COMMONLAND
4 RETURNS FROM LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

Social Capital

Evidence- based research for social capital as part of the 4 returns framework

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Social capital & the 4 returns

Social capital is one of Commonland's 4 returns (the others are: inspiration, natural capital, & financial capital) of landscape restoration (LR). The framework of the 4 returns brings a more holistic mind-set to impact assessment, demonstrating that both financial & non-financial returns are possible & important through landscape restoration.

What – Social Capital as applied by Commonland

The **return of social capital** is currently described by Commonland as: **"Bringing back jobs, business activity, education and security"**

Social capital as a benefit of healthy ecosystems is taken very seriously by Commonland. Firstly, Commonland's (2017) explanation of the 4 returns approach begins by delving into the history of entire civilizations disappearing due to widespread ecological degradation. These social consequences are exemplified by disasters such as Easter Island and the US Dust Bowl.

Secondly, Commonland focuses specifically on *landscape restoration*. It should be noted that the use of the term 'landscape' has a social component embedded within it. As noted by Görg (2007), a landscape refers to the "spatial-temporal aspects of the metabolism between nature and

society." As such, Commonland's focus on 'landscape restoration', instead of 'ecological restoration' or 'conservation', ipso facto highlights the social factor.

Commonland (2017) notes how restoration initiatives require 'socially-friendly' production processes, as well as environmentally-friendly ones. Although certification schemes which include roundtables and stakeholder inclusion in participatory processes are noted as a step forward, they are seen as not going far enough. Instead, Commonland promotes a 'restoration economy' which would work towards fostering systemic change, particularly in the business world, in order to face current global crises based on land degradation.

In defining components of the restoration economy, Commonland (2017) mentions certain social returns possible from ethical business, including: *social stability, jobs, happy consumers, & engagement*. On a wider scale, society is seen to interact with the economy in terms of 'jobs / welfare' and 'products / profits'. Society also benefits from ecosystems through their provision of ecosystems services & functions (see Figure 1). It is noted that there is an interdependency between these three components of society, economy, and ecology with resultant feedback loops.

Other socially-oriented LR benefits or components mentioned by Commonland include entrepreneurial
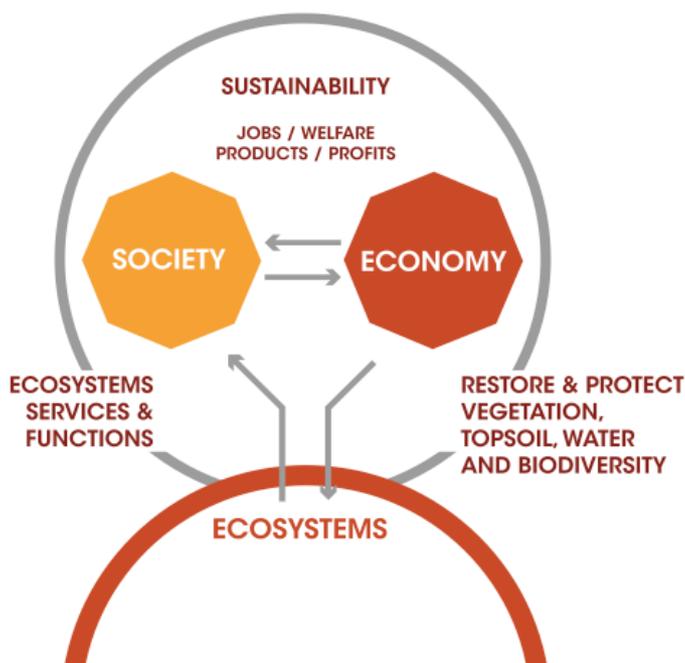
Figure 1: Rethinking sustainability (Commonland, 2017)

ideas for landscape restoration, company consumer engagement and corporate social responsibility, increased networks, job creation, education and training opportunity, and providing security and stability to a region.

Monitoring

In the Commonland Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) framework, social capital is measured as:
Strong communities & networks:
"The community in the landscape is supported by new job opportunities, a strengthened set of skills, and by an effective community network"

There are currently 3 measurement domains for social capital: Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Network

Employment – Number of direct/indirect jobs created/supported at the venture/landscape

Entrepreneurship – Number of people whose entrepreneurial and professional skills have been improved

Network – Number of different groups connected to convey knowledge, information, and other support for innovation (e.g. universities, business schools, governmental institutions, etc.)

