

## **UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021 – 2030**

### **Initiative proposed by El Salvador with the support of countries from the Central American Integration System (SICA)** **Concept Note**

During the Bonn Challenge 3.0 high-level meeting in Brazil in March 2018, El Salvador indicated its intention to seek the proclamation of the “UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021 – 2030”. This concept note sets out the context, rationale and purpose of this initiative. The distribution of this concept note is intended to reach the international community including governmental and non-governmental actors, UN agencies, and civil society.

#### **Ecosystem Restoration**

Ecosystem restoration is understood as assisting the recovery of degraded, damaged and destroyed ecosystems to regain ecological functionality and provide the goods and services that people value. Ecosystem restoration promoted through the proposed UN Decade focuses on landscapes of interacting land uses where ecological, social and developmental priorities can be balanced. Restoration activities enhance the conservation, recovery and sustainable management of ecosystems, including facilitating landscape connectivity. Ecosystem restoration through a landscape approach involves adaptive management, ensuring the resilience of the landscape in the long term.

#### **Statement of the problem**

According to the latest IPBES report, land degradation through human activities is negatively impacting the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people, costing more than 10% of the annual global gross product in loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The significant impacts of ecosystem degradation impair biodiversity and land productivity especially in vulnerable areas in sub-Saharan Africa, South Eastern Asia and Latin America. For example, in those areas and globally, the forest area has been reduced by 100 million hectares since 2000. Vegetative cover is consistently declining, affecting croplands, forest lands, grasslands and rangelands and in some cases desertification has become the new reality of the landscape. Wetlands have suffered a reduction of 70% over the last century.

Reversing this reality is possible. Ecosystem restoration can generate tangible benefits which will increase food and water security, contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and contribute to addressing associated risks such as conflict and migration. Investing in ecosystem restoration has proven to generate benefits ten times the costs of the initial investment, whereas the cost of inaction is at least three times the cost of active ecosystem restoration.

Although there are many current examples of ecosystem restoration on the ground across the world, these are not enough to generate the necessary transformational impact at the global level.

#### **Building blocks towards the Decade**

Restoration of ecosystems is recognized by existing international conventions and agreements as a key undertaking to achieve their goals, including the SDGs, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2020 and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the Land Degradation Neutrality target, the Ramsar Convention, and the UN Strategic Plan on Forests 2017 - 2030. As such, a concerted effort is needed on restoring ecosystems to achieve an enhanced impact across landscapes in the long term.

This was strongly acknowledged during the last High Level Political Forum on the SDGs in July 2018, where countries recognized the need for scaling up resource efficiency including sustainable food systems that restore natural resources and sustain livelihoods. Moreover, countries attested that action to minimize and reverse habitat loss, desertification and land use change needs to be taken urgently and swiftly. Within this, a specific commitment was made to *implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally by 2020* (Paragraph 27 of the HLPF 2018 Ministerial Declaration). These activities contribute to the Bonn Challenge, launched 2011 to bring 150 million hectares of the

world's deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030, which was later endorsed by the New York Declaration on Forests.

El Salvador, together with 48 other countries, subnational jurisdictions and organizations has pledged over 160 million hectares to the Bonn Challenge. Regional political processes and technical cooperation platforms in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean and the Caucasus and Central Asia regions are generating additional momentum for restoration and providing platforms for reinforcing implementation.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UN Environment are providing support for the proposal of a UN Decade. They will team up with other UN agencies, bodies and convention secretariats, as well as with international organizations to support El Salvador's initiative for a UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

This proposal aims to create a framework for action to energize existing commitments and mandates. The proposal for the establishment of a UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration does not seek to create new commitments, but rather to boost current efforts being undertaken under different binding and non-binding international and regional regimes, without budget implications and respecting the existing mandates of relevant UN agencies.

### The opportunity

The global community needs to step up its ambition towards restoring all ecosystems including forests, grasslands, croplands, wetlands, savannas and other terrestrial and inland water ecosystems, marine and coastal ecosystems and, as appropriate, urban environments.

Renewed vigor and commitment are needed to achieve transformational ecosystem restoration. The engagement, efforts and actions of countries, the international community, civil society, private sector and other actors need to be reassessed and re-envisioned in a joint manner. This will allow to holistically address the interdependencies of ecosystems, human needs and biodiversity through a landscape approach of ecosystem restoration, triggering accelerated progress at the pace and scale that is needed to maintain and restore ecosystems, bringing greater balance between social well-being, life on Earth, and sustainable economic growth.

The UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, proposed by El Salvador, with the support of countries of the Central American Integration System (SICA), will enable the generation of different strategic streams that will boost action:

- **Common vision** where ecosystem restoration is a priority at the global, regional, national and local levels, accelerating the reversal of degradation across ecosystems, where landscape connectivity and ecological functions are recovered and enhanced.
- **Mainstreaming** ecosystem restoration in policies and plans to address current national developmental challenges due to land degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change vulnerability, creating in turn opportunities for ecosystems to increase their adaptive capacity, maintain livelihoods and achieve stability of economic activities in the landscape.
- **Facilitating synergies** and a holistic view of how to achieve different international commitments and national priorities through the restoration of ecosystems and landscapes, given the potential of fully-functional ecosystems to generate a full suite of benefits.
- **Cooperation and resource mobilization** aiming to increase the flow of financial resources, technologies, knowledge and capacity building to countries and jurisdictions seeking to achieve international commitments, SDGs and national goal, through the implementation of ecosystem restoration on the ground and at scale.
- **Fostering of concerted commitment** between financing sources, governments, civil society, productive sector, and private sector to address the bottlenecks that impede scaling up resource-efficient productive systems while restoring degraded ecosystems.
- **Bringing forth an increased number of partnerships** and investments in favor of smallholders who generate the most significant value from land use products and who can make a considerable contribution to the restoration of ecosystems in the context of a resilient economy.

- **Awareness generation** of the importance of having functional ecosystems for human well-being and productive activities, achieving a full understanding -at all levels- of the relationship, dynamics and impact of the functioning of ecosystems on local development and the economic sustainability of the society as a whole.

Thanks to current efforts to develop monitoring tools and protocols for ecosystem restoration activities, the resulting benefits during this UN Decade will be monitored national and internationally. This will translate into a contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030, particularly SDG15 and significantly support the achievement of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water).

El Salvador calls on all members states, including members and supporters of the Bonn Challenge, related regional initiatives, and other countries leading and participating in initiatives supporting restoration of ecosystems, to support and cosponsor the proposal to proclaim the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021 – 2030 during the next 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly.