Restoring forests: why local peoples’ rights matter

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Why are local people so important?

No such thing as “spare” land—2/3 of forests are customary land

So successful restoration needs to very closely involve these people.

1) Because it’s just

2) Because it’s necessary for success—forests are under constant threat & need local people to defend them

But many restoration initiatives have not prioritised this.
Enough “consulting local communities”

- Everyone always mentions involving local people
- But often this takes the form of “consultation”
- For restoration to succeed, local people need to be in the driving seat, making active management choices—since they know what model’s likely to work best economically, and will be there in the long run
- In order to be able to make management choices & have long-term interest, they need to have rights over forests
Case study 1: NEPAL

• Since 1993, national forest cover increased by 1/5 – one of fastest rates in the world
• 1993 - government gave 1.6m ha of (mostly degraded) forest land to communities
• Communities restored forests because degradation reduced water supply & firewood
• How? Restricted livestock grazing & timber harvesting, fire management & planted trees.
Case study 2: SCOTLAND

- Transformation of bare hillside to forests – bringing back ancient pine forest
- Scottish government land reform agenda- aims to bring 400,000 hectares of land under community control by 2020
- Movement with diverse, intensely local projects, rooted as much in community activism as environmentalism
What can governments do to support community-led restoration?

1. Innovative financing mechanisms

2. Give forest communities rights to land
   - Lots of things you can do at local level to support restoration (and won’t happen on its own), but in terms of clear, top level policy change, you can’t do much better than that