

Toward a Holistic Approach to Sustainable Development:

A Guide to Integrated Land-Use Initiatives
Executive Summary

Through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community has recognized the need for an approach to development that considers the interdependence of human and natural systems. Single-sector approaches to development challenges are insufficient to produce sustainable landscapes that promote resilience and help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change. Achieving sustainable development requires stakeholders to work together to minimize trade-offs and increase synergies between different, and often competing, sector-focused goals.

Integrated land use initiatives offer a holistic approach to addressing complex environmental and development challenges. This approach seeks to sustainably manage multiple land uses across landscapes, considering both the natural and human systems that depend on them. In order to take an integrated approach to land use management, programs need to link the visions of *all* land use sectors, including agriculture, forestry, and industry—sectors which impact one another but are often siloed in separate policy and management structures. To foster a sustainable landscape, practitioners need to consider interventions that not only address key land uses, but, critically, also approach a multifunctional landscape as a complex tapestry of interrelated social, economic, and environmental systems.

By achieving impact at scale across three dimensions (social, environmental, and economic), integrated land use initiatives can contribute to multiple SDGs, including SDG2 (zero hunger), SDG13 (climate action), and SDG15 (life on land). These initiatives can also help countries reach their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Climate Agreement.

The objective of this report is to take stock of lessons learned, document best practices from a range of integrated land use initiatives, facilitate knowledge sharing, and provide a guide for practitioners who are looking to implement this approach. As the number of integrated land use initiatives has grown substantially in the last decade, and different actors have employed diverse approaches, there remains a lack of comprehensive information on the range of approaches, and limited consensus on the concepts, terms, and best practices.



Though these approaches are not new, much of the relevant literature on using integrated land use as a development tool has been published in the last decade. This report is based on a comprehensive review of the literature as well as consultations with experts in integrated land use. From this process, we identified eight themes as being the most significant for the success of integrated land use initiatives: multistakeholder engagement (MSE); environmental focus; economic focus; boundary setting; land tenure; financing strategies; monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL); and cross-sectoral coordination (see Table 1 for a summary of the eight themes). Experience has demonstrated that the chance for success improves as more of these themes are considered, and are included in planning and implementation.

This report provides a basic toolkit¹ for practitioners and raises awareness of the cutting-edge work happening in this space. It first offers an overview of the state of integrated land use initiatives, before delving into the eight themes. Each theme is then used as a lens for analyzing integrated land use initiatives; and each theme is broken down into its key elements. Innovative case studies are highlighted, remaining challenges and opportunities noted, and best practices described. Finally, the report urges practitioners to consider how incorporating these eight themes into their programs can offer a more holistic approach to creating truly sustainable landscapes.

An integrated land use approach can help promote sustainable land use, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, restore ecosystems, conserve biodiversity, protect natural resources, and improve development outcomes. This report seeks to document how the approach has taken shape globally, and open the door to future collaboration to realize this potential.



BioCarbon Fund

BOX 1: BIOCARBON FUND INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE FOREST LANDSCAPES

This report is funded by the BioCarbon Fund Initiative for Sustainable Forest Landscapes (BioCF ISFL). ISFL collaborates with countries around the world to reduce emissions from the land sector through smarter land use planning, policies, and practices. It works on pilot programs in jurisdictions in Colombia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Mexico, and Zambia. These large-scale, pioneering programs are enabling countries and the private sector to adopt changes on the ground while informing policies made at the international level.

ISFL understands the need for new tools and approaches to address deforestation, climate change, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development. Building on momentum at the international, national, and subnational levels, climate-smart land use approaches—applied across agriculture, forestry, and other land use sectors—offer innovative and effective solutions to address the multifaceted challenges of deforestation and land use change. ISFL is working

to bring these approaches to the forefront, convene stakeholders, and disseminate best practices and lessons learned.



