



FOLUR

Food Systems • Land Use • Restoration

From Ambition to Action

Country Projects Building Sustainable Landscapes

UPDATE 2026

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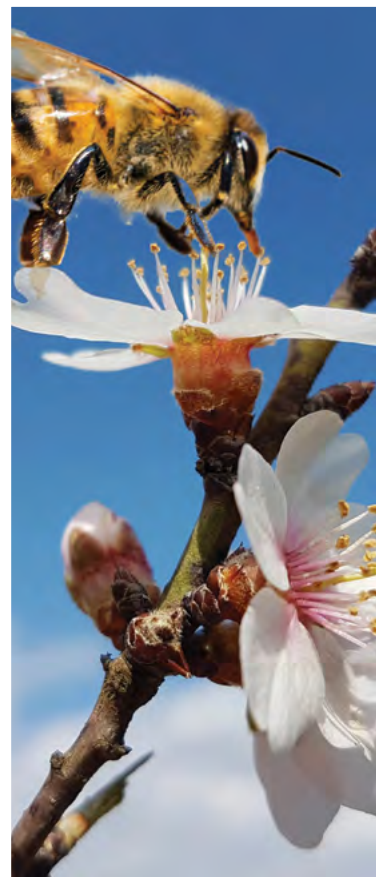
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Introduction



The Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR) is moving from ambition to measurable action across countries, commodities, and landscapes, delivering results in landscape restoration, sustainable commodity production, climate mitigation, and private sector engagement across participating countries.

At the country level, 25 projects are implementing improved land management practices or restoration actions. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with assistance from the FOLUR Global Platform (GP), has also supported sustainable management practices across 3.6 million hectares of commodity production landscapes and has helped bring additional areas under integrated landscape management by developing and implementing integrated landscape plans.

Private-sector engagement, including IFC investments in livestock (meat and dairy) companies and WBCSD-led commercial engagement in rice and soy value chains, has resulted in 47 companies signing sustainability commitments

and has mobilized substantial private-sector financing, including US\$796 million through IFC investments and more than US\$11.9 million through WBCSD-supported engagement in Brazil's soy sector.

Knowledge, learning, and outreach activities have generated more than 100 subsectoral solutions and guidance notes. FOLUR has trained more than 60,000 people and engaged more than 19,000 participants through initiatives led by the World Bank Group, the Global Landscapes Forum, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), such as knowledge management events, annual meetings, South-South exchanges, and other forums, including in-person engagements involving 23 FOLUR countries. The program has also engaged 13 non-FOLUR project countries in new sustainability initiatives.

The FOLUR GP has fostered a dedicated community of more than 25,000 members through the UNDP-managed platform, facilitating knowledge exchange and engagement on FOLUR approaches and good practices.



Building Global Dialogue and Sharing Lessons



Across four regional dialogues held in 2025–26, FOLUR brought together countries from all major World Bank Group (WBG) regions to advance integrated, country-led solutions that address the drivers of environmental degradation in food and land-use systems. Spanning multiple commodities and landscapes, the dialogues focused on practical pathways to restore degraded ecosystems, promote sustainable and resilient production, strengthen livelihoods, and generate global environmental benefits for climate, biodiversity, land, water, and people. The exchanges underscored the need to move beyond sectoral approaches by aligning policies, finance, private sector engagement, knowledge, and multistakeholder partnerships to support systems transformation at scale.

Cross-sectoral and multistakeholder participation: The workshops brought together FOLUR project leaders; government representatives from the ministries responsible for agriculture, environment, planning and development, and forest services; and farmer producer groups.

These workshops convened FOLUR project leaders, government officials, and implementing partners from African countries, together with organizations including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, International Fund for Agricultural Development, FAO, and the United Nations Environment Programme, to exchange experiences related to landscape restoration and nature-based solutions. Technical experts from the WBG, Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development, Global Methane Hub, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, International Center for Tropical Agriculture, International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, WRI, and WBCSD contributed to the dialogue.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS IN COCOA AND COFFEE LANDSCAPES

FEBRUARY 2025

45 participants, including FOLUR country teams from Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda

The FOLUR-hosted Africa Regional Workshop on **"Scaling Nature-Based Solutions in Cocoa and Coffee Landscapes in Africa"** explored how nature-based solutions can strengthen the sustainability and resilience of cocoa and coffee production while protecting forests, biodiversity, soils, and water resources.