Plus Most Significant Change Stories which show that the return of social capital allows people to have a deeper connection to their landscape.

Why – social capital

As Commonland continues to develop & refine its MEL system, the returns of social capital and inspiration, strongly linked, were considered to require special attention. As a part of the work that Commonland undertakes, it hopes to build a social movement, as a key support basis to the burgeoning restoration economy. As such, this brief has the aim to help solidify our use of the term 'social capital' and understand the evidence base for how social capital can be applied to LR.

How – methodology and paper layout

The process of creating this brief was as follows:
a) Looking for & assessing the use & meaning of *social capital* for Commonland (via relevant materials)

b) Performing literature reviews, mostly through Google Scholar, of 'social capital', combined with other keywords such as 'restoration', 'conservation', 'job provision, 'education', 'training', 'entrepreneurship', 'business', 'security', 'rural migration' 'landscape', & 'local economy'

c) Addressing the various definitions of social capital

d) Analysing & grouping the data to develop a framework for consideration & approach

e) Consideration of findings on social capital in regards to Commonland's framework and to landscape data reported on in 2019

The results of «*step (a)*» have already been summarised in the previous sections. The results from the subsequent steps are embedded in the following sections. The final section ties it all together.

Common definitions & usage of social capital

The Social Capital Research & Training organization point out the criticism that social capital theory receives for being poorly defined and vaguely conceptualized (Claridge, 2004). The reason behind this is asserted as the vast multi-dimensionality of the term. The main uses of the term across sociology research are: **trust, rules and norms, types of social interaction, and network resources and characteristics** (Claridge, 2004).

Social capital seems to be defined differently based on the perspective being taken. Woolcock (1998) gave 4 different perspectives on social capital, whereby the communitarian, network, and synergy views all encompassed variations on association and relational ties. The institution view, however, included political and legal institutions.

There is also the business perspective, whereby social and relationship capital is one of the 6 capitals (resources) recognized by the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC, 2013). The other 5 capitals are: natural, intellectual, human, manufactured, and financial. Social and relationship capital is grouped together with intellectual capital and human capital as the three capitals related to people. The rough differentiation is made by who is the 'carrier' of the capital, for human – the individual, for intellectual – the organization, and for social – the network. As such, 'social capital' as considered by Commonland would encompass all three capitals of this more specific breakdown.

According to the IIRC, social capital consists of: the **institutions and relationships** in a community/network, which would include shared norms, core values & trust, as well as an organization's social license to operate. Human and intellectual capitals then add: **people's competencies, capabilities and experiences**, including motivations to innovate, and **knowledge**.

As such, the general use of social capital focuses on relationships (network). However, a wider perspective

adds in the importance of institutions and of individuals' competencies, capabilities, and knowledge. This wider viewpoint is more aligned with both Commonland and the use of social capital in the restoration field, as detailed in the following section.

Attention to social capital in the restoration field

Traditionally there has been some acknowledgement of social capital in restoration projects, but not with as high an importance as attached by Commonland. For example, Murcia and Guariguata (2014) noted that of 116 restoration projects in Colombia, the aims of restoration projects which were categorised as 'socio-economic' were the least represented group, after 'area and connectivity' and 'ecological processes and biodiversity'. Under the socio-economic grouping, the specific goals found were: **employment generation** (<10% of projects), **risk reduction** (20%), **recreation/tourism** (15%), and **cultural/spiritual values** (5%). In Commonland's framework, recreation/tourism would instead fall under financial returns, while cultural/spiritual values would fall under inspiration.

However, other authors such as Aguilar et al. (2015) have discussed the importance of social capital in restoration work. They urge that restoration is an engine for **job creation** to ward against the argument of poverty alleviation used in support of environmentally-degrading activities, such as deforestation and mining. They

also highlight the recent growth and spread of **networks** to promote restoration learning, collaboration, and promotion across Latin America.

Chazdon et al. (2017) highlighted the need to understand the social and economic facets of landscape and forest restoration in policy objectives. They note that for landholders, restoration is more attractive if it improves economic and social circumstances. As such, the **awareness of and distribution of benefits of landscape restoration to communities and landholders** were put forward as key research questions in the field. See Figure 2 for their provided breakdown of the considerations of landscape restoration benefits across different stakeholder groups. In this graphic, local communities are interested in **jobs, promotion of local knowledge and culture**, and **improved livelihoods**, along with natural returns (ecosystem services).

