

BRIEFINGNOTE

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The True Cost of Governance in Integrated Landscape Approaches

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Key Messages

Landscape governance infrastructure should be treated as a recurring operating requirement for ILAs. Without it, participation, coordination, evidence systems and institutional continuity weaken across project cycles, reducing the coherence and effectiveness of wider investments in people, nature and socio-ecological resilience.

- **ILAs are practical mechanisms for policy convergence across climate, biodiversity, land restoration and sustainable development agendas.** They foster coherence across sectors and governance levels, as well as across funding, political and implementation cycles, helping translate global commitments into coordinated action on the ground.

- **Landscape governance infrastructure enables ILAs to function effectively.** It provides the operationalization and institutional arrangements needed to convene actors, sustain participation, negotiate trade-offs, align resources, learn from evidence and adapt over time.

- **Governance costs can be identified and budgeted.**

Practitioner evidence points to recurring costs linked to facilitation, participation, coordination, data, monitoring, learning and institutional continuity.

- **Effective long-term investment depends on governance capacity.** Sustainable investment can scale more effectively where there are credible platforms, shared priorities, coordination systems and accountability arrangements that connect capital to landscape-level outcomes.

- **Governance funding and implementation funding serve different purposes.** Governance funding supports the capacity to coordinate, make decisions, learn and adapt across a territory. Implementation funding supports specific activities, assets and interventions.

Integrated Landscape Approaches

Climate, biodiversity, land restoration, adaptation, water, food systems and resilience agendas are increasingly converging across environmental and development policy processes. Governments and funders are therefore under growing pressure to support implementation that is coherent across sectors, governance levels and time horizons. Integrated landscape approaches (ILAs) provide a practical means of responding to this convergence. They are collaborative, cross-sectoral efforts that align actors, resources and decision-making across a defined landscape, seascape, territory or bioregion, where ecosystems, land and sea use, infrastructure, local economies and community well-being interact directly (Scherr et al. 2026). At this subnational level, policy coherence becomes operational and its effects are visible. These approaches offer a local scale for applying relevant measures of economic, ecological and social progress, and for coordinating investments that depend on interactions between built and natural systems, including grey-green infrastructure.

ILAs depend on continuous governance functions and institutional arrangements to effectively implement on-the-ground action toward sustainability and environmental goals (Minderhoud 2026). However, funding for their implementation remains largely project-based, sector-based and short-term.

Landscape governance infrastructure refers to the recurring operational capacity and institutional arrangements required for ILAs to function over time. This infrastructure includes the processes, platforms and institutions that support governance through which actors coordinate across sectors and interests, negotiate trade-offs, support spatial prioritization, align resources and sustain inclusive, equitable and collective decision-making.

This brief draws on the policy report *The True Cost of Governance in Integrated Landscape Approaches*, which analyses evidence from 30 integrated landscape initiatives worldwide. The findings identify real governance costs and indicate that they are recurring and variable in predictable ways (see Figure 3 and Table 1). Yet these costs are frequently under-recognized, underfunded or absorbed through unpaid labour, institutional goodwill and fragmented project support.

Understanding Landscape Governance Infrastructure

ILAs require the capacity to convene actors, build shared understanding, agree to priorities, coordinate implementation, align resources and adapt over time. Operationally, this entails the following core functions:

- **Convening and facilitation:** Bringing relevant stakeholders together, structuring dialogue, supporting trust and managing diverse interests.
- **Participation and representation:** Enabling meaningful and inclusive engagement by stakeholders and rights holders, including community and customary systems.
- **Shared planning and spatial prioritization:** Identifying priorities, sequencing actions and managing trade-offs across the territory.
- **Coordination and resource alignment:** Connecting institutions, programmes, investments and implementation actors.
- **Data, monitoring and learning:** Maintaining information systems, tracking change and supporting adaptive management.

