

KIEL WORKING PAPER

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Governance of Global
Commons:
The Example of Blue
Carbon Ecosystems



No. 2201 | November 2021

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THE NEED FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE OF GLOBAL COMMONS: THE EXAMPLE OF BLUE CARBON ECOSYSTEMS

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To limit global warming to 1.5°C, vast amounts of CO₂ will have to be removed from the atmosphere via Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR). Enhancing the CO₂ sequestration of ecosystems will require not just one approach but a portfolio of CDR options, including so-called nature-based approaches alongside CDR options that are perceived as more technical. Creating a CDR “supply curve” would however imply that all CDR approaches are considered to be perfect substitutes. The various co-benefits of nature-based CDR approaches militate against this as their common-pool resource characteristics could result in undesired outcomes for CO₂-only incentive schemes. We discuss this aspect of nature-based solutions in connection with the enhancement of blue carbon ecosystems (BCE) such as mangrove or seagrass habitats. Enhancing BCEs can indeed contribute to CO₂ sequestration, but the value of their carbon storage is low compared to the overall contribution of their ecosystem services to wealth. Furthermore, they are *de facto* open-access regimes with unclear property rights. Hence, payment schemes that only compensate BCE carbon sequestration could create tradeoffs at the expense of other important ecosystem services and might not result in socially optimal outcomes. Accordingly, one chance for preserving and restoring BCEs lies in the consideration of all services in potential compensation schemes for local communities. Also, local contexts, management structures, and benefit-sharing rules are crucial factors to be taken into account when setting up international payment schemes to support the use of BCEs and other nature- or ecosystem-based CDR. However, regarding these options as the only hope of achieving more CDR will very probably not bring about the desired outcome, either for climate mitigation or for ecosystem preservation. On the other hand, unhalted degradation will make matters worse due to the large amounts of stored carbon that would be released. Hence, countries committed to climate mitigation in line with the Paris targets should not hide behind vague pledges to enhance natural sinks for removing atmospheric CO₂ but commit to scaling up engineered CDR.

Keywords: Carbon Dioxide Removal, nature-based solutions, blue carbon ecosystems, common pool resources, governance, property rights

JEL: K33, Q54, Q58

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We would like to thank Jan Schnellenbach and Andrew Jenkins for helpful comments and suggestions. The usual caveats apply.

1 Introduction

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that as of 2020 the limit for the emission of CO₂ in net terms is 400 Gt if the increase in global surface air temperature is to be limited to 1.5°C with a probability of 67% (IPCC, 2021). This means that emission scenarios in line with this remaining carbon budget entail a median of 730 Gt atmospheric carbon dioxide removal (CDR) by the end of the century in addition to globally coordinated deep emission cuts (Rogelj et al., 2018). Insufficient greenhouse-gas and (especially) non-CO₂ mitigation would require larger amounts of CDR, as would the reduction of net uptake by carbon sinks.

A distinction has been proposed between engineered, more technical, and nature-based solutions for CDR (Seddon et al., 2020a, 2020b), with current policies favoring atmospheric carbon removal via nature-based solutions (Seddon et al., 2019; Buylov et al., 2021). However, the distinction between engineered and nature-based solutions is by no means clear-cut but subject to societal construction (Bellamy and Osaka, 2020; Bertram and Merk, 2020). Notably for nature-based solutions, the dividing lines between preserving, restoring, and creating natural carbon sinks to remove atmospheric carbon are anything but well-defined (Macreadie et al., 2019). The various nature-based CDR solutions would be applied in a (local) commons context with unclear property rights regarding the carbon removed and the potential co-benefits. This raises the question of how governable these approaches are in a climate-policy context.

