
A new deal for Nature – Restore the Degraded Planet

Unsustainable human activities, from farming and mining to industry and infrastructure, are undermining the productivity of vast areas of farmland, forests and other ecosystems across all continents. This degradation threatens food security, water supplies and the biodiversity upon which human development depends. It drives and is exacerbated by climate change. And it will put the Sustainable Development Goals out of reach unless it is urgently addressed.

Restoration to stop and reverse degradation is underway in many places around the world, but must be scaled up dramatically to safeguard livelihoods, combat climate change, and support vital ecosystem services such as the supply of food and water. During the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, more countries need to join restoration initiatives and ramp up their ambition with stronger support from multilateral donors and the private sector.

The situation today

Degradation is the result of unsustainable and short-sighted management of our land, forests, lakes and rivers, compounded by climate change effects on ecosystems, resulting in conversion, over-exploitation, pollution and erosion. One fifth of Earth's vegetated surface shows declining trends in productivity and, if nothing is done, degradation and climate change could cut crop yields by 10% globally and by up to 50% in some regions by 2050. A significant factor in degradation is the removal of vast numbers of trees from landscapes. Forests and the services they provide continue to shrink, with some 129 million hectares lost since 1990.

Degradation is already impacting the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people, fueling fears of a mass species extinction and costing more than 10% of annual global gross product in lost ecosystem services. In addition, degradation reduces the resilience of agriculture and ecosystems to climate change, raising the risk of catastrophic collapse in the face of rising temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns.

However, some 2 billion hectares of degraded lands worldwide, an area larger than South America, has potential for restoration. Most of it could suit "mosaic restoration", where forests and trees are combined with agriculture, waterways, protected areas and settlements on a landscape scale. Through the Bonn Challenge and New York Declaration on Forests, the international community has set ambitious global goals and, as of 2018, more than 50 countries and other entities have committed to bringing more than 170 million hectares into restoration, but they currently lack adequate policies, finance and capacity to reach their goals. A similar area of marine and coastal ecosystems could also be brought under active restoration by 2030, if we can raise awareness and capacity.

Where we need to be by 2030

In the framework of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, world-wide action needs to be taken to halt and reverse degradation and to meet the target of restoring at least 350 million hectares of degraded landscapes by 2030, realizing up to \$9 trillion in net benefits and alleviating poverty in many rural communities.

Governments need to shift from subsidies and other incentives that encourage degradation towards policies that reward restoration and sustainable resource use, such as tax breaks and payments for ecosystem services. On the other hand, farmers, foresters and fishers need to have tenure or access rights secured as well as the skills and knowledge they need in order to manage local resources for the long term.

In agricultural areas, tree cover should increase and the use of agroecological farming practices expanded, in order to improve soil fertility, reduce erosion and conserve biodiversity. Restored forests can also yield more timber, host more wildlife, face less fire risk and deliver reliable water supplies for people and nature, while the increased biomass can play a crucial role in countering climate change.

Rivers, lakes and wetlands should be restored through integrated water resource management policies. Pollution should be tackled and water resources equitably shared, with fish stocks producing higher sustainable yields.

Funding should be secured in line with the estimated \$837 billion needed to reach the 350 million-hectare restoration target, aimed primarily at the private sector but with increased commitment from local and national governments and international finance bodies as well.

What UNEP advocates for

COMMITMENT

Stronger global and regional restoration initiatives to tap into the growing expertise and support available from organizations such as the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration.

ACTION

Effective implementation of existing national pledges. This may require new governance arrangements, integrated policymaking, better land-use planning, and capacity-building.

FUNDING

Easier access to funding for restoration for national and local government and the private sector, through bilateral and multilateral donors, including those funding climate action. Consistent and long-term policy signals to trigger large-scale re-direction of private finance into ecosystem restoration.

Key UNEP reports

- IPBES 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
- Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (2018) Restoring Forests and Landscapes: The Key to a Sustainable Future
- Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services (2018) Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration
- Global Environment Outlook (2019)

Relevant United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolutions

- **UNEP/EA.4/L.11** Innovations on biodiversity and land degradation
- **UNEP/EA.3/L.10** Addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems
- **UNEP/EA.2/L.24** Combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands
- **UNEP/EA.1/L.08** Ecosystem-based adaptation

SDGs served



The UN-REDD Programme is the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) and supports 65 developing countries. It facilitates the nationally led REDD+ processes and promotes the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities, in national and international REDD+ implementation. Photo by UN-REDD.



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