Theorising conditions for landscape governance – what can we learn from Environmental Policy Integration? A theoretical debate with illustrations from Rwanda

Cora van Oosten, Wageningen UR Centre for Development Innovation; Hens Runhaar, Wageningen University Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group

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Introduction

Landscape governance is generally defined as the process of multi-sector, multi-actor and multi-level interaction and spatial decision making at the landscape level. Aiming at the development of landscape specific policy targets rather than at sectoral objectives or individual actor goals, landscape governance is considered as a way to achieve environmental, economic and social objectives simultaneously (Sunderland, 2014; Reed, 2015). Widely accepted are the “Ten Principles of an Adaptive Landscape Approach”, which reflect the participatory nature of landscape approaches and their embeddedness in a process of multi-stakeholder governance at the landscape level (Sayer et al., 2013). Although landscape approaches are increasingly adopted and implemented, in practice it appears to be challenging to meet the theoretical principles for landscape governance (Sayer et al., 2015). As a consequence, outcomes are suboptimal, at least from a theoretical perspective.

In this paper we address one of the challenges for landscape governance in practice, namely the challenge of how to deal with conflicting policies in various sectors and at various levels, that play out at the landscape level. It is our aim to contribute to the landscape governance literature by further theorising the conditions for effective landscape governance, defined in terms of its Ten Principles. For this purpose we will draw from the more matured body of literature on Environmental Policy Integration (EPI), which is also about integrating environmental and other objectives into sectoral decision-making and practices, albeit without a specific spatial focus. From the EPI literature we derive concepts that help defining the problem of “policy incoherence” in more detail, and learn from the strategies to overcome this problem, as proposed or identified in other empirical studies. We then apply the theoretical framework to the case of forest landscape restoration in Rwanda, in order to test and refine the framework. Forest landscape restoration is a practical operationalisation of landscape governance, as it strives for the restoration of degraded landscapes in an integrated manner, the involvement of multiple stakeholders, and the embeddedness into policy sectors and scales. It analyses the policy incoherence that is increasingly encountered, and identifies the opportunities for vertical as well as horizontal alignment of sectoral policies within a single space.

Structure of this paper

The paper is organised as follows: we will first develop the analytical framework by a) sketching the currently existing knowledge on landscape approaches and landscape governance in particular, b) presenting the emerging practice of forest landscape restoration, as a derivative of landscape governance with a clear policy objective which is the restoration of degraded landscapes, and c) discussing the conflicting multi-sector and multi-level policy objectives at the landscape level, and its link to Environmental Policy Integration.

After this analytical part, we will present the case of forest landscape restoration in Rwanda. We have chosen this case, because it clearly shows how forest landscape restoration leads to conflicting policy objectives at the landscape level. It also shows the need for policy integration, and the struggle to find the right institutional setting for this. We have organised the case around five practical research questions, which are: 1) How does Rwanda position itself in the current debate on landscape governance, and in forest landscape restoration in...
particular; and what are the commitments that it made? 2) How do these commitments fit in local landscapes, their actors and their institutions? 3) How do these commitments fit into Rwanda’s existing policy frames? 4) What are the challenges in terms of policy coherence, in both vertical and horizontal terms? 5) What can we learn from Environmental Policy Integration, and how could these lessons be applied in the Rwandan context, with its relatively strict governance mode yet increasing scope at the decentralised level to mainstream sustainability objectives?

As the research has not been finalised and data collection is still in full swing, we are not yet able to present a scientific discussion on the results, nor are we able to present a solid conclusion. But we will present a preliminary conclusion which summarises the Rwanda case, and paves the way for a discussion on how to deal with conflicting multi-sector and multi-level policy objectives at the landscape level from an EPI perspective. This is exactly what we want to discuss in Prague: what is it that landscape governance can learn from EPI; which EPI literature could be particularly helpful to landscape governance; and what can landscape governance add to the EPI debate? More precisely, we want to discuss the following three topics in Prague:

1. Conceptualising EPI from a landscape perspective, that is, conceptualising policy integration within a single geographical space (the landscape);
2. Conceptualising conflicts between policy objectives, in terms of substantive conflicts (conflictive goals affecting the landscape); procedural conflicts (the level of participation); and institutional conflicts (institutional silos and stickiness);
3. Conceptualising the potential ways to overcome these conflicts and achieve inter-sectoral synergies, also in terms of substantive, procedural and institutional synergies at the landscape level (i.e. multifunctional land use practice, institutional dialogue and institutional bricolage)