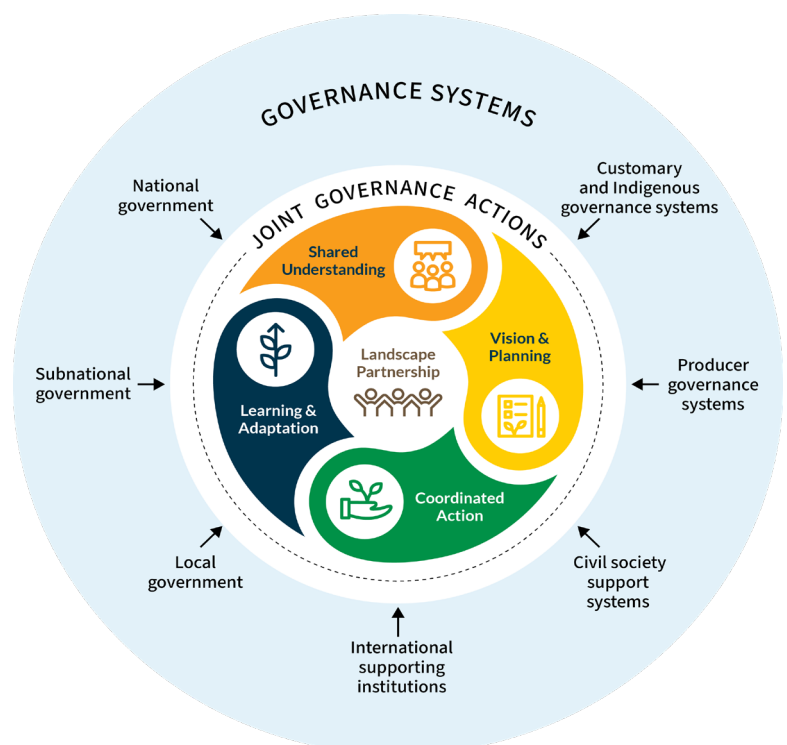


Figure 1: The hybrid reality of governance systems within landscape approaches visualized

- **Continuity and institutional memory:** Maintaining records, relationships, follow-through and coordination capacity across project cycles.
- **Investment orchestration and finance readiness:** Aligning public, private, philanthropic and concessional resources; building investable pipelines; matching finance to landscape functions; and sequencing capital over time.
- **Outcome-based finance and verification systems:** Supporting the governance, data, safeguards, benefit-sharing and monitoring arrangements needed for mechanisms such as carbon, biodiversity, water, Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and other outcome-based payments, where relevant.

These functions are carried out through multiple, overlapping governance systems. Government plays a central role in connecting landscape priorities with public policy, planning, regulation, budgets and national commitments. However, achieving landscape-scale impact depends on coordination among a broader set of institutions operating within their own governance systems (Buck et al. 2017). These include local governments, community, customary and Indigenous groups, civil society, producer organizations, technical partners, private actors and locally embedded governance-support institutions (see Figure 2). These governance systems are hybrid and nested, and landscape governance infrastructure helps coordinate them to generate impact at the landscape scale.

This does not mean that all governance functions require additional institutions or funding beyond existing mandates. Many can be appropriately delivered by government agencies, community institutions, civil society organizations or other actors through their established roles. This requires the explicit assignment of responsibilities, assessment of institutional capacity and realistic provision for staff time, participation, data, travel and operating costs needed to perform them. This helps avoid both unfunded expectations and double funding of functions already covered by institutional budgets.

Costing Landscape Governance Infrastructure: Evidence from Landscape Practitioners

Practitioner experience demonstrates that landscape governance costs are identifiable, recurring and variable in predictable ways. The study drew on responses from representatives of 30 integrated landscape initiatives across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

The evidence suggests three broad cost bands for sustaining minimum governance functions:

- **USD 10,000–50,000** for relatively **small, compact contexts** with basic coordination functions.
- **USD 50,000–130,000** for **medium-sized landscapes** requiring regular facilitation, participation support, coordination and basic monitoring.
- **USD 130,000–500,000** for **larger, more contested, remote, complex or transboundary contexts** with greater staffing capacity, safeguards and information needs.



Figure 2: Map of surveyed landscapes represented regionally

Figure 3 reflects the costs of minimum viable governance functions; more advanced data systems, investment alignment, co-financing, public-private coordination, safeguards, legal support and investment orchestration are likely to require additional resources. While these findings should not be interpreted as a universal costing standard, they offer an evidence-informed basis for highlighting recurring governance costs in funding and financing designs. Applying these figures across contexts would require adjustments for local costs and purchasing power parity.

Governance costs vary according to the scale, geographic dispersion, complexity of land and resource uses, stakeholder diversity, conflict or contestation, accessibility, participation requirements, data needs, maturity of the governance process and institutional context (ISEAL Alliance 2024). Costs are further shaped by whether a landscape already has an established platform, a trusted convening institution, functioning coordination arrangements, data systems, public-sector engagement and the capacity to connect local priorities with national and international commitments.



Figure 3: Minimal funding requirements and gaps in landscape governance and implementation costs in United States Dollars (USD)

Longer-term conditions, including trust, social capital, institutional history and collective learning, also influence the level of effort required and help explain differences among landscapes with otherwise similar formal characteristics.