¹ The full report, *Toward a Holistic Approach to Sustainable Development: A Guide to Integrated Land-Use Initiatives*, along with a supplemental booklet of additional resources and tools for practitioners, can be accessed at <https://www.biocarbonfund-isfl.org/knowledge-center>

Table 1: Summary of the Eight Themes at the Basis of Integrated Land Use Initiatives

1. Multistakeholder Engagement (MSE)	Integrated land use initiatives require the collaboration of a diverse range of stakeholders with different, often competing interests, making multistakeholder engagement critical to program success. Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing, iterative process vital to all stages of integrated land use initiatives. Experience suggests that programs that focus on ensuring sustained stakeholder engagement achieve better results.
2. Environmental Focus	Integrated land use initiatives provide a unique opportunity to meet environmental objectives at the local level while also contributing to national commitments related to land degradation, biodiversity conservation, and climate change. Efforts should be made to develop and adopt new technologies to map and understand complex ecologies in multifunctional landscapes.
3. Economic Focus	The root of natural resource degradation is human behavior. To change these behaviors, integrated land use practitioners need to understand the economic incentives that lead to degradation and find ways to improve the livelihoods of the people who depend on these resources, by developing robust mechanisms that reward communities for contributing to sustainability and conservation. This can only be achieved with a strong participatory mechanism that allows stakeholder engagement in the decision-making process about incentives and their distribution.
4. Boundary Setting	Boundary setting is the process of defining the geographic borders of an integrated land use initiative and determining where the initiative is implemented, who is involved, and how it will be governed. There are many crucial factors that need to be considered in determining the boundaries of an integrated land use initiative, including existing jurisdictional, ecological, and social boundaries. The boundary should create an area large enough to deliver multiple functions to a diverse group of stakeholders, but not so large as to be unmanageable. Developing boundaries with key stakeholders is crucial in order to avoid conflict and improve program legitimacy.
5. Land Tenure	Land tenure represents one of the most significant challenges for successfully implementing integrated land use initiatives. Land ownership and use rights are central to land use planning, but not all initiatives operate in places where all stakeholders have secure property rights. While an integrated land use initiative will not have the resources or capacity to bring about land tenure reform on its own, it should take the existing context into consideration and work toward developing practical solutions to land tenure challenges, such as improving the cadastre systems by using technology to reduce the cost of registration, and strengthening conflict resolution mechanisms.
6. Financing Strategies	Large-scale, long-term programs require sustainable and secure financing from a variety of sources. However, most integrated land use initiatives are dependent on local and international public finances, and have limited investment from the private sector. This is largely because the public benefits from integrated land use initiatives are difficult to monetize. Limited capacity for risk assessment for political, socioeconomic, market, weather, and climate risks, and lack of mitigation instruments create additional barriers. There is still significant potential for expansion into private sector investment, particularly as companies continue to move toward more sustainable business practices. Effective integrated land use programs often make use of their limited resources to identify ways to crowd in new private sector financing, and enable local actors to adopt more sustainable land use practices.
7. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)	Developing cost-effective and participatory methods for MEL as well as measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) is key to measuring the success of initiatives and enabling adaptive management. Setting cost-effective indicators that support multiple goals and targets, and building the capacities of local communities and other stakeholders involved in monitoring the initiative helps ensure accuracy in data collection. Efforts are needed to generate more comprehensive reviews of integrated land use initiatives and their outcomes to gain wider support for the approach and prove its effectiveness. The creation of knowledge-sharing platforms where initiatives can report successful practices and lessons learned to a broader community of practitioners is also vital to the field's ability to implement more effective integrated land use initiatives in the future and move toward a collective, comprehensive framework.
8. Cross-Sectoral Coordination	To properly address the complex, interlinked challenges that integrated land use initiatives are concerned with, cross-sectoral coordination is essential. However, creating coordinated sectoral responses to environmental and socioeconomic problems can often prove challenging. Lessons learned to date demonstrate that clearly defining stakeholder roles and responsibilities, along with building more effective planning instruments to align the objectives of multiple sectors and levels of government could yield positive outcomes.



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