

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

“Prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide”

Challenge

There has never been a more urgent need to restore damaged ecosystems than now.

Restoration of ecosystem is fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, mainly those on climate change, poverty eradication, food security, water and biodiversity conservation. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (hereafter the Decade) is a global effort aimed at restoring the planet and ensuring One Health for people and nature.

The Decade unites the world behind a common goal: preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide. Forests, grasslands, croplands, wetlands, savannahs, and other terrestrial to inland water ecosystems, marine and coastal

ecosystems and urban environments—all of them are in dire need of some level of protection and restoration.

This incredible challenge can only be met if everyone—including Member States, local governments, partners from the private sector, academia and civil society—come together to find viable, lasting solutions.

Restoring damaged ecosystems is an efficient and cost-effective way people can work with nature to address the most pressing challenges humanity is facing today, i.e. the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic, especially in the context of the Build Back Better approach.



- Healthy ecosystems such as forests, mangroves and peatlands, act as carbon sinks, absorbing up to one third of CO₂ emissions.
- Healthy soils can store more nutrients and produce higher quality plants, allowing the world to feed our growing population—9 billion people expected by 2050—without cutting down more forests.
- Thriving ecosystems harbour a wide variety of wildlife. By protecting and restoring them, we can help save the 1 million animal and plant species currently threatened with extinction.
- Restoring 350 million hectares of degraded landscapes by 2030 presents a boost to rural economies—worth US\$9 trillion in ecosystem services—and contributes to alleviate poverty.
- Restoring coastal and marine ecosystems helps protect and bring back some of the richest biodiversity hotspots on Earth. These ecosystems also provide storm protection, fisheries and carbon storage.
- Between 20 and 50 percent of global blue carbon ecosystems (highly productive vegetated coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrass beds) have already been converted or degraded, leading some analysts to conclude that restoring wetlands can offer 14 percent of the mitigation potential needed to limit global warming to 2°C.
- The area covered by blue carbon ecosystems is equivalent to only 1.5 percent of terrestrial forest cover, yet their loss and degradation are equivalent to 8.4 percent of CO₂ emissions from terrestrial deforestation because of their high carbon stocks per hectare.
- Restoration includes measures to create green jobs, which is one of the key elements for building resilient societies post-COVID-19 global pandemic.

Response

Led by El Salvador and together with over 70 countries, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed 2021–2030 as the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration on March 1, 2019. In its resolution, the UNGA recalls the United Nations Environment Assembly's resolution calling for the conservation and restoration of all ecosystems. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) are tasked to lead the implementation. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration also aligns with the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Political momentum for action, as demonstrated by the call for this Decade, is growing and it is not happening in a vacuum. Awareness of climate change and other environmental challenges has reached new heights in many countries. Scientific studies that highlight the potential of restoration in fighting global warming have mobilized journalists and their audiences alike.



Mangrove forest, Indonesia. ©Unsplash

Meanwhile, rural communities, and especially indigenous peoples, have long been the custodians of ecosystems. Securing their rights and building on their knowledge is critical for the success of restoration and for protecting a large portion of the world's biodiversity.

The UN recognizes the critical role of the many initiatives already underway, led by governments, businesses, farmers and citizens who want to rebuild the land and water ecosystems we all depend on. Taking this into account, a series of worldwide consultations and multiple review exercises have been held to develop a concerted roadmap for the implementation of the Decade. As part of this comprehensive process, more than 2000 comments from Member States, scientists, restoration practitioners, funding partners, youth groups and others have been received, with sound advice and shared personal stories about local restoration successes. This has allowed collation of a diverse set of voices and expertise to guide the development of the Decade's strategy. A final strategy will be made available by September 2020.



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Here is a summary of comments from our consultations.

Support clear, traceable goals

The Decade, as mentioned above, is designed to achieve existing targets defined by the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and other global frameworks. It will also act as an accelerator to ongoing restoration efforts, such as the Bonn Challenge, which aims to restore 350 million hectares of degraded landscapes by 2030 or the New York Declaration on Forests, which supports the Bonn Challenge in its goal 5.

But efforts to track and trace success should go beyond numbers. Factors that currently hinder the success of restoration efforts include a lack of finance and difficulties in accessing knowledge.

To succeed, leaders must be ambitious, bold and creative in tackling these hurdles, and act strategically. We need to get the funding lined up. It will take 1 trillion USD to restore 350 million hectares. Sounds a lot? Not really—it's just 0.1 percent of global economic output between now and 2030. And the investment will yield multiple returns.

To successfully implement the strategy and rise up to the challenge, the Decade requires support from all segments of society. Governments will need to align restoration efforts with national planning processes, including nationally determined contributions, and provide additional commitments and financial resources. On the other hand, implementation must be traceable and tangible, down to national and sub-national levels. To help with running and coordinating the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations call on all countries in a position to do so to provide resources.

Get everyone involved

During the UN Decade consultations, venues were filled to the last seat, with people having to stand at the back leaning against walls, rubbing shoulders. Yet no one felt uncomfortable, quite the opposite: this is exactly the kind of engagement that is needed, they said.

Stakeholders also feel that we need a wide diversity of skills, knowledge and experience for action. "My grandmother does not have a Ph.D. in land restoration," said Hindou Oumaro Ibrahim, coordinator of the Indigenous Women and Peoples Association of Chad. "But she is now being recognized by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change because she is an expert on her land. So why can't we move from saying, 'We need to be experts on this,' and go to those who have already been restoring for centuries?"

Indeed, people across the world have different roles to play in ecosystem restoration. Some can directly help protect and bring back nature—farmers, hobby gardeners or activists. Others will have an impact through their choices as consumers. Recent discussions at the Global Landscapes Forum stressed the importance of combining indigenous knowledge with modern technology and the latest of scientific research.

People also approach restoration with different motivations. In a recent poll, 51% said they cared about ecosystems because all our lives depend on them, while 22% cited environmental justice as the main motivator and 12% pointed out that to them, nature itself had rights. Only 6% are motivated primarily by economic factors.

Listen to what's happening on the ground

Ecosystem restoration is a grassroots response to global challenges, similar to countless initiatives across the world—from small school gardens to large-scale efforts covering millions of hectares. As the Decade acts as a catalyzer and builds upon these efforts, initiatives must be sensitive to local needs and context. “What I want from the Decade is patience,” said Mauricio Nuñez, a young practitioner from Peru. “There’s always this rush to go to scale. And the scale is good. But we also need time to try out what works... and the recognition that these smaller efforts are important.”

It is with this in mind that the Decade team will work with local communities and all stakeholders over the next 10 years to help accelerate mature initiatives while encouraging those that are still in their flowering stages. By September 2020, we will launch the visual identity for the UN Decade, with the final strategy and partner toolkits for all who want to be involved. And, to learn more about the latest updates and the launch of the UN Decade, we invite you to watch the [recording of our webinar](#) that took place on May 27th. Stay tuned!