2. Analytical framework: Landscape approaches and landscape governance

2.1. Landscape approaches and landscape governance

In the international debate on sustainable land use, food security and climate change, there is increased recognition of the importance of area-based or landscape approaches (Sunderland, 2014; Reed, 2015). This response acknowledges the complexity of spatial realities, and the ineffectiveness of many sector-based programmes that ignore the cross-sector linkages between agriculture, nature conservation and economic development (ibid.). An important aspect of landscape approaches is landscape governance, which has been defined as the process of multi-sector, multi-actor and multi-level interaction and spatial decision making at the landscape level (Colfer 2011; van Oosten et al. 2014; Ros-Tonen et al. 2015; Kusters 2015). This, with the aim to bring spatial decision-making closer to those directly affected by the spatial decisions taken; and assuming that landscapes provide the ideal space for stakeholders to negotiate options and work on collective decisions about the organization of their space (van Oosten et al., 2016).

It is in this context that Sayer, together with a significant group of recognised authors, developed a set of design principles to guide landscape level decision-making processes in a democratic, transparent and informed way, taking into account the interests of the various stakeholders involved (Sayer et al., 2013). These principles have been widely accepted and adopted as being the basis for landscape governance. The Ten Principles are firmly based on the belief that landscapes are multifunctional, which implies that landscape governance strives for the achievement of multiple objectives, through a participatory and inclusive process of negotiation, adaptation and adaptive learning. The principles emphasise the importance of the integration of agricultural and environmental priorities, which requires a people-centred approach developed and applied at the landscape level. They acknowledge that such a process is hardly predictable, and is therefore a process of “muddling through” rather
than carefully designed and planned. Thus, a “designer” landscape of spatially segregated protected and productive areas, often the predominant paradigm of conservation or environmental engineering, is not precluded by adopting a landscape approach (Sayer et al, 2013; Koh et al, 2009).

In 2014, the same group of authors published a new article reflecting the outcomes of a study reviewing seven landscape initiatives, and assessing their level of adopting and applying the Ten Principles (Sayer et al, 2014). In this article, they draw the conclusion that in none of the initiatives the Ten Principles were systematically applied. Practitioners did draw upon the principles selectively, and adapted them to deal with the specific local conditions. But in all cases, there were too many institutional hindrances and power disparities to lead to the expected consensus-based, integrated and enforceable spatial plans (ibid.). Most frequent hindrances were that plans and priorities were based on personal values and beliefs of the most powerful parties involved; they did not go through a transparent and evidence-based process; and they did not have broad legitimacy. This applied in particular to the cases where outside actors aimed to apply a landscape approach on a project basis, which implies that local ownership is low (Scott, 1998, Sayer, 2008). As pre-conditions for a successful application of a landscape approach, Sayer mentions the importance of local political leadership, private sector engagement, and strong support of local stakeholders, who are to carry the process (Sayer et al., 2014). Also, they recognise as important pre-conditions the solidness of the governance system, particularly in relation to law enforcement, cadastral records, clear land rights, sufficient budget for policy implementation, and legal formalisation of agreements (ibid.). But strangely enough, they do not mention the challenge of policy incoherence, which hampers true institutional innovation at the agriculture-environmental nexus.

This is in contrast with other literature on landscape governance, which points at the disparity between landscape boundaries and jurisdictional boundaries, policy fragmentation, and incoherent sectoral policy frames (Görg, 2007, Van Oosten et al, 2013, Van Oosten et al, 2014). These authors argue that there often is an institutional mismatch between sectoral objectives and landscape objectives, in which sectoral objectives usually prevail (Van Oosten et al., 2016; Runhaar et al., 2014). Moreover, centrally set policy objectives often do not match with locally defined landscape objectives, and there is little institutional space for local authorities to alter sectoral objectives to make them fit into their local context (Van Oosten et al., 2016). Hajer confirms this discrepancy and says that landscape level decision making takes place in an “institutional void”, which urges for new governance arrangements that transcend existing institutional boundaries (Hajer 2009, 2013). Such new governance arrangements require negotiating over new rules and institutional behaviours; crafting or combining ‘old’ sectoral policy frames and ‘new’ place-specific arrangements, which is referred to as “institutional bricolage” (Cleaver, 2002, 2012; De Koning et al., 2012).

