

EVENT REPORT

Forest Landscape Restoration Symposium and Reception

<https://elti.yale.edu/events/forest-landscape-restoration-symposium-and-reception>

June 6, 2025

Kigali, Rwanda

A field course organized by:

- The Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI), Yale School of the Environment
- Wildlife Conservation Society Rwanda (WCS)



David Neidel shares the ELTI model with symposium participants.

Background: The Congo Nile Divide (CND) region of Rwanda, which is prone to landslides, flooding, and soil erosion due to steep slopes, intensive agriculture, and high population density, is among the landscapes of highest priority for restoration in Rwanda. Projects to address these challenges include the Green Climate Fund CND project, World Resources Institute's Restore Local initiative, and other locally led initiatives. To date, however, restoration has been characterized largely by the use of a small number of tree species, mostly exotic, that leave the landscape depleted of the biodiversity that would contribute to climate resilience and farm productivity through erosion control, water regulation, pollinator function, and a more diversified local economy. Better integrating native trees into the landscape in the form of riparian buffers, agroforestry, steep slope reforestation, and more would significantly enhance climate change mitigation and adaptation

ELTI is an initiative of:

Yale SCHOOL OF THE ENVIRONMENT
The Forest School



Symposium attendee Nelly Grace Bedijo speaks about the challenges of restoration in Uganda.

in Rwanda. To realize effective restoration in this high-priority landscape, information on how to propagate, cultivate, and manage native tree species on farms and throughout the landscape needs to be expanded and made accessible through field guides and field-based training for decision-makers, agroforestry extensionists, and farmers.

To accomplish these objectives, Wildlife Conservation Society Rwanda (WCS) and the Yale School of the Environment's Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI) are building a capacity development program focused on native species restoration and agroforestry systems in the CND. Training events will be in the form of multiday courses or course series in which participants will gain technical knowledge and skills to apply directly in restoration efforts.

The ELTI Rwanda program was launched in November 2024 after a 10-month scoping and partnership building process. The team then conducted a needs assessment for capacity building in forest and landscape restoration (FLR) that was completed in February 2025. In the lead-up to the July 2025 inaugural field course for Rwanda FLR practitioners, the ELTI team held a symposium and reception to bring together a variety of stakeholders and share progress toward the country's ambitious restoration goals.

Objectives: The event was designed to connect the ELTI team, including Grace Bachmann (ELTI's Rwanda program coordinator, WCS), David Neidel (ELTI's global strategy advisor, Center for International Forestry Research-World Agroforestry Center), and Amy Vedder (lecturer, Yale School of the Environment), and ELTI course alumni with each other and the community of practice in Rwanda and throughout the region. The symposium and reception were planned with the following goals:



Symposium attendee Josiane Aboniyo presents a flash talk.

- Share ELTI's model with a wide range of stakeholders and increase awareness of the launch of ELTI's program in Rwanda.
- Gather Rwandan stakeholders together to connect them with each other and create momentum toward the creation of a community of practice for FLR.
- Invite ELTI alumni to share their experience and knowledge with a broad audience and connect alumni with each other, the new Rwanda program, and other practitioners.

Content: The event, which was held at Grazia Apartments in Kimihurura, Kigali, opened with a welcome by Bachmann and remarks by Michel Masozera (director, policy and partnerships for Africa, WCS). Neidel then made a presentation on ELTI's global capacity building model, offering examples from Panama and the Philippines. Ivan Gasangwa (manager, forest research division, Rwanda Forestry Authority) and Bonaventure Ntirugulirwa (research fellow, forest productivity and improvement, Rwanda Forestry Authority) then gave keynote addresses on the Rwanda Forestry Authority's role in internationally funded landscape restoration projects and work on indigenous species research and seed sourcing.

During the second part of the symposium, alumni of the ELTI Tropical Forest Landscapes Certificate Program (TFL) gave flash talks, five-to-ten-minute presentations describing their restoration work and barriers and solutions to implementing restoration in their contexts. They each also shared an aspect of the ELTI program experience that altered their approaches to restoration. Josiane Aboniyo (TFL '25; technical officer for Africa, International Union for Conservation of Nature/Ramsar Convention) presented "Mangrove Conservation and Restoration as a Nature-Based Solution in Mombasa, Kenya." Aimable Hafashimana (TFL '25; district coordinator, Rwanda FLR, One Acre Fund) presented "Restoring Landscapes, Empowering Communities: My Role in Rwanda's Forest Landscape Restoration." Margaret Vernon (TFL '22; impact director, One Acre Fund) presented "One Acre Fund & Agroforestry-Led FLR."

The symposium ended with a networking reception and a light dinner for all participants.



KEFA Jacques

Left to right: Symposium attendee David Buyoya, Amy Vedder, Grace Bachmann, and another attendee discuss native species over coffee and refreshments.

Participants: This event was held for ELTI online course alumni based in East and Central Africa and Rwandan FLR practitioners, students, researchers, and other professionals. The 35 participants, including nine ELTI alumni, came from six countries.

Outcomes and follow-up: The symposium produced several outcomes related to strengthening FLR coordination and implementation in the region:

- Identification of a strong interest in ELTI courses and programming beyond what can be accommodated in the July 2025 inaugural field course.
- Identification of university-level practitioners and recent graduates' need for access to high-quality restoration training.
- Draft of a terms of reference document for an FLR community of practice by Michel Masozera and Juliet Kabera (director general, Rwanda Environment Management Authority).

This event was possible thanks to Yale in the World Fund, which is administered by the Yale Office of International Affairs.