

## Chapter 3

# Taking stock with the community

### Summary: Taking stock with the community

- 'Taking stock' helps the community see how FMNR can benefit them by helping to address pressing problems while building enthusiasm and commitment to the practice.
- Taking stock assessments should look at the goals of the community and the unique characteristics of the land, climate, plants and animals of the area, how these are used and, most importantly, how they have changed over time.
- Encouraging the community to reflect and understand how the land and their lives have changed over time is a powerful exercise to help land users identify the role that deforestation has played in creating their current situation.
- Information gathered from a taking stock assessment should be used to shape the design of an FMNR project, helping to ensure that it will best meet the community and environmental needs of an area.
- Ensure all stakeholders are involved and able to contribute to the taking stock activities. This will increase the likelihood of community support and buy-in to the decision to undertake FMNR.

### Resources

- [Annex 1](#) contains a set of questions to help the community take stock of their environment and plan for the future.
- [Annex 4](#) gives some examples of the variety of FMNR approaches around the world, which can be used to illustrate the range of FMNR variations that can exist and stimulate people's creativity when designing their own solutions.

**The current FMNR movement, which is changing landscapes across Africa and the world, began when one man started to see the environment he was working in more clearly. Sometimes the answers to very difficult problems are right at your feet, but nothing changes until you can see them.**

When considering using FMNR, the most important question for a person or community to ask is **whether FMNR will contribute to addressing the community's needs – both rapidly and cost effectively**. The answer to this question can come directly from a needs assessment that considers not only the needs of the landscape, but also the individual and community. We call this needs assessment **'taking stock'** with the community. This is an opportunity for people to reflect on their needs and current challenges, such as increased flooding, reduced soil fertility, increased insect attack on crops, reduced water and firewood availability, higher temperatures and winds or reduced food and fodder supply. The assessment also asks the community to consider how things have changed over time, and to analyse why these changes have occurred. Significantly, it invites people to consider their needs for the future, what their life will be like if they did nothing different at all, and how FMNR can contribute to creating the kind of life they want for themselves and their children.

For project managers, taking stock is a powerful way of engaging with the community and introducing the idea of FMNR. It also provides critical information for developing an action plan.

## How to take stock with the community

### Who should be involved?

A taking stock assessment should be done with the community that will potentially be involved in the FMNR project. This includes the farmers, pastoralists, neighbours, local leaders (traditional, religious and other thought leaders), government representatives and officers and traders (particularly those who sell firewood and charcoal), among other relevant stakeholders at the community level. It is important to ensure that all groups in the community are included – such as women, men, youth, older people and people with disabilities – so that all uses of the landscape and knowledge are represented.

### How to go about it?

The taking stock assessment is best undertaken in a workshop format, as this level of formality, even if fairly low-key, highlights the seriousness of the topic being discussed. The assessment can also be conducted through group discussions or site visits to multiple locations in the area.

### Topics to cover when taking stock

The taking stock assessment covers six main topics, reflecting on how these have changed over time and the causes of these changes.

1. Current situation and goals of the community.
2. Type(s) of land.
3. Land use.
4. Climate and disaster risks.
5. Plants and animals.
6. Social and cultural characteristics of the community.

Examining changes over time is a powerful tool when discussing FMNR within a community. Reflections on how the environment and community were before land became degraded or deforested might come from older people or even children if the environment has been degraded over a short period of time.

The following section describes in more detail the type of information that should be gathered as part of each of these topics. A tool in [Annex I](#) provides a list of questions that can be drawn upon when developing questionnaires or workshop activities for completing a taking stock assessment.

When undertaking these activities, consider capturing the community's account in some way through pictures, quotes and testimonies. This will be powerful information to reflect upon when designing the FMNR project, and help provide a description of the environment and community at a point in time before FMNR was introduced, or before FMNR was expanded if already present in the area. This information is also of great value for evaluations and for communities to reflect on their achievements as time passes.

Questions that should be considered when taking stock include:

### **1. What is the current situation, and what are the goals of the individuals/community who will manage the trees?**

In discussions about how to ensure FMNR is useful in a specific community, it is important to understand what individual and/or community goals are, and how FMNR can help to achieve them. To better understand these goals, it's important to understand the current situation in the community. What are the biggest and most pressing challenges?

