

RPLC AND PARTNERSHIP

HOW THE REGENERATIVE PRODUCTION LANDSCAPE COLLABORATIVES BENEFIT FROM PARTNERSHIP

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Photo credit

A farmer in his agroforestry pilot area supported by RPLC in Thikri Village, Dhar District, Western MP (photo by Tom Harrison)

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Tom Harrison, TPI, December 2024

tpi THE PARTNERING INITIATIVE

The Partnering Initiative was founded by the University of Cambridge and the International Business Leaders Forum in 2003 to develop and promote the theory and practice of multi-sector collaboration. With two decades of drawing out learning while supporting hundreds of partnerships and organisations and training thousands of people, TPI has been a pioneer in codifying best partnering practice standards and in developing the methodologies to build partnering capability.

TPI's mission is to professionalise the practice of partnership and so unleash the power of collaboration to deliver transformational sustainable development.

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Introduction

The landscape approach

It is common for governments, non-governmental organisations and the philanthropic community to implement a programme of activities to address a single social or environmental challenge. As a result they focus support on one particular type of economic actor or value chain. A landscape approach, such as the Regenerative Landscape Production Collaborative (RPLC), is a different way of working. It addresses multiple, inter-connected issues in a geographic area, and the people who rely on the landscape for food, livelihoods, income, culture, and identity; and fosters agricultural systems that conserve and enhance natural resources and build community resilience, whilst enabling businesses to source responsibly.

Founded in 2021 by Laudes Foundation, IDH, and WWF India, RPLC India aims to invite other partners and stakeholders to create a systems-level shift to catalyze and scale a model where;
• producers grow agri-commodities using natural and regenerative farming principles that restore natural resources and reduce emissions from farming systems; and
• smallholder farmers and communities thrive, through improved economic stability, enhanced livelihoods, and greater participation in decision making
• businesses can source responsibly while creating inclusive supply chain relationships.

Transformation of a landscape

Landscape approaches require an integrated approach that combines human well-being and development with conservation or re-generation of the landscape. They understand the landscape as a complex set of interconnected social, economic, environmental, and political ecosystems that interact together within a defined boundary.[1] This can lead to a sustainable transformation in the landscape and the lives of its people, because the approach takes account of each stakeholder's interests, capacities and resources. This contrasts with programmes working on just one of element in isolation, which is unlikely to make enough of a difference to the social and economic systems to bring about lasting change.

Transforming a landscape requires changes across multiple ecosystems so that all of its components function and interact in a way that improves outcomes for stakeholders and address the root causes of issues that are causing challenges to agricultural systems. The aim of landscape approaches is that improved outcomes for people are both stable and sustainable, and also results in uses of the land that reverses damage to the environment and increases biodiversity. This kind of transformation requires a multi-dimensional approach with a high degree of coordination of multiple activities in a variety of spheres (economic, cultural, environmental, political) . Effective collaboration between stakeholders in the landscape is therefore an essential component of landscape approaches. This is achieved through multi-stakeholder partnerships between producers and their representatives, government, civil society organisations and businesses.

These approaches have grown in importance over the last few years and include many agricultural value chains, such as palm oil soy, cattle, paper and pulp and cattle[2]. The approach is being used for organic cotton production in India. A key feature of RPLC, which is currently active in India, Tanzania, Pakistan and Brazil is that, while they may originate in support for one value chain, they involve producers that grow several different crops and depend on diverse income streams. Collectively RPLC aims to convert 50m hectares into regenerative production landscapes with restored and revitalised soil health,

[1] Adapted from the definition used by the Global Landscape Forum https://www.globallandscapesforum.org/

[2] https://www.cdp.net/en/articles/forests/from-calls-to-action-to-action-on-nature-a-landscape-approach

improved water management, preserved and enhanced biodiversity and improved gender equity. RPLC also aims to result in reduced emissions of greenhouse gases.