Discussions highlighted landscape approaches and practices such as agroforestry, restoration of degraded lands, improved soil and water management, tree planting, and diversified farming systems. Participants also emphasized the need for stronger business cases, financial incentives, supportive policies, and private sector engagement to scale up these solutions across cocoa and coffee value chains.

The workshop reinforced the role of nature-based solutions in linking sustainable production, landscape restoration, climate resilience, and farmer livelihoods.

RESTORATION IN RICE AND OIL PALM LANDSCAPES

JUNE 2025

70 participants, including FOLUR country teams from China, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Thailand, and Viet Nam

A technical workshop for FOLUR countries, **"Accelerating Restoration across Palm Oil and Rice Value Chains,"** focused on moving restoration in rice and oil palm landscapes beyond farm-level interventions toward integrated landscape approaches. Stronger governance, jurisdictional coordination, restoration of degraded ecosystems, and incentives for sustainable production are essential to deliver benefits for smallholders and landscapes.

For rice systems, restoration centers on regenerative and climate-smart practices, including direct-seeded rice (DSR), integrated rice-fish-duck systems, alternate wetting and drying, various low-emission rice cultivation methods, and improved weed management in DSR systems.

For oil palm, restoration must address smallholder livelihoods alongside environmental priorities. Key actions include regenerative plantation management, agroforestry, cover crops, improved soil management, integrated crop-livestock systems, peatland and high conservation value area protection, wildlife corridors, and human-wildlife conflict management. Jurisdictional approaches, sustainability standards and certification, traceability, and fair pricing are important for scaling sustainable production and achieving durable restoration outcomes.

LIVESTOCK SECTOR DIALOGUE

MAY 2026

100 participants, including FOLUR and Food Systems Integrated Program (FSIP) country teams from Argentina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Indonesia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Ukraine

A livestock sector dialogue, **“From Deforestation to Regeneration: Reimagining Livestock Landscapes,”** brought together GEF-7 FOLUR and GEF-8 FSIP country projects to explore how sustainable livestock systems can support land restoration, climate resilience, reduced deforestation and emissions, and improved farmer livelihoods.

Discussions highlighted integrated crop-livestock systems, rotational grazing and improved grazing management, silvopastoral systems, improved forage and animal nutrition, animal health, methane reduction, and soil restoration. Participants also explored carbon markets and credits; monitoring of grazing, soil health, vegetation, and carbon outcomes; and finance and market incentives to support adoption and scaling.

The dialogue emphasized the importance of policy coherence and coordinated landscape approaches to align livestock production with restoration and climate objectives.

Please see the full ThinkLandscape piece [here](#).

RESTORATION OF SOY LANDSCAPES

MAY 2026

30 participants, including FOLUR country teams from Brazil, Paraguay, and Ukraine

This multiday FOLUR dialogue, **“Sustainable Soy Pathways: Best Practices on Soil Management and Low-Carbon Approaches,”** found that sustainable soy production can reduce deforestation and emissions, restore degraded lands, and strengthen farmer livelihoods. The technical agenda across Brazil, Paraguay, and Ukraine focuses on soil carbon, no-till systems, biomass inputs, low-carbon production, bioinputs, biodiversity, and soil health monitoring.

For soy systems, restoration depends on rebuilding soil health while keeping production viable. No-till, crop-livestock forest integration, biological nitrogen fixation, microorganisms, bioinputs, and low-carbon agriculture support soil conservation, residue cover, crop rotation, and long-term productivity. Novel soil diagnostic approaches assess soil health using chemical, physical, organic matter, and biological indicators, while Brazil’s expanding bioinputs sector provides tools such as biological control agents, inoculants, biostimulants, and biofertilizers.