Community members should list goals they have for their land, work and lives that are affected by the health and productivity of their land. **The FMNR project will ultimately be built to facilitate achievement of these goals.** Goals should be recorded and used in the [FMNR Action Planning](#) activity described in [Chapter 5](#).

### **2. What type(s) of land are you working with?**

Communities live and practice FMNR in a wide variety of places, including deserts, grasslands, agricultural land, forests and wetlands, among others.

Some locations are humid; some are dry. They can be cold or hot. They may include mountains, valleys and plains, and provide habitat for a wide variety of trees, other plants and animals.

FMNR planning begins by understanding the characteristics of the land you are working with and how they relate to FMNR success.

### **3. How is the land used?**

Truly successful and sustainable FMNR projects meet the needs of the people practising it while enhancing the environmental integrity and function of the landscape. Therefore, it is important to understand how the people who live and work there use their land, as well as what key elements need to be restored and maintained in order to ensure environmental integrity and function.

The types of trees managed, how many trees are regenerated, and even the way that a regenerated tree is pruned, will be determined in part by how each FMNR practitioner wants to use and benefit from their land and trees, as well as the needs of the environment.

Crop farmers, for example, may practice FMNR differently from foresters, who may do things differently from migratory herders or urban land owners. A land user interested mainly in firewood will prune differently than someone seeking building poles, or fertiliser for crops. But all can shape FMNR to meet their needs and help them achieve their desired outcomes.

Restoring tree cover on hilltops and along stream banks may, on the surface, appear unimportant to a community, but the value of reduced flooding and erosion, increased ground water recharge and the benefits of increased biodiversity and habitat are very important for environmental function, and ultimately for the productivity and profitability of more intensively utilised land, such as cropping and grazing areas.

### **4. What is the local climate? What are the disaster risks in the area?**

Because FMNR works with trees, it will influence and be influenced by the climate of the place it is practised in. An assessment of the environment will look into how much rainfall the area receives, when the rains come, what happens to the rainwater, what the temperatures are, what types of storms are to be expected, and any other important climate information that will affect decisions about how and where to do FMNR.

While FMNR can work in most ecological zones, it tends to be a favoured practice in lower rainfall areas where tree planting is difficult and where there are fewer high-value alternative land uses to choose from.

It is also necessary to be aware of what disaster risks occur in the area: many of these can be climate based, such as drought, floods and storms, while others may include natural disasters such as earthquakes or landslides.

## 5. What plants and animals occur naturally in the area?

One of the first things that FMNR practitioners need to understand is what types of trees grow in their area, and what types of stumps or self-sown seedlings are available to be managed with FMNR practices. In some landscapes, much of the original vegetation has been (or appears to be) completely removed. It is important to begin compiling lists of indigenous plant species and their characteristics and uses through direct observation, by talking to elders and by researching forestry reference materials. Often, women are the repository of extensive botanical knowledge – encourage them to share this experience by listing the traditional uses of each species. Often this activity will prove to be a critical step in reviving interest in landscape restoration, as it may touch on feelings of remorse for the rich heritage that has been lost, and kindle desires to bring it back. It is also helpful to understand what harmful and beneficial insects, animals and birds are present in the environment, and what other types of plants are common there.

## 6. Social and cultural characteristics of the community

It is important to understand how the community is organised, including what leadership and government structures, as well as influential groups and leaders, exist. These questions can start to inform the identification of key stakeholders that may need to be involved in any future FMNR projects. A template to capture this information can be found in [Annex 2](#).

Ask what laws or community agreements (formal or cultural/traditional) influence the management of trees or natural resources. It is important to have an understanding about land ownership arrangements, as these are often very influential in how people decide to manage trees on their land. Knowing how the community has changed over time in terms of population, wealth and cultural aspects, such as religion and relationships with the natural resources, will also help to explain how some practices have changed over time. They can also remind the community of any close cultural relationships with nature that may have been held in the past.

## 7. Changes over time?

In each area of your assessment, you will also need to look at changes that have occurred over time. Identifying how the environment has changed, over what span of time and, whenever possible, what has caused those changes will help communities understand the best ways to use FMNR to make positive progress.

