

Restoring Landscapes in South Africa (ReLISA) National Workshop

15-16th May 2023

CSIR International Convention Centre

Context

UNEP is leading a consortium that was formed as a response to the IKI Country Specific Selection Procedure 2020 Republic of South Africa: [Country Call South Africa | Internationale Klimaschutzinitiative \(IKI\) \(international-climate-initiative.com\)](https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/en/country-call-south-africa). The ReLISA consortium has been invited by The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) to undertake the Project Preparation Phase (PPP). The project aims to make the economic case for landscape-level restoration and create the conditions for a just transition of South Africa's land-use sector. This will be achieved by restoring degraded key biomes (grasslands, savannas, thicket), while recognizing the socio-cultural, economic and land tenure context. On-the-ground implementation in consultation with stakeholders (communities, farmers, investors) will contribute effectively to adapt to climate change, address biodiversity loss, while improving livelihoods of rural communities and commercial farmers.

During the PPP (Nov 2022-July 2023), the consortium will assess and validate the theory of change, assure the appropriateness of the proposed sites for restoration interventions, conduct a preliminary assessment of risks and mitigation strategies, identify options for early integration of private sector actors, and coordinate with political partners to align with national policies. A key part of the PPP is the country mission (15-25th May) during which the consortium will finalize the project design based on government priorities and existing projects, stakeholder needs and priorities (including community and private sector), implementation risks, and the potential for leverage and upscaling, while also taking a gender inclusive approach.

ReLISA National Workshop

We welcome representatives from relevant government Ministries and agencies, NGOs, research institutions and others from both the public and private sector across the region to attend the workshop to discuss the project design, proposed target regions, and how these link to national priorities and initiatives.

When: Monday & Tuesday 15-16th May 2023. Day 1 (Monday 15th May) will be lunch (13:00-14:00) followed by a high-level event, while Day 2 (Tuesday 16th), will be a full-day technical workshop.

Where: CSIR International Convention Centre, Meiring Naudé Road, Brummeria, Pretoria. We would encourage you to attend in person, if possible, but it will also be possible to join online through a Microsoft Teams meeting link.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Lucy Cockerell at lucy.cockerell1@un.org

Project Background

Large-scale efforts to restore degraded lands are needed to adapt to climate change (especially with regards water resources), address biodiversity loss, and tackle high per capita GHG emissions whilst enhancing the resilience and livelihoods of poorer rural communities. Overstocking with livestock over the past 150 years was a key driver of land degradation. The cumulative effect of such drivers has been to greatly reduce carbon stocks, livestock and wildlife carrying capacity, biodiversity, infiltration of rainwater into aquifers, and baseflow of rivers.

Climate variability and weather extremes are already having profoundly negative effects on South Africa's water quality and availability, with significant impacts on the economy, jobs and livelihoods. In the past five years, intense dry periods have threatened national food security, led to extreme water shortages, and reduced agricultural yields and farmer income. Land degradation over millions of hectares of grassland, savannah and thicket, as well as on cultivated lands, intensify these impacts. To date, restoration interventions have been applied at the scale of thousands of hectares, and not at the scale (as required) of millions of hectares.

Poor rural communities have a particularly high dependency on ecosystem services derived from well-functioning ecosystems, and degradation reduces their resilience and increases their vulnerability to climate change. The need for effective restoration strategies that addresses both environmental and livelihood/equity challenges, especially in rural parts of South Africa, has been thrown into sharp focus by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to more than 3 million job losses and almost half of all South African households having insufficient food. Similarly, the recent droughts highlight the interconnected nature between rural and urban areas.

To date, most existing restoration initiatives in South Africa were initiated by government agencies or NGOs, with only the limited involvement of the private sector. Reasons include: (i) a lack of awareness of commercial impacts and dependencies on ecosystems; (ii) opportunities for bankable restoration activities are 'off the radar' – e.g. value chain development for sustainably produced goat meat, non-timber forest products and other commodities, and projects for voluntary carbon market projects, which could fund the upscaling of thicket or grassland restoration; and (iii) coordination failures have led to being 'locked-into' sub-optimal pathways ('business as usual'), with key actors (government, civil society, communities, the private sector) failing to/not being incentivized to coordinate the actions required for a transformational shift to large-scale restoration.

This project adopts a comprehensive and structured approach to address these aspects in a very implementation-focused manner. A key decision-making criterion in selecting sites and models for restoration activities of the proposed project is their potential for scaling-up and overcoming such obstacles. In this way the positive livelihood and environmental benefits of every Rand invested from project funds leverages restoration through business adoption in the service of the beneficiaries, particularly poor rural communities.

A like-minded and complementary consortium aims to apply innovative nature-based solutions for landscape restoration. For scaling during and beyond the project lifetime, the partners will: (i) develop and apply biophysical and economic valuation modelling ex ante to determine where there is the

highest returns on investment (ROI) and opportunities to reduce income inequalities; (ii) consult with stakeholders (including the business and finance community) on final site selection to gain buy-in and create 'readiness' for restoration interventions; (iii) develop bankable business opportunities for the private sector; (iv) implement on-the-ground via restoration activities; and (v) and provide capacity building and knowledge products, so as to ensure project sustainability. These measures will drive a transformational change of South Africa's land use sector.

This project and its landscape models will drive a transformational change of South Africa's land use sector. Effective restoration at scale helps to achieve South Africa's inclusive green economy (IGE, including reducing inequalities) and environmental targets such as nationally determined contributions (NDCs), South Africa's Land Degradation Neutrality Target, and those arising from the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Through dissemination activities, project outcomes and lessons learned can also serve as blueprints for transformation for areas in South Africa out with the on-the-ground implementation focus of the project, as well as internationally for similarly degraded savannah, thicket and grassland landscapes. As such, this project will make meaningful contributions beyond the project scope – to the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and implementation initiatives such as the UN Decade of Restoration, the Bonn Challenge and the AFR100 initiative.

ReLISA Consortium & Implementing Partners:

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – (www.unep.org)

Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) – (www.csir.co.za)

Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) – (<https://ewt.org.za>)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – (www.undp.org)

UN Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – (www.unesco.org)

C4 EcoSolutions (Pty) Ltd. – (<https://c4es.co.za/>)

UNIQUE land use GmbH – (www.unique-landuse.de/en)