2.2. Forest landscape restoration as an operationalisation of landscape governance

Forest landscape restoration strongly builds upon landscape approaches, and landscape governance and its principles. It fits into international policy dialogues such as the Convention on Biological Diversity with the Aichi Target 15 which aims at restoring 15% of all degraded land areas by 2020; and the UNFCC climate change convention and its REDD framework (Pistorius et al, 2014). At the international policy level, forest landscape restoration is seen as having the potential to simultaneously contribute to achieving environmental and social policy objectives within a single space (Van Noordwijk et al. 1997; Hobbs and Morton 1999). This would make forest landscape restoration a practical policy domain for Environmental Policy Integration.

Forest landscape restoration has been the basis for the Bonn Challenge, which was initiated in 2011 by a group of international organisations, and aims to globally restore 150,000,000 ha of degraded landscapes in 2020. Individual countries can make a pledge, after which they are held accountable for meeting their targets (Pistorius et al., 2014). Unlike the past, when it was assumed that implementation of policy targets set by international regimes would automatically trickle down to local policy levels (Easterly, 2008, quoted by Pistorius), the Bonn Challenge is supposed to do better. Organised as a policy network weaving ties between existing networks of (inter)national NGO’s, governments and private investors, the Bonn Challenge is to be a mechanism of
collaborative network governance, successfully integrating policies, bridging bureaucratic hierarchies, and mobilise the required financial resources to make it happen.

In order to support this fairly optimistic aim, donor support has been mobilised, and a range of restoration potential assessments, institutional assessments and capacity needs assessments have been developed to support countries in realising their pledges. Although the different support mechanisms are implicitly based on the Ten Principles, countries are free to identify their own priority areas and operationalise them through their existing governance systems and policy frames. This means that the specific challenges related to governance and policy coherence are left to the countries to be solved. These countries would therefore tremendously benefit from existing insights on how forest landscape restoration can be governed in a more participatory and coherent way, avoiding policy incoherence, and learn how to align and integrate policies at the landscape level.

2.3. Conflicting multi-sector and multi-level policy objectives at the landscape level: insights from Environmental Policy Integration

Whereas landscape governance is a relatively new concept, Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) has been established for a much longer period, and covers a growing body of literature analysing the way in which the incorporation of environmental concerns into other policy areas can be achieved (Persson, 2004; Runhaar et al., 2014). It is the Brundtland report “Our Common Future” that already recognises that “the integrated and interdependent nature of the new challenges and issues today contrasts sharply with the nature of the institutions that exist today. These institutions tend to be independent, fragmented, and working to relatively narrow mandates with closed decision processes” (WCED, 1987, quoted by Persson, 2004; Leone, 2005). EPI is therefore widely recognised as a key requirement for sustainable development to be achieved (EU, 2016, available at http://ecologic.eu/sites/files/project/2013/EPIGOV%20Policy%20Brief.pdf). EPI acknowledges the inability of sectoral policies to cover the complexity of spatial realities, and it recognises the need for negotiation and cooperation between various stakeholders and authorities, to create coherence across institutional scales and settings, and lead to improved policy output (Sayer et al., 2005; Peters, 1998; Underdal, 1980). This may however touch upon vested interests, and demand for a redistribution of resources across sectors and scales (Moulaert et al., 2007).

Without going into detail on the vast body of EPI literature, we believe that in order to deal with conflicting multi-sector and multi-level policy objectives at the landscape level, much can be learned from the EPI literature. EPI would considerably contribute to understand the relation between landscape governance and conflicting policy objectives, to enrich the debate on landscape governance, and help making landscape governance a working reality.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case study

As stated in the introduction, we have derived materials from both landscape governance and EPI literature, with the aim to merge these into a combined framework for analysis. We want to test and refine the framework with the aim to theorise conditions for effective landscape governance. We focus on forest landscape restoration as a practical application of landscape governance, as it implies a participatory process in which restoration targets are being set, planned and implemented (IUFRO, 2015). Forest landscape restoration has gained momentum through the Bonn Challenge, which is an international initiative to bring forest landscape restoration at scale, by aiming for 150,000,000 ha being restored globally in 2020 (GPFLR, 2012).