Recent assessments of nature-based and engineered CDR approaches focus primarily on their technological availability and the potential scale of CO₂ removal (Royal Society, 2018; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019), neglecting the different governance challenges associated with these approaches. On the one hand, engineered solutions such as Direct Air Capture and Storage (DACCS) with verification of removal, permanent storage, and property rights, would seem to be candidates for a decentralized, market-based integration into climate policies by including them, for example, in emissions and offset trading (Rickels et al., 2021). By contrast, and as things stand at the moment, various nature-based solutions would be realized in open-access regimes with unclear property rights regarding the removal of carbon. At the same time, these solutions could provide a number of co-benefits for different user groups, ranging from enhancing the local population's livelihood and sustaining biodiversity to providing intangible values enhancing the cultural heritage (Smith et al., 2019). However, applying nature-based solutions maximizing carbon removal only will almost certainly not be an appropriate way of realizing or even maintaining the various co-benefits. This raises the question of which benefits should be prioritized in a socially optimal management strategy. Accordingly, integrating enhanced CO₂ removal via nature-based solutions into (international) climate policy may not only be difficult because of the absence of property rights but in fact may actively make matters worse as a carbon-only price signal might not only fail to bring about socially optimal outcomes but might even leave the whole system in a less desirable state than it was in before (cf. e.g. Atchison, 2019; Song et al., 2021).

Here we intend to discuss potential governance challenges arising for nature-based CDR in a local-commons context. While land-based solutions, especially forests, have received a lot of attention in the past (see e.g. Hatcher, 2009), this is not the case for ocean-based solutions. We thus focus

on different blue carbon ecosystems (BCEs), their potential for sequestering and storing carbon, and the management challenges they involve. BCEs can often be categorized as open-access and are affected by a broad variety of user groups since they provide various co-benefits for coastal communities. In discussing nature-based solutions in marine ecosystems, our aim is also to link the more recent (scientific) literature on blue carbon CDR with the established literature on common-pool resources management by pointing to empirical findings from forest management and the carbon-removal management associated with it.

2 Blue carbon sequestration and storage

Coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, salt marshes, or seagrass meadows provide various services for ecosystems, including carbon uptake and storage. This is reflected in the introduction of the term “blue carbon” to heighten public awareness of the importance of the carbon sequestration potential of marine and coastal ecosystems (Nellemann et al., 2009; Macreadie et al., 2019; Lovelock and Duarte, 2019). However, the term blue carbon is not limited to the ecosystems listed above. Other such systems like macroalgae ecosystems that “may be supporting higher global C burial rates than seagrass, tidal marshes, and mangroves combined” (Macreadie et al., 2019, p. 4) are also covered by the term.

While mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrass meadows sequester carbon per unit area at significantly higher rates than forests (cf. e.g. Duarte et al., 2010; Mcleod et al., 2011), their aggregate annual sequestration is rather low. According to Bertram et al. (2021) mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrass meadows have an annual carbon sequestration of 24.0 [SEM 3.2] MtC y⁻¹, 13.4 [SEM 1.4] Mt C y⁻¹, and 43.9 [SEM 12.1] MtC y⁻¹, respectively, totaling 81.2 MtC y⁻¹ across all these BCEs. This is less than one percent of the annual fossil fuel and industrial CO₂ emissions in 2020 (10.9 GtC, Friedlingstein et al., 2020). Although their marginal carbon removal per area is high, the prospects of achieving “extra” CDR via restoration are fairly low since suitable areas are limited. Assuming that 40 percent of historical BCEs were restored, the estimated additional annual removal would be about 50 MtC by the year 2050 (Williamson, 2022). Similarly, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019) estimate that in US coastal wetlands an additional cumulative removal of 1,500 MtC by 2100 could be achieved via various approaches to restoration.

Although areas suitable for BCE restoration are limited, these habitats store large amounts of carbon and, unlike terrestrial forests, are capable of sequestering carbon continuously as “sediments accrete vertically in response to rising sea level” (Mcleod et al., 2011, p. 554). Carbon density is highest for mangroves (502 tC ha⁻¹), followed by marshes (265 tC ha⁻¹) and seagrasses (111 tC ha⁻¹), resulting in estimated global carbon stocks of 7.3 GtC for mangroves, 5.6 GtC for marshes, and 5 GtC for seagrass meadows (Goldstein et al., 2020). In comparison with terrestrial ecosystems, only peatlands (~500 tC ha⁻¹) can match the carbon density of mangrove ecosystems. The share of BCEs’ soil carbon in total carbon (biomass + soil carbon) is significantly larger than the respective share for most types of terrestrial forest. Furthermore, the percentage of initial soil-organic carbon typically lost in conversion is substantially larger for BCEs (81% for mangroves) than for terrestrial forests (< 30%). For mangroves, for instance, nearly two-thirds of the carbon initially stored in the biomass or the soil is considered irrecoverable (Goldstein et al., 2020). Depending on assumed carbon density and annual hectares lost, emissions from the decline of mangroves alone could lie

