



Youth Position Paper

for the UN Decade on Ecosystem
Restoration Advisory Board Meeting,
Egypt - November 2022



UNITED NATIONS DECADE ON
**ECOSYSTEM
RESTORATION**
2021-2030

Context

A healthy and sustainable environment is the foundation for an equitable, functioning society and the basis for prosperity and security. There is no doubt about the ecological and climate crisis humanity is facing in this century. Youth and future generations are amongst the ones who will feel the most impact due to climate-induced natural disasters, food and water shortages, biodiversity loss, destruction of ecosystems, security threats, the climate refugee crisis, health crisis and sustained losses in economic productivity. These impacts will and are already affecting millions of children and youth globally, especially those living in developing countries, Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The Decade for Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) as proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in March 2019 (“Restoration Decade”) provides a strong avenue for averting this ecological crisis, and mainstreaming empowerment of those under-represented while doing so.

Currently, over 42% of the global population is under the age of 25¹. Brundtland Commission in 1972 (when UN Environment was established) stated in Our Common Future that the core of sustainable development is predicated on the idea of “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”² Intergenerational equity is thus inherent to the very foundation of sustainable development.

Young people have enormous potential and play a crucial role in preserving biodiversity, conserving forests, and restoring ecosystems. In addition to having a desire and capacity to contribute with their own experiences to the outcomes of restoration, youth and youth led organizations, and others, share common conservation and restoration goals. The achievement of ecosystem restoration aims depends on working with young people and giving them a chance. Young people must also be included in decision- and policy-making processes.

Youth Engagement in the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

The involvement of youth in the UN Decade and #GenerationRestoration movement is critically important, not only for the sustainability of restoration initiatives beyond 2030 but also for the promotion of intergenerational equity and empowerment of young people. Young people have been engaged in the processes of the UN Decade since its inception. Among other things, this has entailed hosting several on-ground and virtual consultations on the engagement of young people in the UN Decade and the inaugural #GenerationRestoration Youth Assembly alongside the public launch of the Decade in 2021.

There have been ongoing internal consultations, working group meetings and mobilization that garner and advance the meaningful engagement of young people across the pillars of policy advocacy, knowledge, action and capacity building. The UN Decade Youth Task Force and the Youth Focus Group serve as the mandated and self organized youth mechanism that facilitates young people and is part of the UN Decade governance. The Youth Focus Group, universally structured, allows young people across several constituencies, movements and young individuals to engage with the UN Decade.

This position paper has been prepared as the youth contribution to the Advisory Board Meeting of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration taking place in Nuweiba, Egypt from 12th-13th November 2022, during the UN Climate Change Conference COP27.

¹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/chart-how-worlds-youth-population-changing>

² Brundtland Commission 1987: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

UN Decade Challenges

The Youth Constituency is extremely impressed by the inclusive process of co-creating the UN Decade Challenges so far, however, we strongly urge the UN Decade leadership and partners to ensure youth mainstreaming throughout the implementation process and governance.

As the youth constituency, we strongly feel that the success of the UN Decade lies with the local communities through a multi-agency collaborative approach. The entire implementation process has to be people-centric.

Furthermore, the Youth Task Force looks forward to the design and implementation of the Youth Challenge that is being led by the youth constituency and calls for support from member states and stakeholders toward the implementation of the Youth Challenge.

Regarding the Flagships Initiatives of the UN Decade

The youth constituency welcomes that the Flagship Initiatives were coordinated for 2022 in the context of the Decade to mobilize action and implementation of the Decade on the ground. We share the following recommendations on this matter:

- The focus should be laid upon the implementation of the Flagships once they have been announced, and it should be ensured that a broad range of actors are able to engage in the implementation of the Flagships
- We further recommend that all Flagships should be required to engage with youth organizations and advocates relevant to that Flagship throughout their implementation. The Youth constituency is ready to support the process to identify relevant partner networks and advocates.

Finance

We are convinced that the UN Decade is one of the most resilient pathways to sustainable communities. However, nothing much can be achieved without adequate financing. We are calling upon partners across sectors to increase their efforts in financing this 10 year restoration agenda. We recommend the following:

- We as the youth constituency are grateful for the funding support that has been provided by the UN Decade secretariat for youth and request that this support is continued for the entirety of the Decade
- Finance Task Force: we call for engagement and representation of youth in the work and composition of the UN Decade Finance Task Force. Youth should be involved both in the Finance Task Force and in the Community of Practice. Also, financing youth-led internships. We also request that support and access be provided for youth to participate in the workshops about finance that will take place in 2023
- Furthermore, we suggest that the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) of the Decade is used for system-wide support to the various activities under the Decade including but not limited to Flagships, Challenges, support to the work of the Task Forces, etc.

