



COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

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Restoration and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

Executive Summary

The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), through resolution A/RES/73/284¹ on 1 March 2019, “with the aim of supporting and scaling up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration”ⁱ. FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are co-leading the implementation of the Decade worldwide, ensuring strong cooperation with countries, other UN agencies and partners.

FAO framed a vision for the implementation of the Decade from the perspective of its mandate to make agricultural systems (crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) more productive, efficient and sustainable, while managing and protecting the environment and the natural resources base that these systems depend upon. This document intends to provide an update on the Decade implementation, with particular reference to the restoration of forested landscapes and obtain guidance of the 26th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO 26) on the implications of addressing the restoration of these ecosystems for FAO policies and programmes.

Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to encourage Members to:

- engage in the Decade by establishing and advancing the implementation of ambitious forest ecosystem restoration targets with particular reference to productive landscapes; and
- submit their forest ecosystems restoration initiatives as Flagships on the occasion of the annual World Restoration Flagship calls launched in the context of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

¹ [A/RES/73/284 \(undocs.org\)](https://undocs.org/A/RES/73/284)

The Committee is invited to recommend FAO to:

- support Members, upon request, with tools, methodologies and capacity development initiatives to scale-up forest ecosystems' restoration efforts, share good practices and monitor progress; and
- provide technical support to Members, upon request, to facilitate their access to financial instruments focused on the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration such as the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) or the Integrated Programme on Ecosystem Restoration under the Global Environment Facility (GEF-8).

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I. Introduction

1. The UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), through resolution A/RES/73/284 on 1 March 2019, with the aim of supporting and scaling up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration. All initiatives within the context of the UN Decade will consequently have a dual focus – to avoid degradation as well as to restore ecosystems.
2. In the resolution, the UN General Assembly encourages Members to:
 - a. foster political will, the mobilization of resources, capacity building, scientific research and cooperation and momentum for ecosystem restoration at the global, regional, national and local levels, as appropriate;
 - b. mainstream ecosystem restoration into policies and plans to address current national development priorities and challenges due to the degradation of marine and terrestrial ecosystems, biodiversity loss and climate change vulnerability, thereby creating opportunities for ecosystems to increase their adaptive capacity and opportunities to maintain and improve livelihoods for all;
 - c. develop and implement policies and plans to prevent ecosystem degradation, in line with national laws and priorities, as appropriate;
 - d. build on and reinforce existing restoration initiatives in order to scale up good practices;
 - e. facilitate synergies and a holistic view of how to achieve international commitments and national priorities through the restoration of ecosystems; and
 - f. promote the sharing of experiences and good practices in ecosystem conservation and restoration.
3. In 2020, FAO produced an Information Note named “*Position paper on “Ecosystem Restoration” of production ecosystems, in the context of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030²*” for the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and the Committee on Forestry (COFO). The current document is building on its major provisions and being expanded to cover recent progress and developments within the Decade, as well as to address the linkages with the FAO policies and programming frameworks.
4. At the heart of the above position paper is the recognition that food production from various sectors comes frequently at a cost to ecosystem integrity, that is acceptable and within the ecosystem’s carrying capacity, yet there are always options and opportunities to improve trade-offs between economic, social and ecological objectives, ensuring the efficiency, resilience and sustainability of these systems and reducing their overall footprint.
5. Furthermore, restoration of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems can be seen as a crucial step in the fight to eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition, in the context of a growing human population and the increasing need for the provision of ecosystem services, including food.
6. The UN Decade was launched on the World Environment Day (5 June 2021).

II. FAO’s involvement in the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

7. FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are co-leading the implementation of the Decade, in collaboration with the secretariats of the Rio conventions, the

² COAG/2020/INF/13. <https://www.fao.org/3/nd425en/nd425en.pdf>

International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Global Landscapes Forum, the Center for International Forestry Research and other key partners.

8. As the specialized agency of the United Nations, leading international efforts to defeat global hunger and malnutrition, FAO takes an active role in framing a vision for the implementation of the Decade from the perspective of its mandate to make agricultural systems (crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) more productive, efficient, resilient and sustainable, while managing and protecting the environment and the natural resources base that these systems depend upon. For these systems, the primary objective of the Decade should be to restore them to the full productive capacity of their goods and services.

9. As a first step, a strategy for the Decade³ was finalised in June 2021, defining the scope of ecosystem restoration as encompassing a wide continuum of practices and targeted ecosystem conditions that contribute to conserving and repairing damaged ecosystems in line with the ten guiding principles of the Decade⁴ prepared with the support of the Task Force on *Best Practices* and launched in September 2021. An action plan is being developed for the implementation of the Strategy.

10. Partnership is a cornerstone of the UN Decade. As of June 2022, the Decade's network of partners included over 100 organizations. Furthermore, five task forces were established⁵, bringing together over 500 experts around the world, to support the Decade implementation, including on: (i) *Best Practices*, (ii) *Finance*, (iii) *Monitoring*, (iv) *Science*; and (v) *Youth*.

11. The *Monitoring* Task Force led by FAO brings together 277 experts from 100 organizations and supports the development of the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring⁶ (FERM) a platform that will enable transparent monitoring and reporting on the progress in restoration throughout the duration of the Decade by providing monitoring tools & geospatial information related to ecosystems. The FERM was launched in May 2022 in Seoul, at the XV World Forestry Congress.

12. FAO is leading the UN Decade [Task Force on Best Practices](#). This task force focuses on shaping the knowledge component of the Decade, including capacity development efforts and capitalization as well as sharing and dissemination of good practices for restoration in all ecosystems. The Task Force developed the ten principles that underpin the full set of ecosystem restoration activities and is now engaged in a multi-stage process to develop standards of practice for ecosystem restoration. In parallel, the Task Force conducted a global capacity needs' assessment. The Task Force is currently developing a Capacity, Knowledge and Learning Action Plan for the Decade that will define, replicate and upscale key knowledge products and capacity development initiatives.

13. FAO also participates in the Task Forces on *Finance* and *Science* and actively contributes to relevant activities and discussions.

14. The UN Decade is guided by an Advisory board⁷ of 25 eminent experts, offering relevant perspectives and different schools of thought, in response to implementation challenges and boosting action on the ground. Support has also come from major media houses to mainstream production film-makers, street artists, musicians and many more in celebrating the promise of restoration and reaching hundreds of millions worldwide.

15. A UN Decade's Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) is operational. It contributes to the wider and overarching activities of the UN Decade, while focusing on direct support to countries. However, the scope of the activities of the UN Decade overall goes much beyond the specific actions under the MPTF-funded activities.

³ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/strategy>

⁴ www.decadeonrestoration.org/publications/principles-ecosystem-restoration-guide-united-nations-decade-2021-2030

⁵ www.decadeonrestoration.org/task-forces

⁶ www.fao.org/national-forest-monitoring/ferm

⁷ www.decadeonrestoration.org/advisory-board

III. Progress on the implementation of the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

16. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is now in the implementation phase with the operationalization of the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) through the first Executive Board meeting held on 16 December 2021 and the launch of the nomination process for the UN Decade's Flagship Initiatives. FAO and UNEP would like to acknowledge Germany as the first donor to contribute to the Fund in 2021, and Denmark for the pledged contribution. The Executive Board has approved the 5-year programme to provide catalytic support to directly enable the UN Decade's success. This programme aims to:

- a. support awareness initiatives, partnerships, and targeted campaigns to share good practices and lessons on ecosystem restoration with a global audience. This will highlight the importance of ecosystem restoration to billions of people and significantly amplify the reach of the UN Decade;
- b. increase developing countries' capacity to strengthen policies and access restoration resources. The establishment of on-the-ground Flagship Initiatives will advance key local restoration activities, while highlighting global good practices for scaling up and replication; and
- c. document progress on ecosystem restoration through a global monitoring programme. This will ensure that the global dialogue on restoration takes place on a well-informed basis and that decision makers are kept accountable for restoration targets.