between 40 and 186 MtC y^{-1} (Howard et al., 2017), the latter being slightly below fossil and industrial CO₂ emissions in Germany in 2019 (192 MtC, Friedlingstein et al., 2020).

It should be noted that the term blue carbon is not restricted to naturally occurring carbon sequestration in ecosystems but also includes biological carbon fixation and utilization of marine biomass. Carbon fixed in marine micro- and macroalgae could be turned into fuels or used for electricity generation and could provide CDR when combined with carbon capture and storage (Krause-Jensen and Duarte, 2016; Williamson et al., 2022). Focusing on areas with favorable climatic and environmental conditions, feasible annual removal is estimated to range between 0.8 and 1.1 GtC (Williamson et al., 2022). Achieving such removal would require managed macroalgae plantations via aquaculture (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019; Williamson et al. 2022).

3 Blue carbon ecosystems: benefits, users, property rights, and governance

Though the (additional) carbon sequestration potential of BCEs is quite low, they provide a multitude of other benefits on different geographical scales (see Table 1). They contribute to all the main categories of ecosystem services established in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005): (1) *supporting services* by sediment formation, nutrient cycling, and as a habitat for aquatic species; (2) *provisioning* of food and materials, like timber or fish stocks; (3) *regulating services*, as BCEs purify the water through their absorption of pollutants and excess nutrients, reduce coastal erosion, offer protection against floods, and sequester significant amounts of carbon; (4) *cultural services* in the form of spiritual or recreational value to residents and tourists (Vegh et al., 2019). The regulating services in particular can play an important role in mitigating and adapting to climate change (Duarte et al., 2013), especially since BCEs are able to self-maintain and even repair after major storms (Gedan et al., 2011) and even hold out prospects for adaptation to future sea-level rise (Williamson et al., 2022).

Costanza et al. (2014) estimate the global value of coastal ecosystems, including all coastal ecosystem services, to be US\$ 31.6 tr yr^{-1} . In comparison, Bertram et al. (2021) estimate the value of global BCE carbon storage to be one order of magnitude lower, at around US\$190.7 bn yr^{-1} (\pm 29.5 bn). Thus, the value of natural, non-enhanced carbon storage is quite low compared to BCEs' overall contribution to wealth. Also accounting for associated non-CO₂ emissions, in particular CH₄, BCE restoration targeted at carbon sequestration only is estimated to cost between 491 USD/tCO₂ and 560 USD/tCO₂ for coastal wetlands and mangrove restoration, respectively (Taillardat et al., 2020). By contrast, piggy-backing carbon removal onto BCE restoration projects implemented for other purposes than carbon sequestration would result in additional carbon-removal monitoring costs between 0.75 and 4 USD/tCO₂ for tidal wetlands and seagrass meadows, respectively (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019).

While overall benefits from existing BCEs are high, their preservation is challenging as they are under pressure from developments at local, regional, and global levels. Examples include deforestation, land-use change, and boating or dredging. In particular, BCEs are impacted by eutrophication caused by agricultural runoff (see Table 1; De los Santos et al., 2019; Lovelock et al., 2019). The sources of pressure can be characterized as diffuse, especially in connection with

agricultural runoff, as it is often difficult to attribute non-point source pollution to a specific actor. In addition, BCEs are embedded in ecological interconnections that exacerbate the negative effects of BCE loss (Valdez et al., 2020). For example, Peterson and Heck (2001) demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between seagrass and mussels, which latter bury nutrients in sea sediments. In a large-scale restoration project, Orth et al. (2020) observe a massive spillover from restoring seagrass meadows, finding that the seeded area of 213 ha resulted in a total revegetated area of 3612 ha. In turn, Lovelock et al. (2019) point out that seagrass meadows may degrade if nearby mangroves or salt marshes are lost.