We have chosen Rwanda as a case study, because Rwanda is a frontrunner of forest landscape restoration, currently taking the lead on the African continent. Rwanda is the first African country that has pledged to
contribute to the Bonn Challenge, with a pledge of 2,000,000 ha by 2020 (GPFLR, 2015), and is well under way to meet its commitment. We have also chosen Rwanda because Rwanda has a strong government, and a dynamic process of policy formulation in which sustainable development is playing a key role. Moreover, Rwanda has recently embarked upon a process of administrative decentralisation, and is currently searching for ways to include sustainability goals and build environmental coherence at the district level.

3.2. Data collection

In order to assess the process of forest landscape restoration, its embeddedness in policy sectors in Rwanda, and its alignment with local priorities such as food and nutrition security, local economic development and decentralised public participation, we carried out a series of studies at the national and the local level. Our main empirical basis is formed by four MSc thesis projects carried out by Wageningen University MSc students CoCo Teheux, Michael Leone, Assumpta Uzamukunda and Zowi Bergh. All four research projects have been based upon a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research, using participatory research methodologies, policy analysis and network analysis. All the research projects were carried out in collaboration with local partners such as the Rwanda office of the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, the Rwanda Natural Resources Authority, Kitabi College of Conservation and Environmental Management, and the Districts of Nyamagabe, Rutsiro and Rulindo. Additional information was gathered through an in-depth policy review exercise. The results were shared and discussed during two workshops held with FLR practitioners and policy makers mid-2015 and mid-2016, which provided deeper insights which helped in interpreting and analysing the collected data.

4. Preliminary results

Although we have not finalised the research process and data collection is still in full swing, we can provide some preliminary results, responding to the five research questions set in the introduction.

4.1. How does Rwanda position itself in the current debate on landscape governance, and in forest landscape restoration in particular; and what are the commitments that it made?

As a first result, we can conclude that Rwandan governance system has been strongly influenced by the 1994 war and its aftermath. To rebuild the country, there was an urgent need for inspirational leadership, reconciliation, and nation building, which led to the development of a strong state, with a relatively small group of powerful politicians, an efficient state bureaucracy, a technocratic approach to development, and a strong relation with the private sector (Hasselskog, 2015). This strong state-led developmentalism has certainly led to impressive results, but it also has some problematic aspects, especially in the rural sector. Trapped for decennia in a vicious cycle of land fragmentation, land pressure, poverty and conflict, the post-war policies focused on land registration, in combination with land consolidation, resettlement of the population in congregated villages and agricultural intensification. These measures were expected to bring about more rational land use, stimulate market development and off-farm income generation, facilitate service delivery and promote security and reconciliation (Government of Rwanda, 2002, 2009, 2011, 2013). In order not to lose time on democratic deliberation, rural development has been based on design, planning and implementation of grand schemes, the expertise of expert technicians, planners and bureaucratic intelligentsia, and step-by-step procedures with controllable outcomes (Scott, 1998; Hasselskog, 2015). Little consideration for local perceptions and practices and a complex system of performance contracts assure upward accountability leaves little room for experimentation and innovation at the local level. Hence from a landscape governance perspective, Rwanda hardly complies with the Ten Principles, which are strongly based on participatory governance and adaptive learning.
Nevertheless, Rwanda is one of the frontrunners of forest landscape restoration, as it is the first African country that has pledged to contribute to the Bonn Challenge, with a pledge of 2,000,000 ha by 2020 (GPFLR, 2015). Rwanda is currently working with international organisations and donors to assess the country’s restoration potential, develop restoration plans, and build technical capacities for the plans to be implemented. The country seems to be well underway to meet its pledge of bringing 2 million ha under restoration by 2020 (http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/rwanda). Currently, policies are being defined, and programmes and projects are being initiated in various selected landscapes to ensure that the goals will be met in time. Yet little is known about the local responses in these landscapes, in terms of how landscape inhabitants are actually engaged in the restoration process, how they perceive the methods followed, and how they benefit from the results, which again questions the level of participatory and inclusive landscape governance.

At first glance, the implementation of the plans and the application of the Ten Principles has been more complex than expected. Not in the least because of Rwanda’s rapid growth model which implies a top-down and managerial governance mode, with little flexibility, which increasingly leads to policy incoherence at the local level. A recent initiative to set up a multi-sectoral task force may help creating a context for policy integration at the national level (Leone, 2015). But more is needed to achieve the same at the landscape level, to better align international targets to locally defined needs. A network analysis carried out in Rutsiro District shows that national restoration networks involving government officials, sector based technicians and international organisations and consultants are hardly connected to local networks, and that landscape inhabitants are hardly involved in the design, planning, and even implementation of the restoration projects (Uzamukunda, 2016, for more details see section 4.1).

