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RELEASE: The True Opportunity of Restoring India's Land for Climate and Communities

Restoring 75% of the land in Sidhi District, Madhya Pradesh, could create thousands of jobs and small businesses while fighting climate change. WRI India and the Government of Madhya Pradesh have signed an MOU to help local communities restore more land, faster.

New Delhi/Bhopal, December 9, 2020: Nearly 700 million people in India depend on forests and agriculture for sustenance. The livelihoods of these people are at risk: Climate change could reduce agricultural income by up to 25% annually, leaving more than 50% of the workforce vulnerable. But that damage isn't irreversible. About [140 million hectares](#) — nearly half of India's territory — could benefit from protecting forests and restoring land.

A new report from WRI India, [Restoring Landscapes in India for Climate and Communities](#), quantifies that opportunity for the climate-vulnerable but impoverished Sidhi district in Madhya Pradesh. By adapting the [Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology](#) (ROAM) to assess the environmental, social, and economic benefits that restoration can bring, researchers analyzed the ecosystem services and livelihood benefits of restoration, while taking land tenure, gender, and social inclusion into account.

The analysis found that:

- Restoring 75% of the District's land could create 3.75 million paid working days for local people and almost INR 1.3 billion (USD19 million) of extra income from wages and sale of saplings.
- There is potential to sequester more than 7 million tons of carbon in forests within 20 years, conserving biodiversity and controlling erosion.
- Building 3,000 restoration micro-enterprises that sell high-value tree crops like bamboo, jackfruit, *aonla* (Indian gooseberries), and moringa, could create 30,000 jobs.
- A healthy landscape can fulfil critical local demands by providing food, fuelwood, fodder and non-timber forest produce for dependent communities, controlling soil erosion and conserving biodiversity.

- People from traditionally marginalized groups, including women, unemployed youth, and landless people, stand to benefit.

The report also analyzes the [social landscape](#) of the district: the key people and organizations that govern the flow of information and funds, hold authority, and spur and mediate conflict. By understanding actor-network relationships, researchers found civil society organizations, local research universities need to be at the forefront to drive the restoration agenda in the district along with the state actors. Findings also indicate that while women and members of India's marginalized Scheduled Tribes and Castes implement restoration, they are seldom key decision-makers and mechanisms will have to be designed that benefits can flow to them. Bringing their insights and restoration priorities to the table will be key to achieving the true economic and environmental opportunity.

A Partnership to Restore More Land, Faster

On November 9, the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development (DP&RD), Government of Madhya Pradesh (MP), and WRI India signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to develop a collaborative plan for realizing the total potential of restoring Sidhi's landscape. Under the MoU, the DP&RD and WRI India aim to leverage the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS), Madhya Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MPSRLM), and other initiatives in the livelihoods, infrastructure development, tribal welfare and panchayat sectors. This work will help the Government of India's meet its international commitments, including its nationally determined contribution (NDC) to the Paris Climate Agreement, its Bonn Challenge and Land Degradation Neutrality targets to restore 26 million hectares of land, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

WRI India and DP&RD agreed that restoration should strive to: 1) Align with the goals of various government departments to show the breadth of what restoration can achieve, 2) Improve land productivity and address land use challenges by restoring critical ecosystem services such as biodiversity, soil, and water; and 3) To put people, especially women, at the center of planning and implementing restoration projects.

By learning from these lessons, local decision makers around the world during the upcoming [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#) (2021-2030) can build inclusive systems to manage land that maximize economic opportunities and create value for the most marginalized people.



Quotes:

Mr. Manoj Shrivastava, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of Madhya Pradesh:

“We want to develop a holistic, comprehensive and composite approach to restoration that brings together Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM), Swachh Bharath Mission and watershed work. Sidhi has faced degradation and lost ecosystem services. Landscape restoration has potential to establish a circular economy in the district based on recycling, remodeling and reconfiguring natural resources that have been disturbed. People will be at the center-stage for this collaboration. We will have the help of SRLM and change will come in a gender-specific way; women will be in the forefront of restoration. Many initiatives will be taken with the help of self-help groups, cluster-level federations and village organizations.”

Dr. OP Agarwal, CEO, WRI India:

“WRI India’s motivation for designing projects is to see implementation and change on the ground. Realizing the true opportunity of restoring landscapes will take investment and perseverance. That is why we are delighted to be working with the Government of Madhya Pradesh to restore prosperity and rural jobs in Sidhi. Now, it’s time to replicate this approach to landscapes throughout India – and around the world – during the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030).”

Mr. R. Parasuram, former Chief Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh and Senior Fellow, WRI India:

“WRI India has been an active partner in designing and implementing landscape restoration at the global level. This MoU between Madhya Pradesh’s Department of Panchayat and Rural Development and WRI India, for the implementation of landscape restoration has the potential to become a game changer in the management of natural resources. Given a history of out-migration of its rural poor, this project in Sidhi can help expand rural livelihood opportunities within the district in addition to addressing land degradation and retention of soil moisture for rain-fed agriculture.”



Dr Ruchika Singh, Director, Sustainable Landscapes and Restoration, WRI India, and **Marie Duraisami**, Manager, Sustainable Landscapes and Restoration, WRI India

“Our learnings from Sidhi showcase a path forward for a more synergistic planning at the landscape level, which can unlock the potential of nature-based solutions at scale, with people at the center driving the projects. India has an immense opportunity for landscape restoration in more than [100 million hectares](#) where trees can be grown within different land-uses for climate action. This has been assessed through an interactive, [web-based platform](#) that showcases priorities areas. There are multiple benefits from landscape restoration as the study findings indicate. To unlock this potential, mechanisms will have to be designed so that benefits can flow to the people, especially marginalized men and women, in the landscapes.”

About WRI India

WRI India is a research organization with experts and staff who work closely with leaders to turn big ideas into action to sustain a healthy environment – the foundation of economic opportunity and human well-being. We envision an equitable and prosperous planet driven by the wise management of natural resources. We aspire to create a world where the actions of government, business and communities combine to eliminate poverty and sustain the natural environment for all people.