Other authors, like Buckingham et al. (2015), focus on the socio-economic benefits of landscape restoration at the country level. They point out that **conflict reduction** has been an effect of community forestry in Nepal and the impact of **community participation** in watershed restoration in India. Interestingly, the authors note that restoration has not become more popular in part due to **a lack of inspiration/motivation in the topic on the part of decision-makers**. They posit that this leads to poor enabling conditions and minimal local resource availability. The authors' recommendations are similar to those of Commonland, whereby the need to

inspire, enable, and mobilise in order to create a restoration movement is espoused. Economic incentives, **social engagement,** and **local capacity and knowledge** are seen as necessary conditions to this movement, alongside policies, local champions, and monitoring.

Further in the literature, Aronson et al. (2006) group together the benefits of landscape restoration of '**creating employment and livelihoods'** as well as 'restoring social capital', defined by them as **institutions, relationships, social networks,** and **shared cultural beliefs/traditions** which build trust. Other sources like those in Chabay et al. (2015) note the benefits of landscape restoration for (national) **security**, **food security, disaster mitigation**, and **empowerment**. Some of the stories included in this textbook are examples from Commonland and partners.

Other researchers, like Fischer et al. (2015), also note **that social capital via network organisation promotes collective action, knowledge transfer, creation of shared norms, and trust and understanding**.

Relation to Commonland MEL system

As can be noted, throughout the literature, social capital is often used to refer to:

- employment & livelihood
- institutions & networks
- local capacity, knowledge, & empowerment
- security

Social engagement/participation and shared values, norms, and trust are also mentioned at times. However, these are noted as more intangible or indirect gains.
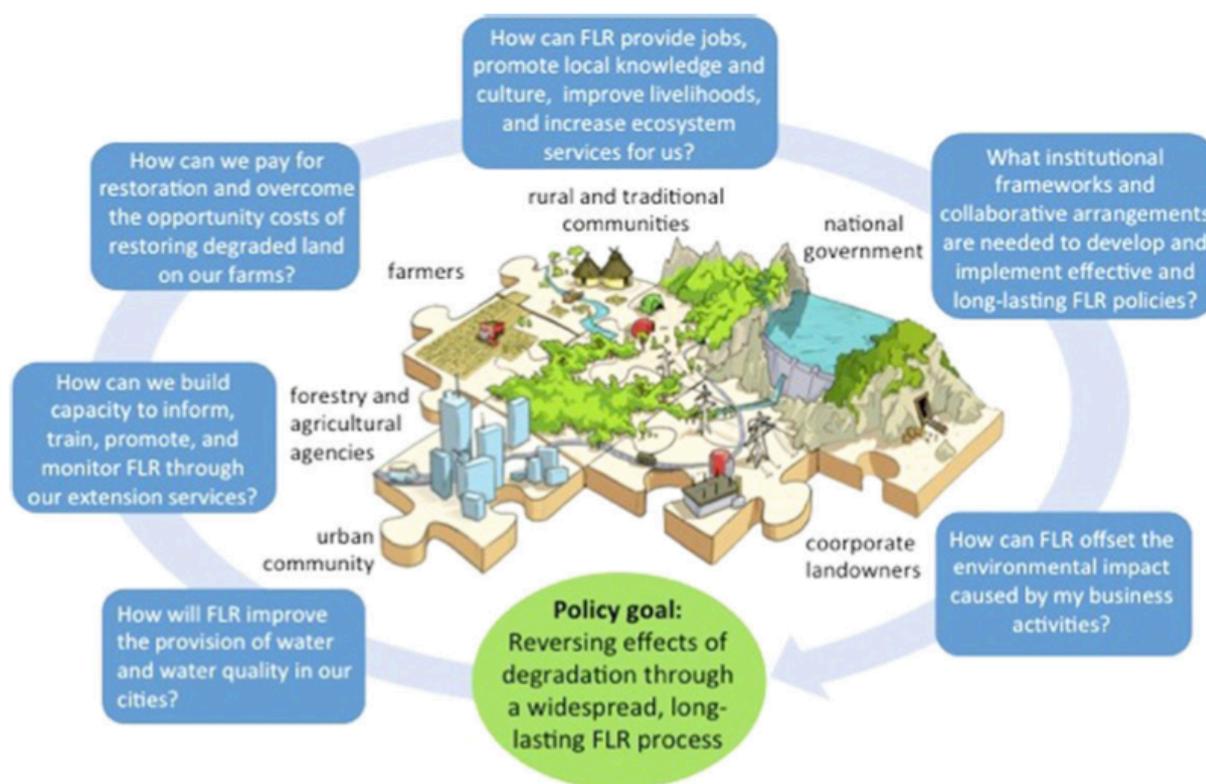

Figure 2: Policy goal considerations across stakeholder groups. Graphic provided by Cora van Oosten (Wageningen UR Centre for Development Innovation), available in Chazdon et al. 2017

Two of Commonland's measures for social capital – **employment and network** – match the first two categories espoused from the literature.

