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## **Concept paper - Elements of a Regional Action Plan on Ecosystems Restoration**

## Elements of a Regional Action Plan on Ecosystems Restoration

### Background

1. The Latin America and Caribbean region supports rich biological diversity, with around sixty per cent of global terrestrial life found within it, alongside a diverse freshwater and marine flora and fauna. The region's biomes extend from wetlands and coastal ecosystems to deserts, tropical forests, extensive savannah grasslands and high-altitude Andean habitats. In particular, the lowland forests are amongst the most species-rich on Earth, and the mountain forests and moorlands (*páramos*) of the Andes host a wide range of endemic and narrow range species. This regional diversity is driven by a number of environmental factors, including a complex evolutionary history and highly variable geography, geology and climate. Large areas of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) remain in a natural or semi-natural state, but there has also been considerable transformation of habitats to serve national, regional and global economies.
2. Within the past decades, marine and terrestrial ecosystems in the region have faced steep declines and significant degradation, leading to a loss in biodiversity, ecosystem goods and services, and a general fragmentation of biological corridors. The consequences of land and ecosystem degradation threatens the ecological foundation on which the socio-economic webs of countries are built, from human livelihoods, cultural identity and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities.
3. The commitments of countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals can be significantly undermined if the ongoing and projected degradation of ecosystems continues into the next decade.
4. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for the Americas offers some key takeaways:
  - a) Endemic species have been assessed for risk of extinction, including 50% of species in the Caribbean, 25% in South America and 40% in Mesoamerica
  - b) Effective management and natural processes in former agricultural areas have seen an increase in biodiversity, including the increase of Caribbean forest cover.
  - c) Various areas in the region have biodiversity under pressure: 72% of the tropical dry forest in Mesoamerica and 66% in the Caribbean; 34% of the Dry Chaco and 17% of the Amazon forest.
  - d) Successful restoration projects at the local level have improved degraded habitats, such as coastal forest in Mesoamerica.
  - e) The intensification of food production is causing the degradation and replacement of natural ecosystems that provide essential services, leaving less diverse systems producing fewer services to people and their livelihoods.
  - f) Habitat degradation due to land conversion, agricultural intensification, urbanization and wetland drainage and conversion, and resource extraction are the largest threats to ecosystem services and biodiversity.
5. The State of the Biodiversity of Latin America and the Caribbean (UNEP, 2016) identified the following drivers causing ecosystem degradation:
  - a) Pressures associated with rapid economic growth and social inequities are impacting the region's natural resources.

- b) Agricultural expansion and intensification to increase both livestock, arable and commodities production.
- c) Major infrastructure development of dams and roads.
- d) High concentrations of population in urban areas.
- e) Country economies within the region are comprehensively dependent on natural resources.
- f) Resource extraction for minerals and hydrocarbons has, in some cases, led to locally devastating direct and indirect impacts on biodiversity such as vegetation removal, water and soil pollution and contamination.
- g) Climate change induced impacts on coral reefs, tropical forest and mountainous habitats.

6. The XXI Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, in its Buenos Aires Declaration and Decision on Biodiversity – Innovative solutions to enhance the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystems – decided “*To invite the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region to take concrete actions for the restoration of ecosystems at the national and regional level during this decade, integrating them into policies and plans to address the current development challenges; and to “Encourage commitments and partnerships among countries, the international community, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, as well as among sources of financing, to address the restoration of degraded ecosystems through efficient production systems.”*”

7. Additionally, the Forum of Ministers decided to “*Support the proposal of the Government of El Salvador and the countries of the Central American Integration System (SICA), calling on the General Assembly of the United Nations in its 73rd session to designate the decade of 2021-2030 as “The United Nations Decade for the Ecosystems Restoration”.*”

8. On 1 March 2019, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the designation of 2021-2030 as “The United Nations Decade for the Ecosystems Restoration”.

### **Rationale for a Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration**

9. Recent reports of the International Resource Panel and the Inter-Governmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) identified that the estimated cost of land degradation has reached USD 490 billion per year globally. At the same time, reports have made the case that the cost of action to prevent this wide spread ecosystem degradation could be much lower, with the potential of reversing the steep decline of biodiversity and ecosystems, generating opportunities in absolute terms for society, from an economic perspective, building resilience to climate change, and ensure the prosperity in job creating and food security.