Growing Country Momentum



Across FOLUR landscapes, country projects are helping to advance transformational change in food systems, land use, and restoration by addressing the drivers of environmental degradation in an integrated way. From climate-smart rice production in China and India to sustainable cocoa, coffee, soy, livestock, and oil palm systems across Africa, Latin America, and Asia, these projects are generating multiple benefits: improved productivity, restored ecosystems, stronger rural livelihoods, greater climate resilience, and reduced pressure on forests, soils, water resources, and biodiversity.

A common theme across these diverse landscapes is the importance of inclusive, country-led approaches that place local communities, women, Indigenous Peoples, and youth at the center of implementation. Women's cooperatives, savings groups, community forest associations, and farmer organizations are strengthening ownership of restoration, value chain development, land-use planning, and natural resource

management. At the same time, digital tools, improved data systems, and scientific evidence are helping countries make better decisions, track progress, and scale solutions that deliver both local development gains and global environmental benefits.

The stories also show the value of partnership and working across silos. Governments, research institutions, development partners, financial institutions, and private companies are aligning policies, investments, knowledge, and market incentives to support sustainable production and landscape restoration at scale. Together, these efforts illustrate how integrated landscape approaches can generate lasting benefits for people, nature, and economies while contributing to healthier, more resilient food systems.

The following stories highlight the transformations that have taken place in several countries.



CHINA

Greener Farming, Women Leading Change

New climate-smart strategies in China's Jiangxi province are making farming more efficient, more equitable, and more profitable—with women at the center.

Farmers working with FOLUR are moving away from using chemical fertilizers and pesticides in rice and Xinyu Sweet Orange systems. Low-carbon, drought-tolerant rice varieties and eco-friendly pest control now cover around 200 hectares of demonstration fields. Intercropping has lifted incomes. Irrigation infrastructure has been restored. Rice yields are up by as much as 11 percent, and soil organic matter by as much as 19 percent.

Private sector investment is adding momentum. A cold storage facility has cut postharvest losses by more than 15 percent. A circular biogas system turns livestock waste into energy and organic fertilizer.

More than half of the 6,750 program participants in 2024 were women. One cooperative, founded by a woman farmer, now serves more than 1,000 farms annually, provides nearly 100 women with stable employment, and has raised per capita incomes significantly.





ETHIOPIA

Coffee, Forests, Livelihoods, Women

FOLUR Ethiopia has been in operation since January 2024, and the results are beginning to show across landscape restoration, women's economic empowerment, private sector engagement, and livelihoods.

Aging coffee farms are becoming more productive through pruning, stumping, and replanting, supported by UNDP-distributed equipment and Indigenous tree seedlings, which are restoring degraded forest zones. The Gedeo Cultural Landscape, recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is one example, with coffee, legumes, and forest ecosystems flourishing under a participatory land-management system.

Revolving funds were fed directly into women's bank accounts to support restoration activities. More than 450 women-led cooperatives are now active. More than 22,000 women are raising poultry, composting, cultivating seedlings, and fattening livestock. Ten cooperatives are targeting specialty coffee production. Nine universities are conducting research.

The private sector landscape is also shifting. A mapping exercise identified more than 100 actors across coffee and forestry value chains—cooperatives, local banks, supermarkets, and media—well beyond the usual multinationals. Tailored engagement strategies are being developed for the most promising among them.

Ethiopia's Green Legacy Initiative tells the broader story: 40 billion tree seedlings planted over six years, forest cover increased almost 40 percent, and more than 760,000 jobs generated. Kenya's experience adds evidence: shade trees in coffee agroforestry systems quadruple carbon storage per hectare. Financing remains a persistent challenge, but firms such as Barry Callebaut, Cargill, and Nestlé are showing what collaboration can look like.

"We can't achieve the change we need without the private sector," said Mulugeta Worku, FOLUR Ethiopia project manager.





GHANA

Restoring Land and Livelihoods

A once-forested region of Ghana is slowly coming back to life. Degraded farmland, grasslands, and riverbanks are also being restored through the FOLUR program.

Many smallholder cocoa farmers had sold their land to small-scale miners as a short-term fix. This deepened poverty and accelerated environmental degradation. Now they are rehabilitating degraded farms through improved planting materials, intercropping, and climate-smart techniques. High-yielding cocoa, cashew, and mango varieties are complemented by maize, legumes, and vegetables, providing income while the long-term crops mature. Aquaculture, poultry, and small-ruminant rearing add further stability.

Women are at the center. Through village savings and loan associations, they have gained financial independence, access to fertile land, and new leadership roles. Processing facilities for groundnuts, oil palm, and shea enable women to add value and increase incomes. The project targets at least 40 percent female participation in community committees, and some communities are reaching 50 percent.

Along riverbanks, planting reduces erosion, stabilizing soils, and improving water quality. Community resource management areas within wildlife biological corridors support biodiversity recovery.





INDIA

A Farming Revolution Takes Root

In India's rice- and wheat-growing heartlands, farmers are trading centuries-old practices for climate-smart alternatives. Early results are encouraging.

FOLUR India works across Punjab, Haryana, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh—states where soils are losing organic matter and crop residue burning fouls the air and drives greenhouse gas emissions. To date, 28,700 farmers have been trained, more than 22,000 are adopting sustainable practices, and 13,600 hectares are under improved management.

Innovations range from the dramatic to the quietly ingenious: DSR that cuts water use and emissions; a yeast-based seed treatment that improves germination; a shredder-seeder-spreader that turns stubble into mulch instead of smoke; and WhatsApp crop advisories in Hindi, Punjabi, and Odia.

Women's self-help groups are driving ecosystem restoration. In Balrampur district, more than 1,500 groups put forward more than 1,000 farm pond proposals in village councils. Women participate in 50 water user associations, which govern local water resources.

Private sector engagement is strengthening sustainable value chains, while government scheme convergence reduces adoption risk for smallholders.





INDONESIA

Women Lead Aceh's Coffee Future

Produced in the cool, misty highlands of Central Aceh, Gayo Arabica coffee is prized worldwide. Behind this celebrated bean, women and youth are quietly reshaping the future of sustainable farming.

A gender-focused field visit under the FOLUR project found women at the heart of coffee production yet largely excluded from formal support systems—shut out of agricultural training, cooperative leadership, and access to financial credit. Rising temperatures and the *Helopeltis* pest are compounding the pressure. Farmers are facing the changes without the tools to respond.

Innovation is emerging anyway. Youth-led groups in Telege Sari and Gegarang villages are reimagining traditional coffee varieties as heritage products. Forty percent of members are young women who are using entrepreneurship as a vehicle for both economic opportunity and gender equity.

The standout example is Kokowagayo (Koperasi Kopi Wanita Gayo), a fully women-led cooperative managing every step of the supply chain, from harvesting and processing to exporting and marketing to buyers in Europe and North America. Women lead while men support logistics.

Field data from the visit feed directly into FOLUR's gender action plan. The trajectory is clear: from participation to full-chain leadership.





KENYA

Communities Restore Mount Elgon Forests

A significant milestone in community-led restoration has been reached in Kenya's Mount Elgon landscape. Restoration contracts have been handed to community forest associations in Trans Nzoia and Bungoma counties, putting communities in charge of the land they depend on.

The contracts were issued under FOLUR, which is implemented by the FAO, and are being executed by the Kenya Forest Service and the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization. The handover marks a decisive shift toward participatory approaches that place communities at the center of forest restoration and sustainable land management.

The project aims to restore 10,000 hectares of degraded land, benefiting more than 60,000 people. Community forest associations will manage the full restoration cycle—from raising 1.6 million tree seedlings to planting and nurturing them—with technical support from the Kenya Forest Service.

The initiative contributes to Kenya's commitments under the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, the Bonn Challenge, and the national 15-billion-tree-growing program.

"Communities play a critical role in ecosystem restoration," said Alex Lemarkoko, Chief Conservator of Forests.