Commonland's third measurement – **entrepreneurship** – somewhat matches the third category of local capacity, knowledge, & empowerment. However, the focus is on a specific subset of capacity, knowledge, & skills, i.e. those related to business.

As Commonland and partners do focus on building a restoration economy and the business side of landscape restoration, this limited focus does make sense. However, the opportunities of landscape restoration do provide for a wider range of skills and knowledge than entrepreneurial ones alone, as shown by the literature. In the case of Commonland's landscape partners, one can also see this. From the reporting data provided in 2019, partners regularly host training sessions on a variety of topics, such as soil health or groundwater practices. These do not provide (direct) entrepreneurial advantage to those who attend, but do increase their skills and knowledge in topics they are clearly interested in.

Considerations going forward

A first consideration may be to expand the return of social capital domain of entrepreneurship in order to include more types of knowledge and skills transfer. This would allow Commonland to capture a fuller range of the capacity building occurring across the landscapes.

Note that (from the 2019 reporting data), there has already been some overlap between 'entrepreneurship' and the domain of 'participation' under the return of inspiration. Specifically, participants in entrepreneurial trainings are also counted in participation in general. This overlap would only increase if entrepreneurship was expanded to 'capacity-building' or 'knowledge & skills' trainings and events in general. However, though this could be seen as double counting, it makes sense that an event aimed at empowerment would both increase skills and provide inspiration. In that sense, there should be no issue in this regard.

Moving on, the domain of employment encompasses the number of jobs created in the landscape through restoration work. From the landscape reporting data, typically the jobs counted are directly linked to the work taken on by the landscape partner(s). However, if restoration work is improving the local economy and increasing regional opportunities, this means that additional jobs fomented by those changes are then not being captured. One notable aspect of this is through the knowledge of replication

projects (a domain under inspiration), which are also providing jobs, but these are not always counted. As such, at some point it may make sense to consider a factor multiplier for jobs or a proxy estimation based off of additional financial capital brought into the region by landscape activities.

As for network, landscape data from 2019 shows that there are different considerations of one's network. Many of the partners are associations, which means that they may tend to focus on their own, inner, network. Tracking how their networks grow over time would show how more individual farmers, businesses, and/or other groups are becoming involved in the restoration economy. However, gathering data on the wider network being built, in terms of connections and knowledge sharing, would also be useful. Some efforts on network mapping have already been made, so highlighting these and taking on other deep dives, could provide further inspiration in a 'showing of strength'. It may also be a 'nice-to-have' in-depth research option to carry out a project (perhaps in collaboration with a student) using social network theory to show how restoration networks are being built and what are their dynamics.

'Security' was also noted in the literature and is generally highlighted by Commonland, but not factored into the MEL system. However, security is such a complex issue with a wide array of macro and micro-scale factors, that measurement and attribution would be difficult. It may be worthwhile to consider setting up a system to measure security gains for some

projects in particularly insecure regions (e.g. perhaps Haiti). However, embedding it into the general system and looking at it annually does not seem practical. In general, Commonland could watch out for macro-scale studies on the link between restoration and security to use for their own evidence base.

Finally, the development of shared values and norms is another social aspect that is desired by Commonland in building a social movement of landscape restoration. However, as mentioned, these are more intangible concepts. They are also not (immediately) beneficial to those who receive them, unlike the other categories of social capital. The consideration of shared values and norms may also be more easily inferred from the return of inspiration, instead.

Awareness, for instance, is often measured in part through social media channels. The amount of interaction happening with those channels, through likes, reposts, shares, mentions, etc., could be one indicator of shared values and norms. Going forward, tracking social media, news, and general internet 'landscape restoration' and '4 returns' mentions and usage could be a further indicator. However, this would be outside of the scope of social capital, and more of a measurement on movement-building and norm-creation.

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