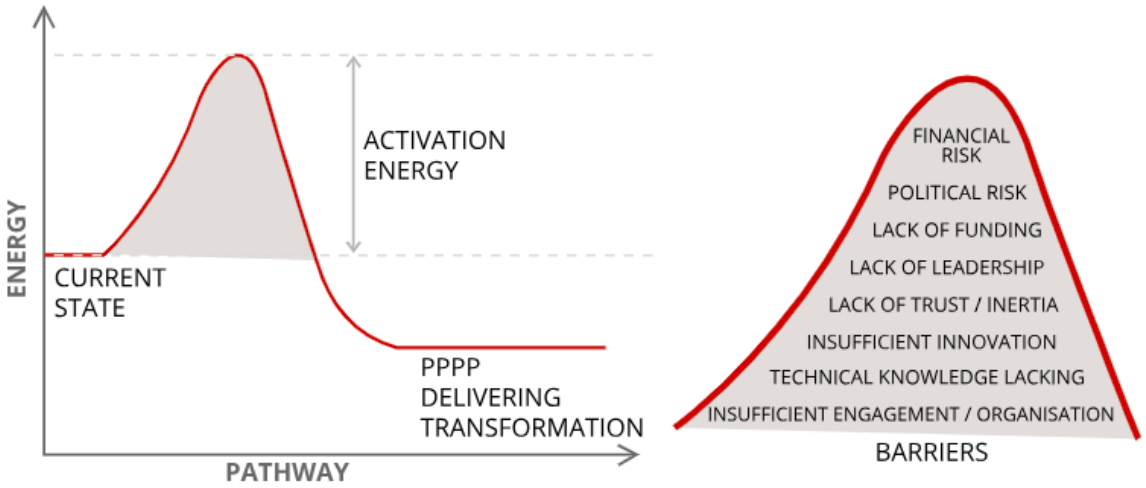
The role of partnership

TPI, through its partnership with the Laudes Foundation in the TRANSFORM! programme[3], has examined how RPLC benefits from multi-stakeholder partnership by reviewing the incentives of the stakeholder in RPLC India, and the benefits that they are experiencing from the highly collaborative nature of the initiative.

RPLC design

RPLC India brings together public sector, private sector, NGOs and philanthropic partners to transform agricultural systems and landscapes in two regions of Madhya Pradesh in India.

In Madhya Pradesh, as in many other landscapes, there are several barriers that prevent this kind of transformation from happening. Public-private-philanthropy partnerships (PPPP) such as RPLC are able to overcome these barriers as a result of the 'activation' role played by philanthropy.



In RPLC, Laudes' roles include convening, co-creation and design, and provision of catalytic funding for partners to implement activities, coordinated by a secretariat provided by IDH. These have provided essential activation energy for the transformation to begin. Philanthropic partners are also building partners' capacity, de-risking future investment and supporting learning between partners and other stakeholders.

Partner incentives to collaborate in RPLC

The benefits that will arise through collaboration are critical to the health and success of any partnership. The benefits of a landscape approach provide the motivation for the partners to join and stay engaged in RPLC. The benefits that partners experience needs to align with the objectives of each individual and organisation in the system in order to create the incentive for a sustainable change to happen.

Why farmers engage

Farmers' motivation for engaging with RPLC is to increase their incomes while mitigating risk. The benefits they hope to experiences from collaboration will help them to achieve lower production costs and higher revenues from their produce. With support from RPLC, they can achieve these goals by

[3] https://thepartneringinitiative.org/programmes/philanthropy-partnerships-systems-change/

upskilling and changing production methods to ones that use of less expensive inputs, generate higher revenues, and are more resilient. Changing to organic cotton provides these benefits, but farmers also manage risk through a diversified income cropping system and they expect RPLC to provide opportunities to access other high-value markets. They look to RPLC to support them to reduce the risks arising from climate change, and access more funding to improve their farms.

Public sector motivations

The Government of Madhya Pradesh is keen that farmers see an increase to their income, while high volumes of production from the State are also maintained. They expect collaboration to help achieve this through improved public-private coordination and increased private investment. This will help them to achieve fundamental public objectives in regard to a governments role in providing an enabling environment that supports inclusive growth, public infrastructure and a supportive policies and regulation.

Motivations for civil society participation

Civil society organisations, in the form of local NGOs, implement activities to support their communities. The RPLC implementing partners believe that collaboration will provide them with access to resources to increase their scale and impact, enhance their credibility, and enable them to learn from each other. A collaborative approach ensures that the community becomes a true partner in the transformation process, giving representative organisations greater ability to support communities, promote their rights, and provide essential services to those most in need.