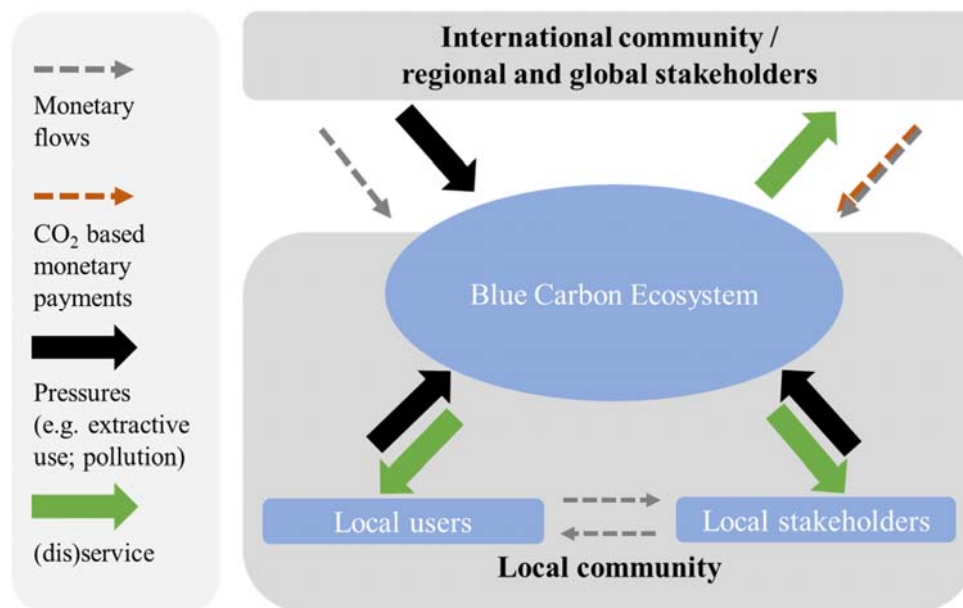


Figure 1: Idealized payment scheme for internalizing externalities (pressures and (dis)services) on different scales, assuming that the local community – consisting of users and other stakeholders - is the holder of the property rights.

While the ecological interactions between pressures on BCEs at local, regional, and global levels are relatively well studied, this is less the case for the impacts of management practices and governance regimes. To manage BCEs effectively and to achieve a socially optimal outcome, pressures on, and co-benefits provided by, BCEs have to be understood and considered. In a stylized management approach, the various services and disservices, plus pressures on the BCEs, would be quantified to derive optimal payments and compensations between the various stakeholders to achieve socially optimal BCE conditions.¹ The management approaches related to

¹ One could argue that “pressures” and “services” are two sides of the same coin, as the services of the ecosystem may be to absorb pressure, i.e. eutrophication as a “pressure” may be counterbalanced by the purification “service” of the ecosystem. However, a pressure (negative externality) may be so strong as to actually destroy the ecosystem. Accordingly, we explicitly include both “pressures” and “services.”

CDR that are currently under discussion are often based on the idea that regional and global stakeholders should compensate a local community providing access to a BCE for services like carbon storage by way of some international payment scheme (e.g. similar to REDD+) through international institutions. Figure 1 illustrates this approach, taking into account the internalization of further services like water purification and depicting an idealized payment scheme with the local community as property-rights holder. If compensation for CDR alone were paid, other ecosystem (dis)services and pressures would be ignored, thus leading to a non-optimal outcome. Figure 1 illustrates this situation by showing CO₂-based monetary payments in a different color. Besides ignoring other regional and international services (or pressures), local governance and benefit-sharing structures are frequently not firmly established. The focus on payments for CDR only may lead to local governance geared to international money flows, thus leading to a relative neglect of local co-benefits and moving further away from the social optimum.