4.2. How do these commitments fit in the local landscapes, their actors and their institutions?

The concept of landscape is not new in traditional Rwandan thinking. In Kinyarwanda landscape would be translated as “Ibisiza n’imisozi” which literally means “the valleys and the hills”, in which “hills” refers to the territory, habitat or home of people. Traditionally, Rwandans consider their landscapes to be multifunctional, and the historically evolved agro-sylvo-pastoralism reflects people’s needs for food supply and subsistence income (Biggelaar, 1994). Trees (ibiti, which literally means “any plant which is not a grass”) are planted for various purposes as providers of fuelwood, medicines, timber, stakes, and increasingly also to combat soil degradation. “Good farmers” (abahinzi-boroze beza) are locally defined as farmers who are able to raise a surplus, because they have a reasonable farm size, a variety of trees, and a good soil quality, obtained by the application of manure of their cattle (Biggelaar, 1994; Ndayambeje, 2013). All this however changed during the run-up to the war, with increasingly unequal land distribution and stress on arable land, forcing farmers to avoid fallow periods and expand onto steep slopes (Bigagaza et al, 2002; Musahara, 2006; Musahara and Higgins, 2005). Average land parcel size dropped from 2 ha in 1960 to 0.35 in 2007 (Sagashya and English, 2009). After the war, massive displacement and resettlement of refugees led to a high concentration of people in critical areas, with dramatic land-slides with thousands of casualties as a result (Uzamukunda, 2016). These dramatic events called for a rapid response in the form of large scale forest restoration, centrally designed as massive food-for-work tree planting schemes, and the deployment of military forces as labourers, especially in the affected Western and Southern parts of the country. Reforestation was largely done through the planting of Eucalyptus, a rapidly growing multi-purpose tree which suited the need for fixation of the soil, and the urgent need for timber and firewood. Well-known are the post-war large scale restoration programmes in Gishwati and in Bugesera, initiated by the government with considerable donor support. After the post-war reconstruction period, the restoration activities continued in several shapes, under different projects and following a variety of approaches. Most recently introduced is the forest landscape restoration approach, which is by far the most participatory and inclusive, as it proposes active stakeholder engagement, and the simultaneous achievement of environmental, economic and social goals. Although Rwanda has fully embraced the approach and pledged a considerable contribution to the Bonn Challenge, the participatory nature of forest landscape restoration is considerably different from Rwanda’s mainstream development approach of top down and technocratic steering, which is experienced as challenging by many technicians on the ground (ibid.).
4.3. How does forest landscape restoration fit into Rwanda’s existing policy frameworks?

Rwanda clearly recognises its dependence on the environment for its sustainable development. Article 49 of the National Constitution states that “Every citizen is entitled to a healthy and satisfying environment. Every person has the duty to protect, safeguard and promote the environment. The State shall protect the environment. The Law determines the modalities for protecting, safeguarding and promoting the environment” (National Constitution, Government of Rwanda, 2013). Also the two main policy guidance document which are Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) have set out clear and measurable targets for environmental improvement as a prerequisite for the development of the country, which is setting the policy scene for forest landscape restoration at scale. A leading concept in both document is the Green Economy, which acknowledges the importance of the private sector in promoting green growth (Teheux, 2014).

There are three policy sectors which are particularly relevant to forest landscape restoration, which are the National Forest Policy, the Land Law and the Agricultural Production and Intensification Programme. The National Forest Policy (2010) states that “forestry is to be one of the bedrocks for sustainable development”, and actively aims for a 30% increase of the national forest area by 2020, to be realised through afforestation and reforestation (MINIFROM 2010). This is to be partially done through commercial forest plantations, especially in the buffer zones surrounding the national parks, but also through agroforestry. This “trees on farm” approach is to bring great added values for farmers by providing them with timber, fuel wood, bean stakes, fruits and medicines, as well as erosion control (ibid.). This is in favour of forest landscape restoration through agroforestry and other multifunctional approaches.