What the private sector wants from RPLC

The objective of the private sector brands that partner in RPLC India is ultimately to be viable in the long term and achieve commercial success through responsible and inclusive practices, an efficient market and sustainable supply of materials in their value chains.

The risk mitigation provided by participation in RPLC supports these objectives by providing companies with the ability to make meaningful sustainability claims against voluntary and regulatory commitments. Through RPLC, both international brands and local supply chain businesses can also better fulfil their procurement needs for organic product with traceability and visibility, and leverage to their investments from public funds and investment by their peers. RPLC also provides new opportunities for investment and mitigates some of the risk for investors and funders. Engaging in RPLC can also support community buy-in for agriculture support provided by companies.

Benefits from partnership experienced so far

There are three main areas where collaboration between all the partners in RPLC India has led to significant benefits that align with partners' objectives and are starting to transform the landscape. Developing enough trust between stakeholders from different sectors is often a major barrier to effective collaboration, but RPLC has created a governance system which has successfully improved trust levels between partners. This has also enhanced the credibility of partners in each other's eyes, which has resulted in some significant benefits and impact. Sharing of expertise between partners has also been beneficial. Farmers have confidence in RPLC due to the demonstrated benefits of the prescribed regenerative production methods.

Success factors for transformation

The progress made by RPLC India in the last 2 years is a good start but for the desired transformation of the landscape more collaboration is needed over a longer timeframe of 5-10 years. This will require more resource that Foundations are able or willing to offer for activation and a patient approach. Results of a recent TPI survey underlined the tension between systemic change timeframes and

traditional funding cycles. One respondent noted that "philanthropy is often looking for direct impact and projects, which is not aligned with systemic change and an engagement of 10-20 years."

The private sector needs to be confident that it will experience commercial value from a transformation of the supply chain. Brands will need to be closely involved in designing programme activities in order to be assured that they will be able to make impact claims. RPLC impact includes preserving and enhancing biodiversity, improving management of water resources and addressing gender inequality, but a company supporting the partnership will need to be able to cite data that matched exactly their impact targets and validated by a third-party.

Public-private collaboration, successful as it is so far, must be institutionalised such that regular contact and coordination between the government and other stakeholders is embedded in the system. Continuity of support from a secretariat is essential for a long enough period for a transformation to happen.

Maintaining a healthy partnership will be essential for all partners to continue to experience benefits from collaboration and stay engaged. This requires the trust that has developed between partners to be maintained. Resilience will be needed when challenges to collaboration arise, as well as good processes to keep communication channels open and manage the potential issues between partners.

Comparison between RPLC country programmes

The RPLCs in India, Pakistan, Tanzania and Brazil share a common landscape-based approach and at the heart of them all is a commitment to collaboration to achieve systemic change and regenerative production systems. However, while there are many commonalities between how the RPLCs are structured and organised, the partnership features are highly specific to each context as follows.

Role played by each sector:

the public sector, in the shape of the Madhya Pradesh government, is driving change in RPLC India, with the private sector currently less engaged. This is similar in Brazil, but in Tanzania and Pakistan the private sector is leading the way. The levels of resources available from the public sector also differ significantly between these contexts, with funding from public sector initiatives playing a particularly important role in India, contrasting most starkly with Tanzania where local government is highly resource constrained and cannot prioritize the provision of support to the activities that RPLC is promoting.

Economic ‘driver’ for RPLC:

in all of the RPLC countries except Brazil there is a strong economic case for the private sector to engage with the other sector partners in order to secure sustainable production in one of their supply chains. This is most commonly for organic cotton. Brazil is the exception because the role of a single high value crop is much less of a lever for transforming the landscape than the other countries. There are also very different motivations for farmer participation, either primarily interest in increasing incomes (India and Pakistan) or responding to the threat of climate crisis (Bazil and, even more so, Tanzania.

Trust between sectors:

civil society is highly engaged and motivated in all the countries. However, trust between the sectors is also at different levels, as is the willingness to formalise collaboration. In Tanzania, there is a much higher level of trust between sectors than in other countries but there is also more of a reluctance to formalise the partnership there. Collaboration in RPLC is therefore effective in Tanzania in spite of, not because of, formalising relationships, whereas committing to formal governance structures has been a key success factor in other RPLC countries.



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