Adaptation

The youth constituency calls for stronger financing for adaptation. The Adaptation Fund is currently underfunded and is insufficient to meet the needs of Developing Countries to protect their people, biodiversity, and economies from the impacts of climate change.

Adaptation activities should include Ecosystem-Based services, such as restoring and conserving wetlands, conserving mangrove forests, forests restoration, afforestation, landscape restoration, urban trees and parks. Climate adaptation finance, specifically for ecosystem based services, must be expanded because it is one of the most cost-effective ways to improve climate resilience for vulnerable and exposed communities and the ecosystems on which they rely, in particular in developing countries.

Adaptation Communication which is provided in article 7 of Paris agreement should be implemented by including the voices of Southern states in briefing the policies for mitigating climate change. A joint Principle for Adaptation should be proposed for an effective and equitable national framework along with the developing countries.

Clean Energy

Providing clean energy options to meet increasing energy demand will require an innovative multi-faceted approach. Clean energy should still comply with Environmental Regulations to protect against disturbance or destruction of critical ecosystems.

We suggest that this topic be further mainstreamed in the work of the Decade and new partnerships be sought with partners and stakeholders that work on SDG7 issues.

Policy Actions

Realization of the UN Decade is anchored on sound policies across all levels of engagement. We believe, for successful policy actions, governments must be kept on their toes in implementing ecosystem policies at the local and national levels.

While the majority of governments and restoration actors have put in place sound restorative policies, these policies are not being translated into actions. “Nothing beyond paperwork”. We strongly suggest that the UN Decade be empowered institutionally to strengthen the capacities of governments and local communities as the champions of sustainable ecosystem restoration.

Gender

We need to address the management of ecosystem restoration from a gender perspective. In ecosystem restoration, men and women perform diverse roles, especially in developing countries where women are particularly important for resource conservation and sustainable use. Therefore, social justice—which has been acknowledged as one of the core concepts for more sustainable livelihoods and ecosystem management—is dependent on gender equality and women's empowerment. We further recommend that gender parity and gender balance are mainstreamed across all activities, including endorsed activities and partnerships under the UN Decade.

Sustainable Economies

Innovation in markets to utilize ecosystem based services for economic development will help support developing & developed economies to integrate ecosystem restoration into their business models.

Social enterprises and for-profit companies can build a business on supporting native plantings, drought-tolerant crops, resilient tree canopies, and flood prevention through adequate stormwater systems with bioremediation. We also recommend supporting and promoting cutting-edge techniques like Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and further suitable incentive mechanisms.

Indigenous Land Rights

The Youth Working Group supports indigenous peoples' efforts to restore their ancestral land rights. Indigenous communities protect 80% of the world's biodiversity. It is important that indigenous peoples and their communities are involved in all areas of the Decade - including designated seats in Task Forces, Advisory Board and further structures of the Decade. In addition, when research and scientific activities are undertaken, it is essential that indigenous peoples and local communities are involved from the outset. In this sense, participation in decision-making spaces is critical to foster their leadership on environmental justice issues and protect and implement the voices of grassroots communities, including frontline advocates.

Highlight the value of generating intercultural, intergenerational and inter-scientific dialogues for inclusive participation with cross-cutting policies to design intercultural public policies that respond to their needs, ensuring participation in all these processes. Likewise, to be able to facilitate the capacities, educational tools and resources necessary to assume decision-making functions in the field of climate justice, forest conservation and environmental policies.

Hence, it is necessary to have access to land and autonomy over the management of territories by indigenous peoples in order to conserve practices and replicate knowledge. Thus, indigenous land titling is a priority for the different countries. Tribal area should be protected and one representative from those areas should be encouraged to participate in decision making policy their rights, livelihood and dependency on minor forest reserve should be protected

Environmental Education

We have to create interactive and innovative educational tools to better understand ecosystem restoration and work together for solutions. We have to make conscious and deliberate efforts to raise sustainability champions, we need to provide relevant education that will enhance climate change learning. The UN Decade - as it brings together system-wide approaches on the triple planetary crisis, should amplify the need for environmental education to be mandatory at all stages of learning.

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