The Land Law of 2005 indicates that every household needs to register his/her land, with a minimum of 1 ha per household (Government of Rwanda, 2005). Those who hold too little may not be allowed to register, unless they buy additional land, or regroup with other smallholders, so that farmers cooperate in planning and executing their farming activities, each retaining their own parcel (ibid.). Rwanda’s agricultural policy pushes for specialisation of agriculture as well as cash crops. The policy promotes strong regional specialisation. Once a single best crop has been indicated, farmers are to plant that crop, in order to get access to farm inputs as well as to secure their land rights. They are assumed to work in cooperatives, in which the cooperative not only provides farm inputs, but also arranges market access and transportation of products. If farmers do not fit in this cooperative system, they risk to lose their land, as they may be expropriated, or forced to sell the land to other farmers who better respect the government’s guidelines. This is in contrast to the “trees on farm” approach, and does not fit in the concept of forest landscape restoration, especially not its multifunctionality and its contribution to local livelihood improvement.

4.4. What are the challenges in terms of policy coherence, in both vertical and horizontal terms?

The three policy sectors of forestry, land and agricultural production are meant to be complementary, providing a framework that “guarantees tenure security for all Rwandans and give guidance to the necessary land reforms with a view to good management and rational use of national land” (MINITERE, 2004). However, the previous sections suggest that this is not the case. Although the three policy sectors were born out of necessity, it is their rapid and forceful implementation of particularly the Land Law and the regional specialisation and intensification policy that have unnecessarily undermined the livelihood stability of rural subsistence farmers (Pritchard, 2012).

The regional specialisation and intensification policy forced farmers to concentrate on one single crop, and leave the traditionally evolved risk spreading multi-cropping, including agroforestry. The traditionally applied system of agro-sylvos-pastoralism does not fit in the cooperative land holdings, and in order to comply with production targets, concentration on single cash crops have made farming households highly dependent on markets, as they are no longer able to grow their own food crops (Pritchard, 2012, Kathiresan, 2012). The massive resettlement of the population has disrupted the emotional bond between people and their place, which has negatively influenced people’s food security and their sense of tenure security (ibid.).
In general terms, people do appreciate the restoration activities, especially the ones that lead to higher crop yields, such as the terrace building. They also like the restoration activities in the buffer zones around the national parks, as these lead to a decrease of human-wildlife conflict. They also like the energy saving stoves, as it makes them less dependent on firewood which can no longer be collected from the forest. In general, they would prefer restoration to take the shape of agroforestry, but they also realise that large scale agroforestry would negatively affect agricultural production, which could jeopardize their performance contracts. They regret that so far, the mining sector which is a major economic activity in the area has been ignored. They suggest that the restoration of previous mining sites would be an interesting option, as it would be beneficial for all.

But in-depth research in Gishwati and Mukura (Rutsiro District) also indicated that forest landscape restoration has not been able to meet the expectations. Local farmers consider landscape restoration as being entirely a government affair. They do not see themselves as being part of the process. They were not involved in the design, and did not contribute with their own knowledge and experience. According to them, the planning of the activities was entirely done at the central level. Some of the respondents stated to have lost their land to the restoration activities, which had led to conflict and increased pressure on farm land (Uzamukunda, 2016). People said that they do not like the species which were planted by the government (Alnus acumunata), as they do not produce good timber, and do not harbour much biodiversity, which is an important source of food and medicinal plants. Neither do they like the large continuous areas of planted forests, as this reduces the availability of farm land. If it were for them, they would have chosen different trees, and different locations (ibid.). People did mention the problem of inconsistent policies. The most striking example was given by farmers who said that in their district, representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources came to plant trees for farmers, but a few months later these newly planted trees were removed by representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, in order to build terraces on the consolidated farm fields (Leone, 2015).

4.5. What can we learn from environmental policy integration, and how would this be applied in the Rwandan context, with its relatively strict governance mode yet increasing scope at the decentralised level to set sustainability objectives?

The previous sections show that there is a real need for both vertical and horizontal policy integration, particularly at the landscape level. But we also know that the Rwandan governance system is quite strict and rather top-down, leaving little space to manoeuvre at the local or landscape level. Expert documents such as the “Forest landscape restoration opportunity assessment for Rwanda”, carried out by Rwanda’s Ministry of Natural Resources in collaboration with the World Resources Institutes and IUCN states that for forest landscape restoration to be successful, there is the need to solve “inconsistencies between policies and strategies of various ministries, especially related to agroforestry, where responsibilities are defined but too often overlap” (ROAR, 2015). Furthermore, it states that “Improved coordination among government agencies is needed, to ensure that ministries work together, provide guidance to one another in their respective areas of expertise, and identify ways to collaborate with the private sector and civil society” (ROAR, 2015).

