



HOW TO EXPOLRE FOREST RESTORATION ATTITUDES AND GOVERNANCE

PRACTIONER GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC



SUPERB
Upscaling Forest Restoration



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To ensure public and stakeholder support for forest restoration it's important to understand perceptions and attitudes towards forests and restoration. These guidelines are designed to help forest restoration practitioners plan and conduct interviews to gather perspectives on public attitudes, stakeholder perspectives, and governance challenges that could affect restoration efforts. The guide explains how to design simple interviews (20–30 minutes) with clear, jargon-free questions, especially when speaking to the general public. It also offers advice on how to team up with a local partner, identify and approach interviewees, and analyse the data so that it can help shape forest restoration strategies that are inclusive and tailored to the local context.



INTRODUCTION

What and who are these guidelines meant for?

To design forest restoration strategies that are socially accepted, policy-relevant, and scalable, it is essential to explore public attitudes, understand how different stakeholders interpret restoration, and assess governance challenges that may hinder implementation (Kazungu and Hunziker, 2025; O'Brien, 2025). Conducting interviews with the public and key stakeholders early in the restoration planning phase can provide insights needed to avoid conflict and design forest restoration that is aligned with the public and stakeholders' needs and expectations. These guidelines are designed for forest restoration practitioners and provide a brief overview of how to design and conduct interviews with the general public and forest restoration stakeholders.

Who is the general public?

The general public refers to people who may not be directly involved in forest restoration but are still affected by it. For example, this could include local residents, hikers, cyclists, mushroom and berry pickers, or hunters. They represent a broad range of everyday perspectives and values.

Who are forest restoration stakeholders?

Forest restoration stakeholders are individuals or groups who have a more direct interest, role, or influence in decision-making processes related to forest restoration. These can include public administrations (e.g., related to the environment, agriculture, water and forests), private landowners and related associations, nature conservation organisations, hunting associations, state forest representatives, financial institutions, and research/academia.

What aspects of public attitudes should I pay attention to?

Different dimensions of public attitudes towards forest restoration and forests can influence public support towards it. These include:

- What does the public value about the forest?
- How does the public use the forest?
- How familiar is the public with forest restoration strategies?
- What benefits (if any) do the public associate with forest restoration?
- What support mechanisms do the public favour for implementing forest restoration?

What governance challenges should I look out for?

Various governance challenges can complicate forest restoration planning and implementation. These include:

- Unclear and conflicting competencies that complicate coordination between public administrations (e.g., ministries of the environment or agriculture/forestry)
- Top-down decision-making that is misaligned with local interest
- Misaligned forest policies across sectors (e.g., forest, water, nature conservation, energy, agriculture, etc.) and spatial levels (e.g., regional, national, and international)
- Conflicts between stakeholder groups that arise from different interests and values
- Historical power imbalances between stakeholder groups (usually specific to the individual case of forest restoration but can include, for example, power imbalances between the state and local/indigenous communities)
- Challenges with decision-making (usually specific to the individual case of forest restoration but can include, for example, complex forest land ownership)

DESIGN YOUR INTERVIEW

If you are new to conducting interviews, we recommend aiming for a short interview of 20-30 minutes. Longer interviews are possible, but you should be mindful of the stakeholder's/member of the public's time and how long the data will take to process. When interviewing the general public, it is especially important to avoid any sort of technical language or jargon about forest restoration as they may not be familiar with it. Forest restoration stakeholders are often more familiar with the topic and can offer detailed insights, so questions can be slightly more technical, but it's still important to avoid jargon. For an interview of 20-30 minutes, we recommend 5-7 structured questions.

The number of interviews you should conduct depends on what your goals are and the diversity of stakeholders/members of the public in the area. In general, you should aim to cover a broad range of perspectives. This could be, for example, 10-15 interviews with members of the general public, and a similar number for interviews with stakeholders. Conducting fewer interviews may still be beneficial, but keep in mind you may not have covered the diversity of different perspectives that exist. Start with a few basic introductory questions (e.g., the person's background, how long they have lived/worked in the area, occupation, etc.) before moving into more focused questions. Depending on the goal of your interview, questions could include:

On public attitudes:

- How often do you go to nearby forests in a week/month?
- What benefits are provided by the forests in your area or region?
 - What benefits are most important to you or your community?
- Do you think that the forests in your area could provide more of these important benefits if there was more support (e.g. financial or otherwise)?
 - If yes, what kind of support would be needed?
- What does forest restoration mean to you?



- Are you aware of any forest restoration activities that were implemented in your area or region in the past?
 - If yes, how were you and others in the community involved in it?
 - Do you think it has provided any benefits for the local community?
 - If yes, what benefits?
 - If not, what do you think could have been done differently?