The most commonly underfunded functions are often the same functions that make ILAs work: facilitation, participation support, staff coordination, data systems, monitoring,

communication, trust-building, learning and institutional continuity. When these functions are under-resourced, landscape platforms become dependent on short-term projects, individual champions, unpaid labour, institutional goodwill or ad hoc support.

Table 1: Basic characteristics and governance findings of surveyed landscape initiatives

Categories	Features <i>% of participants</i>
Ecosystems	• Wide-ranging, including mountain, forest, grassland, riverine and coastal ecosystems
Land and sea uses	• Diverse, ranging from protected areas and production sites (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, pastoral) to human settlements • Mostly subsistence-based uses (50%) with only mild diversification across emerging sectors
Governance systems	• Approximately 50% have basic governance architecture, and around 30% have established multi-stakeholder platforms • Approximately 70% have legal structures that allow certainty in managing funds and stakeholder engagements • Less than 50% have adequate resources to fully engage diverse stakeholders
Factors that impede effective governance	• Unequal treatment of different stakeholder groups and priorities • Lack of long-term funding sources to meet different facilitation activities (building trust, communicating, consensus building between different actors, etc.) • Inadequate staff to support fundraising • Inadequate funds to update maps and manage data • Political uncertainty and lack of political will • Shifting donor priorities • Duplication of efforts by different facilitating bodies • Demographic changes and outmigration
Factors that have enabled sustaining activities	• Creation of social capital and trust • Participatory and inclusive planning • Close coordination with local authorities and institutions • Secure land tenure • Long-term agreements with authorities • Investing in training, monitoring, evaluation and learning activities • In-kind community investments (including effort, time, human resources and skills) • Embedding governance in existing mainstream structures • Engaging the private sector • Strategic partnerships with influential actors across the decision-making chain that create a network of relationships and alliances • Establishing dispute resolution programmes • Diversified funding
Fallouts from inadequate financing	• Erosion of trust and rise in conflicts between stakeholders • Loss of compiled data of closed projects, or inability to access updated datasets for planning, review and implementation • Lack of cross-sectoral alignment; inability to bring about convergence • Adverse impacts to continuity of initiatives and long-term planning

Why Governance Infrastructure Matters for Mobilizing Sustainable Finance

Long-term investment in a landscape requires more than a pipeline of projects. It depends on trusted platforms, shared priorities, data, coordination capacity and accountability arrangements to equitably align public, private, philanthropic, concessional and community resources with landscape-level outcomes over time.

The bioeconomy and grey-green infrastructure illustrate, in different ways, why these shared governance functions matter. Translating bioeconomy principles into practice requires context-specific decisions on resource use, rights, inclusion, ecological priorities, economic opportunities and equitable benefit-sharing. Similarly, grey-green infrastructure requires engineered and ecosystem-based assets to be planned across spatial and institutional boundaries, taking into account their impacts, dependencies and risks, as well as financing and long-term management requirements.

Landscape governance infrastructure provides the basis through which projects, sectors and sources of finance can align and sustain outcomes across a territory. Without it, investments that should reinforce one another are more likely to proceed in parallel, duplicate efforts, leave gaps or create unmanaged trade-offs.

A clear funding architecture starts by distinguishing between three related but different funding needs:

- **Recurring governance infrastructure:** The capacity to coordinate, make decisions, learn and adapt across a territory over time.
- **Variable implementation investments:** The execution of agreed projects and investments, such as restoration, livelihoods, productive assets, service delivery and grey-green infrastructure, aligned to landscape-level priorities.
- **Advanced investment orchestration:** The additional capacity to align, sequence and mobilize capital across the landscape.

Investment orchestration becomes especially important when funders and policymakers seek to scale long-term investment through ILAs. It involves aligning different sources of capital with landscape priorities, matching financing sources to functions, managing dependencies and risks, and ensuring that investments contribute to agreed ecological, social, economic and governance outcomes (Hofstetter 2025); see Table 2.

Table 2: Actions to strengthen recognition of landscape governance funding

Actor	Actions
National level policymakers	Recognize and budget for landscape governance infrastructure within national implementation frameworks, including strategies for NBSAPs, NDCs, NAPs, land degradation neutrality plans and national or subnational bioeconomy strategies.
Intergovernmental organizations and convening bodies	Recognize landscape governance infrastructure within international frameworks and make explicit calls to direct funding towards it.
Subnational and local governments	Incorporate landscape governance infrastructure into territorial development plans, sector programmes and annual budgets. Use local revenues, national transfers and co-financing arrangements, as relevant.
Landscape initiatives and practitioners	Adequately consider governance infrastructure costs to the same degree as implementation costs and actively advocate for increased funding.
Landscape support institutions (e.g. NGOs and civil society)	Support landscape initiatives and practitioners in accurately costing and budgeting for governance functions, and advocate for increased governance infrastructure funding across different funding sources.

