership being returned from the government to farmers. Kathleen Merrigan noted that even in the U.S., where laws that clarify ownership regimes and transfer of land are more formalized than other countries, access to land can still be an issue due to other factors, such as land prices.

Government policy is not the only driver of change

Policy must be better aligned with what is working on the ground. However, industry also has an important role in driving change. Merrigan noted that many private companies are deeply committed to the Paris Climate Agreement, despite lack of support from the current administration in the U.S. Consumers are developing an increased awareness of where and how their food is grown and demanding higher standards of corporate responsibility, and industry has responded to consumers.

Act now to shift the 2050 trajectory

Moving forward, it is important to consider both synergies and tradeoffs in the intersection of goals between sectors. Paula Caballero concluded that the decisions we make now will determine what our landscapes, economies, and societies look like in 50 years. In order to bring about needed shifts, we must integrate long-term perspectives into short term decision-making. We must train ourselves and future generations to become systems thinkers, so we are better equipped to understand the interconnections between social, economic and ecological systems and provide better leadership and decision-making. In order to achieve both the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement, policy must more explicitly support integrated landscape management models.

This policy briefing is a summary of the discussion during “Meeting Climate and Sustainable Development Goals through Integrated Landscape Strategies: The New Policy Imperative,” held February 12th, 2018 in Washington, DC, as part of the FAO-EcoAgriculture Partners high-level speaker series, *Towards Sustainable Landscapes*. Visit ecoagriculture.org to find out about upcoming events.

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