17. In order to promote practical experience related to restoration efforts across different locations and ecosystems, FAO and UNEP Members were invited in December 2021 to nominate and submit Flagship Initiatives, which will contribute to the implementation of the UN Decade from the year 2022 onwards. A restoration Flagship Initiative of the UN Decade should be the first, best, or most promising example of ecosystem restoration, adding value, embodying the ten restoration principles and inspiring others to undertake or accelerate restoration at significant scale.

18. These Flagships will enable the UN Decade to align with the UN resolution's mandate and inspire a global movement "with the aim of supporting and scaling up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration".ⁱⁱ

19. From the above nominations, a limited number of Flagship Initiatives will be selected by FAO and UNEP where substantial activities on the ground can be supported directly through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund of the United Nations Decade, for example through provision of technical assistance by implementing partners at country or regional level.

IV. Flagships nominations and related activities

20. The assessment of all Flagship nominations received have been carried out by the UN Decade's *Science* Task Force (led by IUCN) and the *Best Practices* Task Force (led by FAO) between April and June 2022, in consultation with the submitting entity and implementing partners. The final approval will be confirmed by FAO and UNEP. Approval of the selected Flagships to receive financial support by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund will be given by the Fund's Executive Board.

21. A selection of the Flagship Initiatives submitted before 31 March 2022 will be presented concurrently at the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 27), to be held in Sharm el-Sheikh in November 2022 and they will be promoted widely and considered as success stories or opportunities for investors.

22. From 2022 onwards, the invitation will be repeated each year and might move to an open-ended call starting at the end of 2022. Flagship Initiatives will be selected, seeking to ensure diversity of ecosystems and balance at global scale. Any proposal for a Flagship Initiative by a non-

state actor will require endorsement by the government(s) of the country or countries that the Flagship targets.

V. Ecosystem restoration within FAO policies and programmes

23. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 was developed in the context of major global and regional challenges in the areas of FAO's mandate, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and was endorsed at the 42nd session of the FAO Conference on 18 June 2021. It seeks to support the 2030 Agenda through the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind.

24. Restoring productive ecosystems contributes to and supports all *four betters* and creates a basis for contributing to the achievement of relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (including SDG 2, 13, 14, 15 and 17), and advancement of FAO's work within several Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), in particular: *better production* the PPAs "Innovation for sustainable agriculture production" (BP1), "Blue transformation" (BP2) and "One Health" (BP3); for *better environment* the PPAs "Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems" (BE1) and "Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture" (BE3); and for a *better life* the PPAs "Resilient agrifood systems" (BL4) and "Scaling up investment" (BL6), to name a few.

25. In addition, building on the results of FAO's restoration-supported programmes such the Action Against Desertification in support to the Great Green Wall (GGW)⁸, FAO developed a proposed Value-Addition Impact Area Initiative (VAIA) under the *Better Environment – Restoring Environment for Productive Agriculture, Investment and Resilience (REPAIR)*, aimed to step up large-scale land restoration for small-scaling farming, across different production systems (agroforestry, forestry, pastoral, mangroves, coastal) in Africa and Central America. Suitable productivity-enhancing restoration can create opportunities for diversifying livelihoods and building resilience through restoration interventions, particularly for the youth and women in Land Locked Developing Countries, Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.

26. Concurrently, FAO is supporting existing efforts on forest and landscape restoration through its Trust Fund programme: The Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism (FLRM)⁹, which aims at providing technical assistance for country-level implementation with ongoing projects in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Guinea, Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Pakistan, Philippines, Sao Tome e Principe and Vanuatu. FLRM is also:

- a. supporting national partners to mobilize additional financial resources from the GEF, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Adaptation Fund (AF) for scaling up national/regional restoration initiatives;
- b. developing and disseminating knowledge products and publications on ecosystem restoration and facilitating knowledge sharing events through its Community of Practices, webinars and online courses developed in partnership with the FAO eLearning Academy;
- c. contributing to key global restoration partnerships such as the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR)¹⁰ and the initiative named "The Economic of Ecosystem Restoration" (TEER)¹¹.