This includes the governance capacity needed to support outcome-based finance — such as markets for carbon, biodiversity and water, as well as PES or other payment mechanisms (see Table 3). These mechanisms require more than technical measurement; they depend on credible institutions, clear rights and responsibilities, safeguards, benefit-sharing arrangements, data systems, monitoring and accountability over time.

Governance-support institutions are central to sustaining these mechanisms. They help maintain coordination, trust,

evidence, institutional memory and follow-through across project and political cycles. Predictable support for these institutions can strengthen the credibility of landscape investment pathways and enable public, private and philanthropic finance to contribute more effectively to long-term outcomes.

Financial mechanisms routinely provide for the management, due diligence, monitoring, reporting and coordination capacity required to deploy capital effectively. Landscape finance requires a comparable recognition that recurring governance and investment-orchestration functions form part of effective delivery rather than an optional addition. This does not imply a standard percentage fee, but it does require these functions and costs to be made explicit within the wider financing structure.

Conservation Trust Funds provide a well-established example of how governance and management capacity can be built into a broader financing arrangement, including where they are capitalized through debt-for-nature swaps. While not directly transferable to every landscape, they demonstrate that these functions can be explicitly designed and funded rather than left dependent on short-term projects or informal contributions.

Funding and Policy Recommendations

1. Recognize ILAs as a delivery mechanism for policy convergence.

Position ILAs as practical means to support implementation across climate, biodiversity, land, water, livelihood, resilience and emerging bioeconomy agendas.

2. Recognize landscape governance infrastructure as part of implementation packages.

Include landscape governance infrastructure in implementation frameworks for biodiversity, climate adaptation, land, water, bioeconomy and related subnational delivery agendas. Coordination, facilitation, participation, data, monitoring, learning, continuity and the institutional arrangements that sustain them should be regarded as eligible implementation functions.

3. Fund legitimate and inclusive governance systems.

Support the platforms, facilitation capacities and governance-support institutions that enable coordination across public institutions, local governments, community and customary systems, Indigenous governance systems, civil society, producer organizations, technical partners and private actors.

Table 3: Financing mechanisms and relevant governance functions

Mechanism type <i>Examples are non-exhaustive</i>	Relevant governance functions
Multi-year programme grants	Support continuity, facilitation and adaptive management.
Pooled public funding	Align public agencies around shared territorial functions.
Trust funds or landscape funds, including those capitalized through debt-for-nature swaps	Provide dedicated governance and fiduciary structures and sustain recurring coordination, monitoring and implementation support across funding cycles.
Blended structures	Combine concessional, public, philanthropic funding and private finance around agreed priorities.
Co-financing platforms	Coordinate parallel funders and reduce duplication.
Public-Private Partnership and Producer Responsibility Organization of arrangements	Support infrastructure or service delivery where commitments, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, but only establish safeguards for public purpose, accountability and legitimacy.
BIOFIN/INFF-linked processes	Provide entry points for integrating governance costs into national financing strategies.

Funding should strengthen legitimacy, representation, accountability, meaningful participation and long-term institutional capacity across project and political cycles, ensuring they are not entirely dependent on government funding.

4. Connect governance funding to mission-oriented landscape finance.

Design fit-for-purpose financial mechanisms that ensure implementation investments are supported by the governance capacity needed to align priorities, coordinate institutions, build investable pipelines, sequence investments, manage trade-offs and sustain accountability over time. Public and concessional finance can play a catalytic role by supporting platform development, early coordination, pipeline preparation, data systems and long-term public value creation.

5. Require costed governance functions in landscape investment design.

Ensure that landscape-related programmes and investments include spatially explicit and costed governance functions and institutional arrangements. These should not be treated as residual overheads, informal expectations or voluntary contributions from local institutions.

6. Shift toward predictable multi-year resourcing and applied learning.

Expand multi-year, flexible and programmatic funding modalities that sustain territorial coordination, institutional continuity and adaptive management across project cycles. Support pilot landscapes, comparative costing exercises, practitioner exchanges and documentation of good and promising practices to strengthen funding and implementation design over time.

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