10. In response, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), particularly through its Decisions XI/16, XII/19 and XIII/5 *urged Parties and encouraged other Governments and relevant organizations, as well as indigenous peoples and local communities, and relevant stakeholders to promote, support and take actions on ecosystem restoration inter alia by making use, as appropriate, of the short-term action plan on ecosystem restoration as a flexible framework according to national circumstances.*

11. In 2016, the CBD COP in its decision XIII/5 adopted a short-term action plan on ecosystem restoration, as a flexible framework and adaptable to national circumstances and legislation for immediate action towards achieving Aichi Biodiversity Targets and other internationally agreed commitments and targets. Four main activities of the plan include:

- a) Assessment of opportunities for ecosystem restoration;
- b) Improving the institutional enabling environment for ecosystem restoration;
- c) Planning and implementation of ecosystem restoration activities;
- d) Monitoring, evaluation, feedback and disseminating results.

**12.** A Regional Action Plan on ecosystem restoration has the potential to build a collaborative effort to reverse and ensure that the ecological foundation of the region is maintained for the prosperity of its peoples. Furthermore, a strategic action plan can identify and design common and specific policy measures, cooperation and financing mechanisms, and on-the-ground actions to advance ecosystem restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**13.** According to the IPBES regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for the Americas, in South American biomes, anthropogenic fires, pollution from illegal logging and off-site activities are ongoing, however the establishment of conservation areas and indigenous lands have contributed to reducing the rate of deforestation and fire specifically in the wet tropical forest. In the region, agriculture and deforestation are the main land use changes that have altered carbon fluxes and stocks, and these activities have reduced carbon inputs to ecosystems.

**14.** Deforestation rates in the Amazon decreased during the past decade but increased again as of 2015, with the expansion of the agriculture frontier, illegal mining and infrastructure projects, as well as the wildfires which have affected the biome increasingly in the last few years. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the costs of wildfire damage and management are increasing, in part due to degraded natural services resulting from poor management practices

### **Purpose and Scope of the Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration**

**15.** A Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration provides a framework for harmonized and coordinated action on ecosystem restoration across Latin America and the Caribbean region. It aims to sustainably conserve and manage land and marine ecosystems, addressing the key drivers of degradation. Through collaborative efforts, the Action Plan will work to reduce and halt biodiversity loss; combat land degradation and desertification; mitigate climate change; reduce disaster-related risks, and restore ecosystem conditions and processes for increased resilience, enhanced ecosystem functions and sustainable benefits.

**16.** Building a strategic vision for ecosystem restoration, ensuring participation of a wide range of stakeholder, including government at national and sub-national levels, civil society, academia, youth, indigenous peoples and local communities, and productive sectors will be a key contribution of the Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration. In this sense, strengthening political momentum will be key to accelerate and upscale ecosystem restoration commitments and targets; identify, promote and facilitate resource mobilization; build and enforce effective monitoring of implementation and tracking of progress towards the achievement of ecosystem restoration commitments and targets at the regional level.

**17.** The Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration will target restoration efforts across all types of ecosystems – terrestrial, inland water, marine and coastal, and, as appropriate, urban ecosystems. It will be implemented at various scales — national, regional, subnational, including transboundary ecosystems — and site levels using a land- and seascape approach.

### **For the consideration of Member States**

**18.** The Inter-Sessional Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean is invited to consider the identification of a roadmap to develop a Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration.

**19.** A Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration aims to be a collaborative effort to reverse and ensure that the ecological foundation of the region is maintained for the prosperity of its peoples, through a strategic plan that can identify and design common and specific policy measures, cooperation and financing mechanisms, and on-the-ground actions to advance ecosystem restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**20.** The Regional Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration will be aligned with the short-term action plan on ecosystem restoration adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity in decision XIII/5.14. In this sense the main components of the Action Plan are envisioned to be:

- a) Assessment of opportunities for ecosystem restoration;
- b) Improving the institutional enabling environment for ecosystem restoration;
- c) Planning and implementation of ecosystem restoration activities;
- d) Monitoring, evaluation, feedback and disseminating results.
- e) Communication, awareness-raising and outreach.

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