Policy recommendations for industrialized countries or regions like California (Wedding et al., 2021) might focus on the establishment and extension of systems monitoring the environmental, economic, and social benefits of BCEs, including carbon storage and sequestration, to increase incentives for the protection of marine areas. This could increase the attention given to BCEs in (sub-)national climate policies and support the establishment of new MPAs aiming for CDR as one benefit among others. However, the environmental outcomes of creating MPAs, such as an increase in the abundance of fish biomass and species, depends not only on the size, age, and geographical isolation of an MPA, but also on the rules for access to the MPA and the enforcement of protection (Edgar et al., 2014). While rich industrialized countries may be able to satisfy the three main conditions (1) availability of resources to monitor the state and the benefits of BCEs, (2) strict limitation of access for the local population, and (3) the capacity to enforce these rules, this is hardly ever the case in less developed countries. For example, if the local population depends on extractive uses like timber or fodder from mangrove forests to sustain their livelihoods, they will oppose the total closure of the area (e.g. Badola et al., 2012; Roy, 2016). At the same time, the provision of other services like storm protection or nursery habitats can increase local support for mangrove conservation and restoration (Stone et al., 2008; López-Medellín et al., 2011; Badola et al., 2012).

External actors whose goal it is to create offsets for international carbon markets may be perceived as intruders (Gannon and Hulme, 2018). This also underlines the importance of the local context and the inclusion of local interests in management. While this has long been recognized as a crucial factor in the successful management of mangrove forests (for an overview see Arumugam et al. 2020), the mere inclusion of local stakeholders is not sufficient in itself. Trust in local management and a clear benefit-sharing scheme are equally important (Arumugam et al., 2020; Ha et al., 2012). Problems besetting the design and implementation of such schemes in reality are (1) the fact that benefits and negative externalities are currently poorly quantified, (2) coastal areas are often open-access regimes, hence the property rights for the actual BCE are unclear, and (3) property rights for the services and disservices extending beyond the area covered by the BCE are unclear. It is thus hard to imagine how a decentralized payment scheme could be implemented that would properly internalize all these (dis)services, including those extending beyond local communities.

4 Property-rights regimes and lessons to be learned from the literature on common-pool resources (CPR)

The net emissions from forestry and other land-uses (FOLU) including deforestation accounted for 11% on average of annual GHG emissions between 2007 and 2016 (IPCC 2019). This being so, international schemes have been discussed to compensate for (local) income losses resulting from refraining from deforestation (Hatcher, 2009). The idea is to internalize global benefits via payment schemes so that incentives to avoid deforestation are in place. Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) in combination with conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+) are frameworks developed under the UNFCCC to provide such incentives. However, REDD or REDD+ have been criticized for their failure to reduce deforestation and the fact that so far their contribution to climate change mitigation has been overestimated (West et al., 2020). One reason brought forward for the poor performance of this framework is that local communities and stakeholders have not been properly involved. The CPR literature has focused on community forest management (CFM) and the extent to which tenure rights can be included in paying compensation. Tenure rights or CFM on their own may in many cases not only be capable of promoting desirable ecological outcomes. The costs of (only) formally recognizing communities' tenure rights are significantly lower than the expense involved in setting up and monitoring international schemes such as REDD (Hatcher, 2009).

Several empirical studies investigating CPR governance performance focus on forest management and thus provide potential insights for nature-based CDR. Drawing upon data from the *International Forestry Resources and Institutions* (IFRI) research network, Hayes (2006) finds no statistically significant difference in forest conditions between legally protected areas (e.g., national parks or wilderness areas) and areas governed by local communities, suggesting that the outcomes of installing protected areas are not necessarily superior to the outcomes of management regimes with appropriate rules and the involvement of locals in CPR forests.

Also referring to the IFRI project database, Chhatre and Agrawal (2008) demonstrate that local enforcement is strongly associated with forest regeneration. Furthermore, Chhatre and Agrwal (2009) find that local rule-making autonomy facilitates “win-win outcomes,” i.e., improvements in livelihoods *and* carbon storage. From the same data, Coleman (2009) concludes that local sanctioning and monitoring seems to be a more decisive factor than the form of ownership. Investigating the determinants of local monitoring and sanctioning, Coleman and Steed (2009) find that the right to extract resources from the CPR increases users' willingness to engage in monitoring and sanctioning. In a meta-analysis, Porter-Bolland et al. (2012) show that in their sample of 73 case studies the annual deforestation rates under CFM are lower and less variable than in protected areas, although deforestation occurs in both categories.