27. FAO updated its safeguards system to help with ensuring resilience of agriculture and agrifood systems, protecting and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources while meeting the needs of

⁸ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/action-against-desertification/en>

⁹ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/en/>

¹⁰ <https://www.forestlandscaperestoration.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/our-work/gl/teer/en/>

those living in poverty. The Organization ensures that measures are in place at each step of the project cycle to address potential risks arising from FAO supported activities.

28. Therefore, the *Framework for Environmental and Social Management (FESM)*¹², which is the outcome of the revision of the 2015 *Environmental and Social Management Guidelines (ESMG)*, aims to ensure that people and the environment are protected from any potential adverse impacts of FAO's programmes and projects. It includes new and updated requirements to conserve and restore renewable natural resources and biodiversity, as well as to protect animal welfare, foster resilient livelihoods and respect Indigenous Peoples living in voluntary isolation – all of these are forming integral parts of the ecosystem restoration activities.

29. FAO has endorsed or is in the process of developing new or reviewing corporate strategies that form solid grounds for upscaling restoration activities.

30. The FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors¹³ was approved by the FAO Conference in 2019¹⁴. Its implementation aims to reduce the negative impacts of agricultural practices on biodiversity, to promote sustainable agricultural practices and to conserve, enhance, preserve and restore biodiversity as a whole.

31. FAO's Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031¹⁵ contributes to addressing a broad range of interlinked challenges, including the loss of biodiversity, desertification, land and environmental degradation, the need for accessible, renewable energy, and food and water security. Ecosystem restoration activities would offer potential for both climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as resilience building.

32. FAO's Science and Innovation Strategy¹⁶ aims to strengthen FAO's capacities to deliver the SDGs and the Strategic Framework 2022-31. It addresses the complexity of agrifood systems, covering all relevant scientific disciplines and types of innovations, including those stemming from indigenous and local knowledge, as well as community-based innovation. These elements are crucial in terms of ensuring scaling up restoration efforts and bringing all partners and stakeholders on board.

VI. Conclusion

33. SDGs are unlikely to be met unless ecosystem degradation is stopped, and ecosystem restoration is undertaken at larger scale (hundreds of millions of hectares) and at global level. Currently, there is insufficient political support and technical capacity in both the public and private sectors to invest in the many hundreds of thousands of ecosystem restoration initiatives worldwide that are needed to achieve restoration at such a scale.

34. The success of the Decade's implementation clearly depends on restoring agricultural production landscapes and seascapes, given their importance for reversing land degradation, and therefore FAO's role cannot be underestimated.

35. FAO has relevant technical expertise, operational capacities and frameworks in place to support Members in their restoration efforts and in scaling up and showcasing practical solutions along with pioneer innovations and mobilize partners and stakeholders.

36. Country and partner engagement is crucial to ensure ownership and local action in support of the Decade's ambition. Thus, FAO Members are in a lead role to scale up relevant commitments and activities and guide the implementation of the Decade in order to make it a success.

¹² Document under finalization.

¹³ <https://www.fao.org/3/ca7722en/ca7722en.pdf>

¹⁴ See document COFO/2022/6.2

¹⁵ See documents COFO/2022/INF/9 and COFO/2022/5.1

¹⁶ See documents COFO/2022/INF/10 and COFO/2022/7.5

37. FAO would like to call upon its Members to support the activities of the Decade and stands ready to mobilize relevant resources and technical capacities to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life* for all.

ⁱ United Nations. 2019. *United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030)*. New York. [A/RES/73/284 \(undocs.org\)](https://undocs.org/A/RES/73/284)

ⁱⁱ Please refer to endnote *i*.