LIBERIA

Mapping Land, Empowering Women

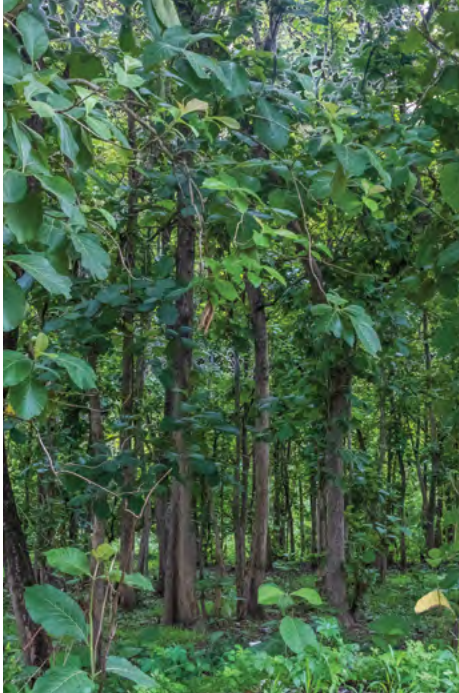
For the first time, northwestern Liberia has a comprehensive land-use plan. That is no small achievement in a country where land fragmentation, poor market access, and limited agricultural support have long constrained communities living alongside some of Africa's richest biodiversity—elephant and chimpanzee habitats—under threat from logging, mining, and climate change.

Implemented by Conservation International under FOLUR, the 2.5-million-hectare project has built a multistakeholder platform, giving local communities a structured voice in implementation. Plans are in place at the national, landscape, and community-cluster levels. Training is underway to activate them within six months.

Women are central to the conservation model. About half of all frontline conservationists—78 targeted in total—are women. Gender champions are embedded in each community to strengthen participation in decision-making.

Community resource centers are building local capacity in agricultural knowledge and land-use planning. Climate-smart cocoa production is improving yields through intercropping and disease management. A recent business symposium has drawn additional private sector actors into the landscape.





NIGERIA

Aligning Finance and Farming

Nigeria is tackling deforestation on two fronts—in its banking sector and on the ground in cocoa and oil palm landscapes.

More than 30 leaders from seven major banks, including the central bank, have agreed on a roadmap to embed deforestation-free standards into agricultural investment portfolios. The stakes are real: Nigeria lost nearly 18 percent of its forests between 1990 and 2018 among the highest deforestation rates globally. The roadmap covers geospatial monitoring, harmonized regulatory frameworks, and financial inclusion for smallholder farmers—currently among the least served by banking credit. The goal is a financial ecosystem where environmental, social, and governance principles are fully embedded into banking standards and support Nigeria’s obligations under the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).



On the ground, a landmark multistakeholder workshop in Calabar brought together more than 120 delegates to codesign transition pathways for sustainable cocoa and oil palm landscapes. Policy dialogues focused on EUDR compliance and women’s land rights. Key achievements include sustainability assessments across two states, a new geospatial platform, farm mapping to support EUDR compliance, and ecological restoration suitability maps.



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Smartphones Transform Papua New Guinea's Land Management

Land management in Papua New Guinea has long been fragmented because of overlapping mandates, scattered data, and competing interests—from conservation to agriculture, mining, and logging. A new digital National Land Use Information Management System is changing this.

Developed in under two months with support from FOLUR and implemented through UNDP, the system centralizes geospatial data covering conservation zones, logging sites, mining prospects, and agricultural areas, and makes it accessible via smartphones.

"You can see what's happening on the other side of the mountain, or in neighboring provinces," said Gibson Pitz, Deputy Chief Principal Planner at Papua New Guinea's Department of Lands and Physical Planning. "That's a game changer."

The two-way system allows users to upload and access data, increase transparency, and help resolve land-use conflicts. Formal data-sharing agreements are being established with the environment, agriculture, mining, and oil and gas sectors.

The next phase will deliver comprehensive land-use plans for New Britain Island. The system is already live, and the data are already available.





PARAGUAY

A Burgeoning Agricultural Transformation

Paraguay is the world's sixth-largest soybean producer and eighth-largest beef exporter. It is also quietly transforming how it farms.