Brooks et al. (2012) use four dimensions (attitudinal, behavioral, ecological, economic) to analyze community-based conservation efforts regarding forests, grasslands, fisheries, and wildlife. Their main finding indicates that local capacity building, i.e., investments in human capital, is generally associated with positive outcomes. Oldekop et al. (2019) examine the effect of CFM in more than 3800 municipalities in Nepal, finding that CFM reduces both deforestation and poverty, although the initial poverty level moderates this effect. In a more recent meta-analysis, Hajjar et al. (2021)

provide more nuanced insights into the effects of CFM on environmental outcomes, income, and resource access rights. In the majority of up to 524 cases, environmental indicators and livelihoods are positively affected by CFM; however, the commercial or subsistence access rights decreased in more than 50% of the 249 studies providing information on this category. This led to serious trade-offs between income and access rights, especially when elites benefited from formalized CFM while poor or marginalized groups lost their subsistence access. This shows that the design of benefit-sharing rules is important and should be included in any analysis, as only half of the observed sharing schemes resulted in more equitable outcomes. The conclusion is that the distribution of rights within local communities is an important success factor for CFM. Overall, the empirical findings described above are not conclusive in identifying the *one* perfect approach to managing forests or CPR; however, they are conclusive in the sense that while there is no panacea, the inclusion of the local community and particular attention to local property rights are likely to favor positive environmental outcomes. As Ostrom (2010) notes:

“Our research shows that forests under different property regimes—government, private, communal—sometimes meet enhanced social goals such as biodiversity protection, carbon storage, or improved livelihoods. At other times, these property regimes fail to provide such goals. [...] Thus, it is not the general type of forest governance that is crucial in explaining forest conditions; rather, it is how a particular governance arrangement fits the local ecology, how specific rules are developed and adapted over time, and whether users consider the system to be legitimate and equitable” (Ostrom, 2010, p. 658).

For the management of BCEs, one can conclude from the empirical studies that they can indeed, under the right circumstances and governance framework, contribute to positive ecological and socio-economic outcomes. The quote from Ostrom above also indicates the need for further research on the governance of BCEs, as the regime needs to fit the local ecology. Unlike in forest systems, where research has shown that extractive use increases the willingness to engage in monitoring efforts, extractive use is less relevant for many BCEs. However, the range of regional and global pressures that affect BCEs directly or indirectly by changing their environment (see Table 1) demonstrates that even if local institutions prevent overuse of resources and foster sustainable outcomes, achievement of such outcomes cannot be taken for granted. For instance, a seagrass meadow may be protected locally, but nutrient spillovers into the sea could threaten its preservation. These aspects show that insights from the literature on the communal management of terrestrial forests can only be drawn upon in part for the governance of BCEs.

5 Discussion and conclusion

To limit global warming to 1.5°C, natural carbon sinks will have to be preserved, enhanced, and extended. Blue carbon ecosystems (BCE) can contribute to the achievement of this goal. However, it is still unclear how the pressures on these ecosystems from local, regional, and global actions can be reduced and their contribution to global carbon storage governed at the local level. We identify three main challenges pertaining to the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of BCEs for carbon storage.

The first challenge is that the potential for extending BCEs is low because the area available is limited. Thus, while prospects for achieving “extra” CDR via restoration of mangroves, saltmarshes, and seagrass meadows are unpromising, the destruction of BCEs would release a

relatively large amount of carbon. New incentive schemes are needed that take this feature into account, and restorative measures should rather be assessed in connection with the aim of protecting existing meadows, i.e. keeping blue carbon stocks intact instead of considering them primarily as measures for carbon removal.

