

This case study is one of several produced by the **CLARA** network to coincide with the publication of the IPCC Special Report on Land. We're showcasing **CLARA** member climate solutions which demonstrate the **rights-based, low-emission development pathways** needed for reducing emissions while **promoting livelihoods** and **ecosystem integrity**.

# Restoration of woodlands reinvigorates local economies and increases biodiversity

Collective management of North Assynt Estate in Scotland has resulted in the successful restoration of an ecosystem and diversification of sources of local income

## Organisations and individuals involved

Movement Reforesting Scotland  
(local crofter fisherman,  
local tenants)

Fern

**Kelsey Perlman, Forest and  
Climate campaigner**  
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## Location

8400-hectare North Assynt Estate  
on the North-West coast of Scotland



**COLLECTIVE PURCHASE BY** local residents of an 8400- hectare estate in Scotland has allowed 800 hectares of woodland to be restored. Previously, this area was used for sheep grazing, and as shooting areas, and although this use of the land benefited a few people (namely the private landowners), it did not provide the environmental and social benefits which are now evident.

The growth of this native woodland composed of birches, rowans, pine and willows is a haven for wildlife and creates a rich ecosystem. As such, allowing bare hillsides to rewild by removing sheep has contributed to creating a more biodiverse landscape than was previously present. Crucially, this woodland is now acting as a new carbon sink. Forest restoration must be included within UK and international climate goals to 2030, 2050 and beyond. However, forest restoration and the resulting carbon sequestration must go hand in hand with the reduction of emissions at the source—the two are not mutually exclusive, nor should they ever be.

In addition to environmental benefits, the woodland also provides more jobs than sheep farming. The woodland continues to provide income from deer hunting which was already present, but further income is generated from tourism, from walkers following the “North Coast 500” road, and seasonal sightseers. Tree orchards, tourist paths and fuelwood projects are underway.

Crofters were initially provided with grants from the Scottish Government to plant trees, and provided with income to compensate for not keeping sheep on the land. However, income is now such that the benefits of woodland over sheep grazing are clear. The purchase of this land is setting a precedent for land reform in Scotland, much of which has historically been under the private ownership of large estates. More communities across Scotland are now starting to purchase land as they recognise the benefits of reforestation for the environment and society.

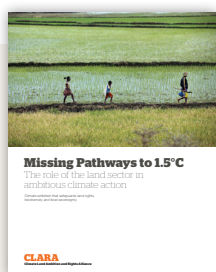
# Testimony

**Kelsey Perlman, Campaigner, Fern**

“There is little “spare” land on the planet today, and the prospect of dedicating large areas of land to absorbing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> raises fears of taking land away from communities. So, to succeed, this project works with and complements local customary land needs and rights. The restored and expanded woodland provides a range of economic and health benefits as well as supporting biodiverse ecosystems. This sets a precedent for more projects which bring new employment and income, which strengthen communities’ connection to nature, and contribute to national and international climate goals.”

## ‘Missing Pathways’ to climate action

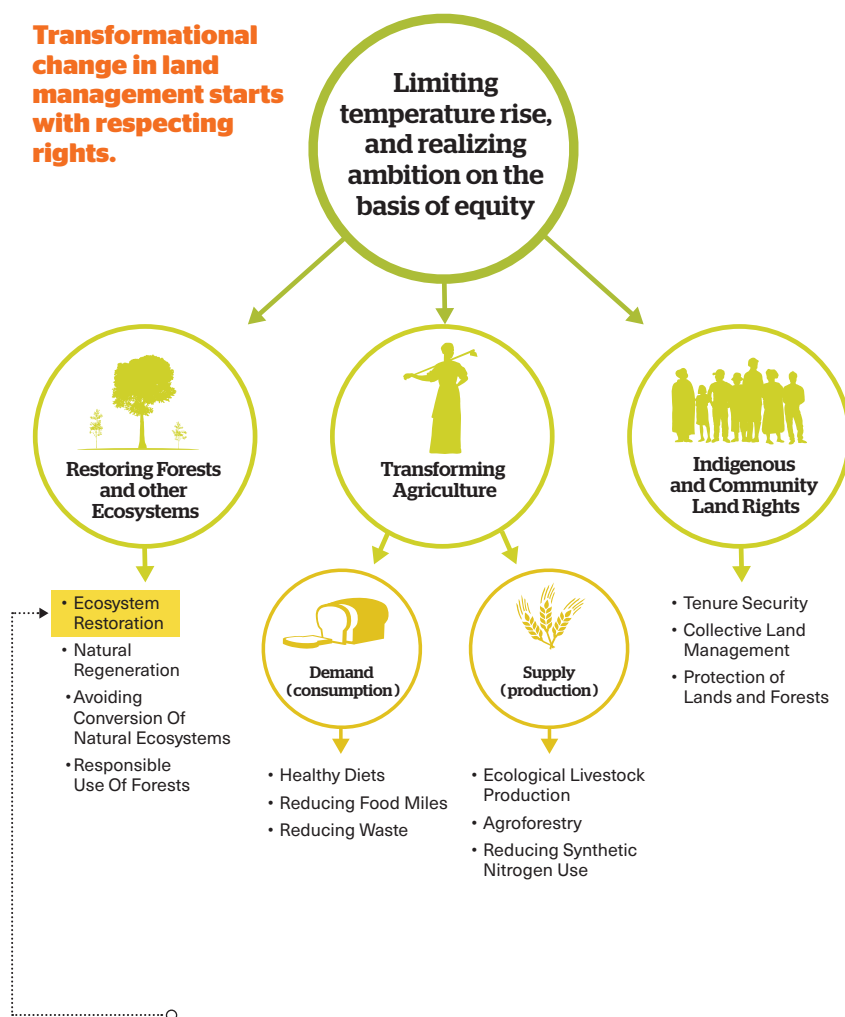
Last year, CLARA published the report ‘Missing Pathways’, identifying areas of global mitigation ambition rooted in land rights, restoration, agroecology, and food system change.



This example follows ‘Missing Pathways’ to climate action by...

Valuing the dual benefits (to both local communities and to the environment) of restoration. The restoration of the land that was continually grazed allows for increased carbon capture in the soil and trees, and demonstrates how natural ecosystems can be a key ally as we mobilize against climate crisis. Such actions also reinforce the existing roles of forests as anchors of ecosystems and the services that they bring to people and nature. Approaching restoration from a rights perspective which puts local communities first also ensures longevity and relative lack of conflict thanks to local leadership and commitment to the project into the future. Done correctly, rewilding and restoration can be pro-poor and a force for democracy and a fairer future.

**Transformational change in land management starts with respecting rights.**



North Assynt is exemplary of ecosystem restoration which works with and complements local customary land needs and rights.

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