This issue was discussed during a workshop “Towards a coordinated action for forests and landscape restoration” (organised by FAO, June 2015), during which it was confirmed that there is a recognised need for policy coordination across the agriculture, forestry and natural resources sectors, and there is a political will to do so. To this end, agroforestry was identified as a first domain of coordinated action, as it is currently problematic because of the many contradictions manifested at the local level (Leone, 2015). Although most participants considered full integration of policies unrealistic and undesirable, they said that “inter-ministerial search for communication, consultation and agreement” was needed, desired and feasible (ibid.). The workshop recommended the establishment of an inter-sectoral working group. By the end of the year, this working group was established, and already organised several inter-ministerial meetings, which shows a true commitment and buy-in at the highest political level.
Besides policy integration at the inter-ministerial level, there was also a strong recommendation to work on policy integration at the district level, where different policy directives increasingly hamper forest landscape restoration on the ground (Leone, 2015). The question was whether such a participatory mechanism should be newly designed and developed, or whether there are existing structures at the local level, which could play such an integrative role. One option would be the Joint Action Development Fora (JADF), which have been established across the country in 2007, with the particular aim to bring together Central and Local Government Authorities, Private Sector, Development Partners and NGOs/CSOs representatives at the District level, to operationalise the country’s Decentralisation Policy (Rwanda Governance Board 2016, see http://www.rgb.rw/index.php?id=2).

Currently ongoing research into the functioning of the JADF will show whether JADF indeed provides a good platform for both vertical and horizontal policy integration, or whether JADF is merely an instrument to strengthen central government control over the rural areas. We expect that much depends on the specific district, its authorities and non-governmental actors and their ability for “institutional bricolage”, to navigate between nationally defined policies based on international commitments, and local priorities based on local people’s livelihood needs.

5. Preliminary conclusion

It is still too early to draw conclusions, as we are still in the phase of data collection, verification and analysis. But based on the above, it can be concluded that the development model chosen by Rwanda is not entirely in line with the principles of landscape governance, and there are many challenges with regard to policy incoherence. Especially at the local level, where different sectoral policy objectives have created contradictions and confusion, and there is a clear demand for policy alignment, both in the vertical as well as in the horizontal sense. There is not only a demand at the local level, but also a formal recognition at the national level that something has to be done to solve the problem of conflicting policies in different sectors and at different levels playing out at the landscape level. Yet there is no strategy on how to overcome this problem, as there is hardly any experience with policy integration in Rwanda. The vast amount of literature on Environmental Policy Integration however, would certainly help filling this gap. Despite Rwanda’s rigid governance approach, there clearly is a political will to create policy dialogue at both the national and the local level, and the first steps to this have been taken. Policy dialogue at the national level would create institutional space for sectoral policy objectives to be better aligned. Policy dialogue at the local level would provide room for active innovation at the agriculture-environmental nexus, and for local authorities to take up the freedom to craft arrangements adapted to their spatial context (institutional bricolage). And finally, multi-level policy dialogue would enhance the participatory nature of spatial planning processes. Whether the Joint Action Development Fora could be an appropriate vehicle for such dialogue is yet to be seen, but there definitely is a need and a political will to better align international targets with local needs, as embedded within various policy sectors.

It is clear that with regard to conflicting multi-sector and multi-level policy objectives at the landscape level there is a need to learn from EPI. EPI experiences would enrich the landscape governance debate, as it addresses the issue of policy inconsistency which importance is underestimated within the landscape governance debate. This, while more policy coherence would enhance landscape governance performance on the ground. EPI experience from other empirical studies would help solving policy incoherence at the landscape level, and enrich the landscape governance process by making it more participatory and inclusive. In this way, the Ten Principles become more relevant, lead to stronger public support, and positively influence forest landscape restoration in both quantitative as well as in qualitative terms. It would thus contribute to a further development of the concept of landscape governance, defining its way forward, and building the right institutional basis for it.

We hope that our participation in the Prague conference will increase our understanding of EPI, and help us to construct a stronger theoretical framework combining EPI insights with forest landscape restoration practice, thus contributing to more participatory, inclusive and coherent landscape governance.