Most communities considering practising FMNR do so because their environment has changed for the worse over time, and they now find it more difficult to survive, let alone thrive. Changes in soil fertility, crop yields and weather patterns, the amount of water available to meet people's and animals' needs, and any other changes that affect people's lives and work, are all important to understand when deciding how to best use FMNR.

It is equally important to discuss the reasons for these changes. Conflict, changes in population and changes in laws and policies may all lead to changes in the local environment. While climate change is having a huge impact in some areas, other areas are less affected.

## Using the taking stock assessment

If assessing the local environment has identified gaps in environmental health that FMNR can help to fill, there's an opportunity to introduce the practice through a facilitator or experienced practitioner (we call these people FMNR champions – see [Chapter 5](#) for more information). This can be done by following these three steps:

1. Introduce the concept of FMNR to the community, or identify a version of it that has been practised there in the past. This should involve a physical demonstration on how to do FMNR; partly because not everybody will understand FMNR through a verbal description, and partly because it's fun and engaging.
2. Identify and clarify any questions and concerns. This is particularly important, as overzealous FMNR trainers can forget that they too were once sceptical, and that there is a process everybody needs to go through to accept new ideas.
3. Provide a process for the community to make informed decisions about whether FMNR is the right choice for them. This could involve:
  - a. Reflecting on information gathered about the past, present and future to help people accept that continuing with business as usual will result in disaster.
  - b. Presenting the Niger case study as a before-and-after example of FMNR. There are films and written resources available on the FMNR Hub website about this story, and many other examples.
  - c. Inviting the community on a farm or field walk to identify tree stumps, tree species and their traditional usage. This information should be recorded to begin to develop a local species list. See [Annex 5](#) for a template to help with this.
  - d. Look for examples of 'positive deviance', ie. individuals who are already practising some form of FMNR. Ask them to share why they do it.
  - e. Provide the community with a chance to vote or decide in another way if they would like to undertake FMNR.

### What will FMNR look like here?

In general, it is not so much the environment as the land use that determines what FMNR looks like. FMNR is defined by a set of principles. Application of these principles will be strongly moulded by the objectives of the land users, which could include increasing crop yield, diversifying income sources, increasing livestock production, boosting forest production or protecting biodiversity. Ideally, a holistic approach will be taken to accommodate the varied needs across the landscape and result in optimum economic, social and environmental benefits.

The diagram in Table 1 on page 31 shows how characteristics of FMNR may vary with different land uses. Apart from land use, the tree species present will also play a big role in defining what FMNR looks like in different places. Farmers will regenerate very valuable trees on farmland even if they compete with crops if the potential profit from the trees is greater than the value derived from crops alone. Alternatively, farmers will select some of the many tree species that do not compete with crops, which often can enhance crop performance (Figure 1). Additional information about tree species selection and variations in FMNR can be found in [Chapter 4](#). It is important to remember that while FMNR is defined by a set of principles, each community and land user is free to adjust these practices to meet their needs. This may also involve the experimentation and adaptation of practices over time.



**Figure 1** A field where FMNR is being practised. Uganda (2018). Photo: T. Rinaudo

**Table 1** How FMNR characteristics vary across different land use types

Land use	Cropping	Pasture	Hillslopes or degraded communal land	Forests
<b>Tree density</b>	Lower density (approximately 40 trees per hectare).	Moderate density (approximately 50-100 trees per hectare).		High density, depending on rainfall. (approximately 1,000-1,500 trees per hectare).
<b>Types of trees or shrubs regenerated</b>	Species that are high value or beneficial to crops.	Fodder species, or species with other uses such as medicine or food.  Shrubs and grassland species may also be regenerated.	Indigenous species that promote soil conservation, or can be used for firewood.	Species with a range of community values as well as biodiversity conservation values.
<b>Species diversity</b>	Lower diversity. Trees species selected primarily for crop interaction and other uses.	Moderate diversity of species to meet fodder, firewood and soil conservation needs.  Grass and shrub species may also be regenerated.		Maximum diversity of species to be encouraged, including trees, shrubs and grasses.