The Fouta Djallon Highlands form a mountain ecosystem that straddles the Republic of Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The Fouta Djallon highlands are the source of West Africa’s most important rivers: Senegal, Gambia, Niger and Mano rivers. These rivers provide drinking water, irrigation and hydroelectric power to millions of people in Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. They are critical for sustaining livelihood systems.

The Guinean highlands are densely populated, with up to 120 inhabitants per square kilometre compared with the national average of 24 persons per square kilometre. The greatest share of local livelihoods is derived from agroforestry, forestry activities and animal husbandry. Natural resource and watershed degradation are caused principally by shifting cultivation, excessive logging, uncontrolled bush fires and overgrazing. Ecosystem degradation will affect these livelihood systems and associated services.

Policymakers at various levels across the Fouta Djallon countries have shown interest in adopting reward schemes for environmental services and there are policy responses towards this direction. For instance, Sierra Leonean forestry authorities have highlighted the need to develop rewards based initiatives as a strategy to better manage the country’s classified forests.

Local partners of the PRESA (Pro-poor Rewards for Environmental Services in Africa) project intend to build upon these regional initiatives in laying a social foundation for the design, piloting and scaling up of transfer schemes for environmental services.

Policymakers at various levels across the Fouta Djallon countries have shown interest in adopting reward schemes for environmental services.

Sustaining the Fouta Djallon ecosystem and its associated services

Policy makers at various levels across the Fouta Djallon countries have shown interest in adopting reward schemes for environmental services.

An ecosystem in danger

Many West African ecosystems have been degraded by land use decisions that cause deforestation, soil fertility decline and loss of biodiversity. This is attributed to slow integration of environmental considerations at different levels.

Low farm productivity adds to this problem, which is also aggravated by inadequate diversification of farming systems, poor access to markets, unsustainable land-use practices and weak capacity among local institutions to innovate.

Few formal mechanisms have been developed to reward communities engaging in forest conservation to sustain ongoing landscape management initiatives. Reward schemes for environmental services provide opportunities to enhance institutional capacity linking environmental service modifiers – smallholder farmers – to downstream service beneficiaries. Reward schemes have the potential to provide the platforms to address ecosystem degradation and the effective and efficient allocation of resources.

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PRESA - Pro-poor Rewards for Environmental Services in Africa is working at sites in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Guinea to facilitate fair and effective agreements between stewards and beneficiaries of environmental services. Voluntary, conditional and negotiated agreements can reward poor farmers for good land use practices, while ensuring a clean and sustainable supply of environmental services for local and global communities.

Farmers in Guinea clearing the land with fire. (Photo © PRESA)
Opportunities and challenges for PRESA

In 2005, the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started the Landscape Management for Integrated Livelihoods (LAMIL) in Guinea. LAMIL provided alternative livelihood options to adjacent communities in order to reduce pressure on forest resources. A package of agroforestry techniques has been introduced to restore soil fertility.

LAMIL has built strong connections between project and policy makers in the sub-region while enabling partnerships with the private sector, community based organizations and non-governmental organizations. For instance, LAMIL is facilitating a multi-stakeholder ecosystem dialogue via the Mano River states platform. The PRESA project will build on LAMIL networks to address challenges such as capacity building.

PRESA will be exploring different types of reward schemes including the provision of extension services, capacity building and facilitation of land tenure security. Co-management of ecosystems by different stakeholders has been used to address human-wildlife conflict and is a viable option as it matches PRESA’s pro-poor conservation approach.

Where appropriate, reward schemes may feature cash rewards or compensation for ecosystem stewardship. The cash payments could be direct payments for community forestry, household compensation for family plantations or carbon market credits.

PRESA is building on ICRAF’s experiences across Africa and Asia. The Rewarding Upland Poor for Environmental Services (RUPES) project in Asia provides useful lessons for pro-poor rewards for environmental services and its tools, methods and approaches can be adapted to local contexts.

Ongoing activities

More research is required to build the evidence base for conservation activities. Policy makers and donors will benefit from PRESA activities including scoping studies, policy analysis, stakeholder analysis and capacity building.

There are plenty of opportunities for interested parties to get on board in building a fair and effective ecosystem reward mechanism for the Fouta Djallon highlands.

Partners

- Landscape Management for Integrated Livelihoods (LAMIL) project

Stakeholders

- Communities living within the Fouta Djallon highlands;
- Governments where the Fouta Djallon highlands straddle borders, including the Republic of Guinea itself.