The second challenge relates to the fact that the wealth BCEs generate through carbon storage is small compared to their contribution via other provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural ecosystem services. A carbon-only price signal might not result in a socially optimal outcome. Creating a “CDR” supply curve, for example, would imply that all CDR options are perfect substitutes, but discussion on the various co-benefits of BCEs indicates that this is obviously not the case. Accounting for CO₂ storage only could, for example, favor fast-growing monoculture reforestation over mangrove preservation despite the differences in additional services. Accordingly, there is a chance of preserving and restoring BCEs by considering all services in potential compensation schemes for local communities. However, instead of defining CDR targets, policies should first aim for precautionary management strategies for these ecosystems (given the various ecosystem services they provide and their climate adaptation potential) and then regard carbon sequestration and storage in these ecosystems as a co-benefit.

The third challenge has to do with governance. Since these ecosystem services often display characteristics typical of common-pool resources or public goods, this poses a special management challenge. This is true in particular of marine ecosystems because high monitoring and enforcement costs for ocean environments imply that many BCEs are *de facto* open-access. Furthermore, ecosystem services accrue at different geographical levels. The major (ecosystem) services like coastal protection are provided at the local and regional level, while co-benefits like carbon sequestration are relevant at the global level. Similarly, a range of regional to global pressures affect BCEs directly or indirectly. Even if local institutions prevent overuse of resources and foster sustainable management – and strengthening local institutions seems promising for the bid to achieve CDR and enhance co-benefits –, there is still no guarantee that the outcome will be good in environmental terms. In many cases, pressures are diffuse and difficult to attribute to a particular firm or person, e.g. in the case of non-point source pollution.

As an advance in the attempt to set up adequate governance systems for CDR by BCEs and to reverse the trend of destroying BCEs, we suggest taking more detailed stock of current property rights allocations and local governance structures, focusing on the methods they use to incorporate BCEs’ ecosystem services and hence on the way they interact with regional or international institutions. Local structures are particularly important here, as good management can lead to a trend reversal (De los Santos, 2019; O’Connor et al., 2020; Orth et al., 2020), but the other levels must not be left out of account. A simplified and modified IFRI-like questionnaire for BCEs has been devised to identify the factors that at various levels constitute successful governance regimes for BCEs. The current IFRI questionnaire collects information on a wide range of social predictor variables and ecological outcome variables, the latter including forest vegetation density and species diversity. Although there are several biophysical predictors such as elevation or temperature, most predictors relate to potential *local* user groups and associations and the activities and institutions related to forest use (Huntington et al., 2016). Only a few questions investigate the extent to which higher-level authorities supervise or interact with forest user groups. Given the

variety of ecosystem (dis)services provided by BCEs to users at various geographical levels and the range of non-local pressures and benefits affecting BCEs (see Table 1), a suitable questionnaire would inquire into the ecosystem-specific circumstances in this connection and gather information concerning the property rights holders involved (Sikor et al., 2017). Also of interest are the regulatory, institutional, or organizational changes in the past that may have affected the BCE's ecological outcomes, e.g., regulations on the agricultural use of fertilizers or integration into an international offset regime.

Thus, the focus for supporting the use of BCEs and other nature- or ecosystem-based approaches like CDR may not be on international payment schemes like REDD+ but rather on international support for setting up suitable local management structures and on a better understanding of the governance of natural commons across different levels. However, focusing on setting up suitable local management structures also requires that countries committed to climate mitigation in line with the Paris targets do not hide the required amounts of CDR behind ill-undefined approaches to the enhancement of natural sinks, but commit themselves to scaling up engineered CDR. Pinning excessive hopes on ecosystems in the shape of extra CDR will most likely not result in the desired outcome—neither for climate mitigation nor for ecosystem preservation. But ignoring their role in storing carbon is not an option either.

Acknowledgements

CM and WR acknowledge funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 869357 (OceanNETs). CM further acknowledges funding from the project ASMASYS (Unified ASsessment framework for proposed methods of MARine CDR and interim knowledge SYnthesiS) funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research under grant agreement number 03F0898C. WR further acknowledges funding from the research project SeaStore (Diversity Enhancement Through Seagrass Restoration) from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research under grant agreement number 03F0859E. WR and MR acknowledge funding from the projects RETAKE (03F0895K) and TestArtUp (03F0897E) both funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

