



REVERSING FOREST DEGRADATION – BEYOND ENRICHMENT PLANTING

We all know how to stop deforestation, at least in theory. In practice, it is extremely difficult. But how about reversing forest degradation or restoring forests? That looks somewhat more straightforward, as it is more technical in nature.

A recent report by Alain Karsenty and co-authors refer to enrichment planting as one way to enhance carbon stocks, the other one being reforestation or afforestation. The focus of their report is on financing options to support REDD+ activities and not on such technical matters as restoration. They may therefore be forgiven for not devoting more space to the issue. Others have done so in a not so recent paper, in which the authors clearly distinguish between four different degrees of degradation that require quite different treatments. Their suggested treatments are not only more cost-effective and provide more social and environmental benefits, they also address the drivers of forest degradation and result in the sequestration of substantial amounts of carbon.

As a first step, the authors define four somewhat arbitrary states of degradation. They range from slightly to critically degraded forests, the latter barely qualifying as forests under the UNFCCC's definition. For slightly degraded forests a medicine of reduced logging intensities, timber harvesting restrictions on environmentally sensitive areas, lengthening of cutting cycles, reduced-impact logging techniques, and liberation treatments of future crop trees in the residual stand is prescribed. Not one word of planting one tree. Forests in the next degradation category require active liberation and other silvicultural treatments to enhance the growth of future crop trees, and prevention of pre-mature re-entry logging and of continued use of poor logging practices. In highly degraded situations, the prescription is similar to the previous one, but enrichment planting with native species is proposed for large gaps. For critically degraded forests, treatments range from assisted natural regeneration and agroforestry to fire management, grazing restrictions, suppressing the growth of invasive and fire-favoring grasses, protecting naturally regenerated native tree species, weeding, fertilizing, and, if necessary, inter-planting of native or even exotic nitrogen-fixing trees.

So the first step is not to establish a nursery to produce hundreds if not thousands of seedling, most of which may not survive anyway once they have been planted. Instead, the first step is to identify the drivers and assess the severity of degradation. Based on what the forest still looks like one would then select the most appropriate approach. You can find the report, including a long list of useful references, at <http://www.sisef.it/iforest/contents/?id=ifor0556-004>. If you are not the restoration type and prefer to explore REDD+ financing options, then check out Karsenty's report at http://ur-bsef.cirad.fr/content/download/4123/32260/version/3/file/REDD_study_CIRAD_final.pdf.

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