

Post-pandemic recovery through landscape restoration

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Abstract

Land degradation as one of the mega drivers of loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services has affected billions globally, resulting in rampant loss of livelihoods and accelerated distress migration. India, one of the land degradation hotspots in Asia, has also been reeling under the impacts of the ongoing climate and pandemic crises, which have seriously imperiled local livelihoods and human well-being. Boosting livelihood-based social support programs can be a transformative approach to scale up Nature-based Solutions to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality and to realize global restoration, climate, and biodiversity conservation goals. In this article, we provide evidence for enhancing landscape restoration success by creating green job opportunities to achieve post-pandemic recovery. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was initiated as a poverty alleviation program in India and can be transformative approach to achieve global climate and sustainable development goals. We use cases from diverse ecological contexts of India to demonstrate the potential of MGNREGS. To revolutionize the process, we propose developing and mainstreaming national-level landscape restoration guidelines by using locally relevant knowledge for addressing critical gaps, identifying institutions and their roles, developing local capacity, leveraging technology to facilitate decision-making, encouraging multi-stakeholder involvement, and promoting inclusiveness and community participation.