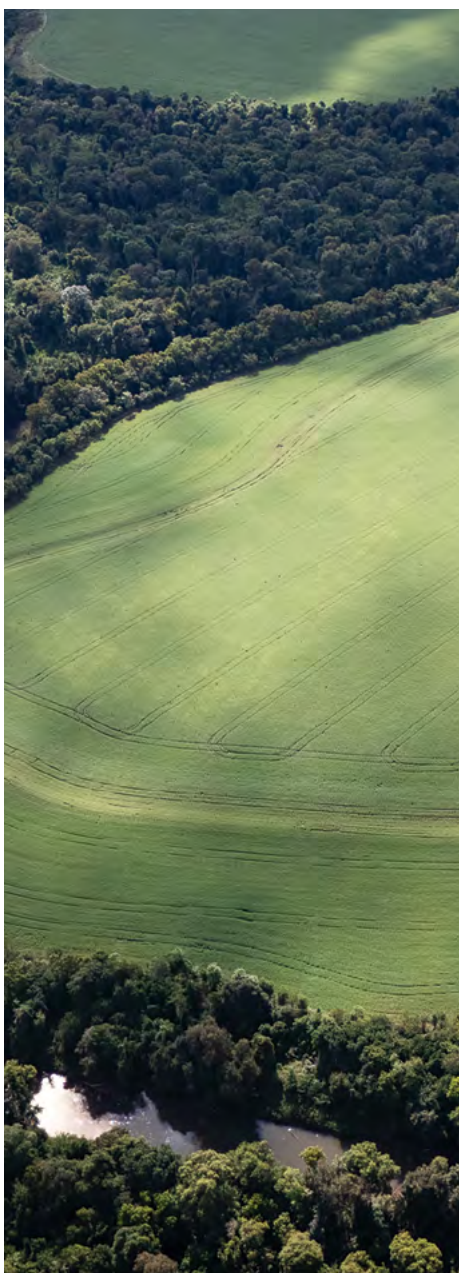
Four initiatives under FOLUR are showing results in the Chaco and Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest regions.

In Alto Paraguay, rotational grazing across 5,000 hectares is transforming livestock productivity. Cattle are gaining up to 450 kilograms per hectare annually, compared to 150–180 kilograms previously, while soil health and biodiversity improve.

In Macharety, Indigenous women are turning compressed forage-shrub leaves into high-density feed pellets across 7,500 hectares, combining new processing techniques with assisted natural regeneration.

In Naranjal District, FOLUR and local partners have restored four freshwater springs, contributing to a broader program that has restored 160 springs, reducing erosion, securing water, and building resilience to drought and extreme weather.

In the same district, 85 families from the Puerto Barra Aché Indigenous Community are producing honey from 29 beehives—350 liters in three months, with three harvests projected annually. A replicable model providing reliable income for a community conserving its ecosystem.





UKRAINE

Protecting Wetlands Amid War

Polissya is northern Ukraine's region of dense forests, peatlands, and wetlands, and it is home to elk, lynx, otters, and the black stork. It was already one of Europe's most ecologically significant landscapes before Russia's invasion. Since then, explosions have torn through ancient forests, toxic munitions residue has seeped into soils and rivers, and conservation work has become hazardous.

The UNDP and GEF are responding through FOLUR, supporting 10 national parks and several regional reserves with equipment and field support to monitor wildlife, detect wildfires, and restore damaged habitats.

Teams at Rivne Nature Reserve—Ukraine's largest Ramsar-designated wetland, spanning 42,000 hectares—are using portable radios, inflatable boats, generators, and automated weather stations to work in remote, waterlogged areas under difficult conditions. Thirteen drones supplied to eight protected areas are enabling real-time fire detection and biodiversity monitoring. Cameras and optical lenses help rangers at Nizhynskyi Regional Landscape Park track wildlife in sensitive habitats.

In early May, park workers spotted three marsh turtles sunbathing on a log in a quiet canal, almost invisible against the algae-covered wood.

"Even in transformed water bodies where wetlands once thrived, life endures," said Oleh Ivanenko, park director. "With our care, nature has a chance to breathe freely once again."



UZBEKISTAN

Smarter Seeds, Healthier Soils



A mobile seed-cleaning machine mounted on a wheeled trailer has doubled harvests in Uzbekistan's Qashqadaryo province, reduced waste by 20 percent, and cut costs by one-third. It is one of many FOLUR interventions transforming farming across a landscape shaped by the loss of the Aral Sea and decades of soil degradation.