Level Ecosystem	Local		Regional / National		International / Global	
	Pressures	Ecosystem (Dis-)Service	Pressures	Ecosystem (Dis-)Service	Pressures	Ecosystem (Dis-)Service
Mangroves	Deforestation ¹⁹ : o Overharvesting of timber o Conversion to other land use Pollution, nutrients ¹⁹	Timber, fish stocks, other materials ¹ [P] Nutrient/pollution uptake ¹ [R] Protection against storms, erosion control ¹ [R] Provision of habitats ¹ [S] Recreation, tourism ¹ [C]	Nutrient spillover (e.g., from agriculture)	Migrating fish stocks ^{1,3} [P] Protection against storms, erosion control ¹ [R]	Climate change impacts ¹⁵	Carbon storage and sequestration ^{1,16,17} [R] N ₂ O and CH ₄ emissions ⁸ [R]
Seagrass	Mussel beds ^{2,3} Pollution, nutrients ¹⁹ Boating, dredging ¹⁹ Loss of other ecosystems ¹⁹	Seagrass biomass [P] Nutrient/pollution uptake ¹ [R] Protection against storms, erosion control ¹ [R] Habitat for aquatic species ¹ [S] Recreation, tourism ¹ [C] Wrack on beaches ¹² [C]	Nutrient spillover (e.g., from agriculture)	Migrating fish stocks ^{1,3} [P] Protection against storms, erosion control ¹ [R] Wrack on beaches ¹² [C]	Climate change impacts ¹⁵ Ocean acidification ^{9,15}	Carbon storage and sequestration ^{1,16,17} [R] N ₂ O and CH ₄ emissions ⁸ [R]
Salt Marshes	Conversion to other land use ¹⁹ Pollution, nutrients ¹⁹	Nutrient/pollution uptake ¹ [R] Protection against storms, erosion control ¹ [R] Recreation, tourism ¹ [C]	Nutrient spillover (e.g., from agriculture)	Protection against storms, erosion control ¹ [R]	Climate change impacts ¹⁵	Carbon storage and sequestration ^{1,16,17} [R] N ₂ O and CH ₄ emissions ⁸ [R]
Macroalgae		Seaweed biomass ¹⁴ [P] Nutrient/pollution uptake ¹⁴ [R] Habitat for aquatic species ¹⁴ [S] Esthetic effects (buoys), noise (boats) ¹⁴ [C]	Nutrient spillover (e.g., from agriculture)		Climate change impacts ^{4,5,6,15} Ocean acidification ^{4,5}	Carbon storage and sequestration ¹⁰ [R] Halocarbon emissions ¹⁴ [R]
Terrestrial Forests	Deforestation ¹⁸ : o Overharvesting of timber o Conversion to other land use	Timber, plants, game, freshwater [P] Stabilizing the hydrological cycle, cooling effect ¹¹ [R] Protection against soil erosion, avalanches, etc. [R] Provision of habitats [S] Recreation, tourism [C] Potential fuel for wildfires		Stabilizing the hydrological cycle, cooling effect ¹¹ [R] Protection against soil erosion, avalanches, etc. [R]	Climate change impacts	Stabilizing the hydrological cycle, cooling effect ¹¹ [R] Carbon storage and sequestration ^{16,17} [R]

[1] Vegh et al. (2019); [2] Peterson and Heck (2001) [3] Wall et al. (2008) [4] Koch et al. (2013) [5] Provost et al. (2017) [6] Smale (2020) [7] Thom and Seidl (2016) [8] Keller (2019) [9] Garrard and Beaumont (2014) [10] Krause-Jensen and Duarte (2016) [11] : Ellison et al. (2017) [12] Kirkman and Kendrick (1997) [13] Orth et al. (2020) [14] Hasselström et al. (2018) [15] Macreadie et al. (2019) [16] Mcleod et al. (2011) [17] Goldstein et al. (2020) [18] Skutsch and Turnhout (2020) [19] Lovelock et al. (2019)

Blue: Service / positive effect; Red: Disservice / negative effect; Black: Unclear

[R], [S], [P], [C]: Regulating, supporting, provisioning, cultural ecosystem service according to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005)

Table 1: Overview of services, disservices, and pressures for blue carbon ecosystems and terrestrial forests.

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