On stakeholder perceptions and governance challenges:

- What does forest restoration mean to you?
- What challenges do you see that could potentially hinder forest restoration activities?
Please consider:
 - Cooperation between public administrations (e.g., ministries, agencies, etc.) at different levels (regional, national)
 - Policies and legislation across sectors and at the regional/national/international level
 - Relationships between stakeholders
 - Decision-making processes
 - Any other challenges?
- Do you see any conflicting interests between stakeholders that could influence forest restoration activities in this area (e.g., preferences for nature vs. timber harvesting)
 - What actions could be taken to resolve these conflicts?

COLLABORATE WITH A LOCAL PARTNER

If you are a forest restoration practitioner but are not familiar with the local area where the forest restoration is being planned, we recommend teaming up with a local partner who is familiar with forest-related issues, for example a representative from a public administration working on forests, a researcher, a local non-governmental organisation, etc. The local partner can help you to refine and incorporate the local context into your study questions and identify important stakeholders and members of the community.

IDENTIFY YOUR INTERVIEWEES

If you have sufficient knowledge of the local area, members of the public, and stakeholders, you can identify your interviewees on your own. Ideally, these interviewees should offer different perspectives on forest restoration, so you are able to get an overview of differing opinions. If you are not familiar with the local area, we recommend teaming up with your local partner to select members of the public and stakeholders for an interview. For members



of the public, it is important to ensure demographic and professional diversity (e.g., different age groups, genders, occupations) and to aim for geographic representation if the study area is large. For stakeholders, selection criteria could include, for example:

1. Knowledgeable about restoration in the local area/region;
2. Belongs to one of the following groups: (a) Public forest or environmental administration (at local, regional, or national level) (b) Private forest owners, workers, and associations (c); (d) Non-governmental environmental organisations; (e) State forest enterprises, agencies, and associations; (f) Recreational or hunting associations; or (g) Financial institutions;
3. (a) Knowledgeable about governance challenges and/or conflicting interests and values of stakeholders that could affect restoration implementation of restoration in the area, OR (b) represent a typical view of a typical forest or forest restoration related conflict between stakeholders in the area;
4. Gender balance.

APPROACH YOUR INTERVIEWEES

After you have identified the members of the public and stakeholders you want to talk to, get ready to ask them if they would like to participate in an interview. Several aspects should be considered in this process:

- Do they prefer to be contacted via email or phone?
- If they are not familiar with who you are, it might help if your local partner contacts them first on your behalf to introduce you and ask if they can be approached for an interview.
- Will your interview take place over the phone, online (on Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or another platform), or in-person (recommended, if possible).
- How long will the interview take?
- Inform the interviewee of your study (e.g., purpose and aims) and get the interviewees' consent before conducting the interview (verbal or written). Without prior consent the interview should not proceed.
- Will you record the interview or take notes during it? If so, it is crucial to ask for permission before the interview starts to avoid any issues.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

At the beginning of your interview, remind your interviewee what the purpose of your study is and why you are interested in talking to them. If you want to record or take notes during the interview, ask for their permission again. Start with your introductory questions before moving into more focused questions on forest restoration. You can ask follow-up questions



when you want to know more about a certain topic, but be mindful of the time and how many more interview questions you have left. If your interview goes overtime, acknowledge this and ask for permission to continue for a few more minutes (5-10).

PROCESSING THE DATA

How you process your interview data will depend on how it was collected. If you took written notes during the interviews, start by organising them in a structured format (e.g., a table or spreadsheet). Grouping answers by interview question will make it easier to identify patterns and compare perspectives across interviewees. If you recorded the interviews, you can either transcribe them fully (be aware that this is a time intensive process, unless you use a digital transcription programme) or listen back and take structured notes, summarising key points for each question. Again, organising this information in a table or spreadsheet will help you analyse the responses systematically. This type of comparison will help you explore patterns in stakeholder and public perceptions, which can be useful for identifying potential areas of agreement or tension. You don't need to conduct a formal qualitative analysis, but some basic interpretation and thematic grouping will help to make sense of the data you collected and help inform your next steps.

NEXT STEPS

Once you have finished analysing the interview data and identified some key findings, it can be beneficial to summarise them in a short report or presentation. In this report or presentation, you can highlight the main concerns of interviewees, any potential opportunities for forest restoration, and perspectives and elaborate how you think these insights can inform the planning and implementation of forest restoration (e.g., stakeholder engagement, communication, design, etc.). Ideally, share this output with your interviewees and ask them if you captured their perspectives correctly. This can help validate your findings and build trust. Afterwards, share and discuss your findings with other stakeholders involved in restoration decision-making and decide how to proceed with the planning process.

REFERENCES

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