No-till conservation practices have halted erosion and improved fertility by replacing plowing with direct seeding into crop residues and practicing crop rotation. Community-produced biohumus—organic fertilizer made by earthworms processing food scraps and livestock manure—is reducing dependence on chemical inputs. Semicircular earthworks harvest rainwater, retaining moisture for months after rainfall stops.

At the Uzbekistan Research Institute of Soil Science, scientists have produced more than 2,500 soil-quality maps using artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools—knowledge that helps farmers and policy makers make smarter decisions.

More than 180,000 hectares are under sustainable land management. Some 30,000 hectares have been restored. More than half of the 3,000 people reached directly are women.

What began as a response to a drying landscape is becoming a model of what smart investments in people, tools, and ecosystems can achieve.





Lessons from Country Project Experiences

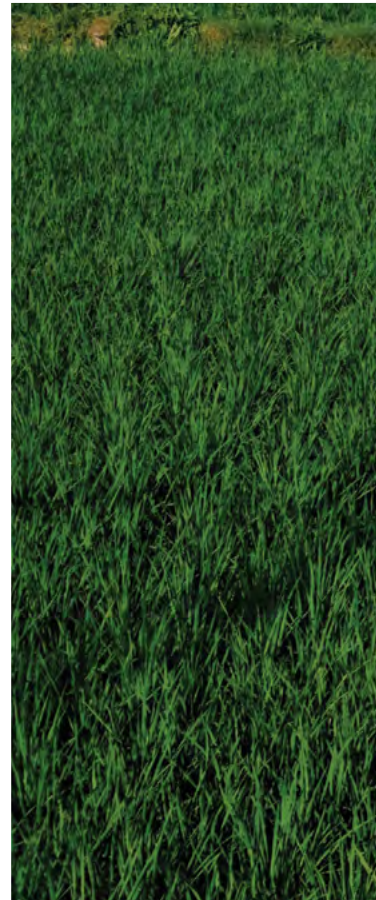


Table 1. Insights from Country Projects and Lessons Learned

COUNTRY PROJECT INSIGHT	WHY IT MATTERS
Innovation was often social and institutional, not technological.	The real breakthroughs often came from how people, agencies, communities, and partners worked together. Innovation was described as primarily institutional and social rather than purely technological.
The most successful innovations combined four things at once: technology, partnerships, community ownership, and economic incentives.	Project interventions stick when technology is combined with strong partnerships, community ownership, local knowledge, and economic incentives.
Partnerships were not a soft add-on; they were the dominant reported driver of innovation.	Country projects emphasized multistakeholder collaboration and partnerships as a success factor for driving innovation.
Some of the most interesting capacity gaps were highly technical and forward-looking.	Beyond procurement and monitoring, projects identified gaps in geographic information systems, land use planning, digital systems and digital literacy, climate finance, agroecology, artificial intelligence, greenhouse gas accounting, and carbon measurement. This suggests that countries are moving into more complex implementation territory.
Gender work was strongest when built into project machinery, not treated as a participation target.	Gender was embedded into monitoring systems, safeguards, work plans, terms of reference, contracts, governance bodies, and focal point networks. Country approaches incorporated gender into these core systems and established gender focal point networks across projects.
Youth engagement was framed around making agriculture a viable livelihood pathway, not just inviting young people into meetings.	Country projects went beyond youth participation and instead focused on inclusion into value chains, enterprises, leadership, training, and intergenerational learning, positioning agriculture as a viable livelihood opportunity.
Traditional knowledge was treated as governance knowledge, not simply cultural knowledge.	Country projects worked through traditional authorities and respected Indigenous governance, leadership, and decision-making processes.
Implementation challenges were often mundane but decisive: procurement, recruitment, operational agreements, and staffing.	Basic delivery systems posed a threat to transformation. Frequent challenges included delays in procurement, recruitment, operational partner agreements, staff turnover, understaffing, and shortages of specialized local expertise.
Peer exchanges and study visits were identified as effective capacity-building tools.	Country projects learned well from each other. Capacity building was reported as most effective when embedded throughout implementation through partnerships, peer exchanges, and study visits.

Source: Original for this publication.

Experiences across FOLUR country projects reveal common lessons about what drives lasting food systems transformation, as the table above shows. This section highlights three of these key lessons.*

1) Food systems transformation succeeds when projects invest as much in institutions and incentives as they do in technologies.

A powerful lesson emerging across countries is that transformation was rarely driven by technology alone. While many projects introduced new production practices, digital tools, restoration methods, or value chain innovations, countries consistently reported that **their most important breakthroughs were institutional rather than technical.**

Successful projects created new ways for governments, producer organizations, communities, financial actors, and private sector partners to work together around shared objectives. In many cases, the innovation was not the technology itself, but the partnership, governance arrangement, financing mechanism, or stakeholder platform that enabled adoption and scaling. Countries also showed that successful innovations were often adaptations of existing local knowledge rather than entirely

new technologies. **Uptake increased when projects built on local practices, traditional knowledge, or farmer-led experimentation instead of introducing externally designed solutions.** This finding challenges a common assumption that scaling sustainable food systems is primarily a matter of identifying and transferring better technologies. Instead, country experiences suggest that transformation depends on creating enabling systems that connect policy, investment, markets, knowledge, and local institutions. The lesson is that sustainable food systems, biodiversity conservation, restoration, and climate objectives are most likely to succeed when interventions address the institutional and economic conditions that shape behaviour and decision-making.

* These lessons are drawn, at a high level, from the World Bank Group–UNDP co-led Virtual Learning Fair, a participatory process designed to celebrate and share country experiences and transferable good practices across FOLUR. The curation phase included interviews with 26 country projects, and some of the lessons emerging from these conversations are reflected in this update. The next phase will focus on learning workshops based on the priorities and lessons identified.

2) Empowering local actors produces stronger and more durable outcomes than externally driven implementation.

Across countries, **lasting change depended on shifting resources and decision-making closer to local actors.**

The strongest projects moved beyond consultation to give communities a real role in planning, implementation, financing, and governance. In Guinea, Kenya, Paraguay, and Nigeria, community ownership mattered more than the specific technical solution: projects worked best when communities were treated as decision-makers and implementing partners, not

beneficiaries. Kenya's direct community financing, Ghana's farmer-led extension, Ethiopia's women-centered business models, and work through customary and Indigenous governance structures all point to the same lesson: people are more likely to sustain change when they help shape it. For integrated landscapes, local ownership is not just an inclusion goal; it is a practical strategy for increasing adoption, managing trade-offs, reducing implementation risk, and sustaining results.

3) The next frontier of food systems transformation is implementation capability, not strategy.

A particularly striking lesson from country projects is the **extent to which implementation capacity emerged as a determining factor for success.**

While countries continued to face familiar challenges such as procurement delays, staff turnover, coordination constraints, and limited technical expertise, many also identified emerging capacity needs associated with **increasingly sophisticated food systems interventions.**

Projects reported challenges related to geographic information systems, digital planning tools, climate finance, greenhouse gas accounting, carbon measurement, digital literacy, and artificial intelligence applications. At the same time, implementation was often constrained **more by institutions than by technology.** Political transitions, staff turnover, coordination across ministries, and administrative complexity emerged as more significant barriers than technical challenges in many countries. Several

countries also highlighted innovative responses that combine traditional and modern approaches, including India's use of farmer-generated videos alongside traditional knowledge, Indonesia's investments in systems leadership, China's work on low-carbon rice systems, Mexico's experience with blended finance, and Peru's integration of landscape governance with risk management. The lesson is that designing integrated food systems projects is no longer the primary challenge; implementing them **increasingly requires advanced technical, financial, analytical, and institutional capabilities.** Countries repeatedly concluded that practical learning, peer exchange, study tours, partnerships, and continuous capacity strengthening were among the most effective ways of building these capabilities. As food systems agendas become more complex, the ability to translate knowledge into implementation is becoming as important as the interventions themselves.

Abbreviations

EUDR	European Union Deforestation Regulation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FOLUR	Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program
FSIP	Food Systems Integrated Program
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GP	Global Platform
IFC	International Finance Corporation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WBG	World Bank Group
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WRI	World Resources Institute

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