



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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Progress towards the implementation of 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 paper intends to provide an update on the Decade implementation, with particular reference to the restoration of agricultural production landscapes and obtain guidance of the 28th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG 28) 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:

- a) *welcome* FAO and UNEP co-leadership to promote the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, and the progress made so far;
- b) *provide* guidance on the implications of addressing the restoration of agricultural production ecosystems within FAO policies and programmes;
- c) *encourage* Members to engage in the Decade by establishing and advancing the implementation of ambitious ecosystem restoration targets, with particular reference to agricultural production ecosystems; and
- d) *recommend* Members to support the activities of the Decade and enhance their ecosystem restoration efforts.

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

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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 1st 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.

2. The need for restoration is particularly demonstrated in terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems. Land degradation is costing over 10 percent of the annual global gross product in loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. It is estimated that one-third of land used for food, fibre and feed production are degraded, representing 1.6 billion hectares affecting all countries in the world.² The restoration of degraded land is considered central to the function and service provision of many ecosystems.

3. Inland waters and freshwater ecosystems also show among the highest rates of ecosystem decline, with only 13 percent of the wetland present in 1700 remaining in 2002.³ Marine ecosystems, from coastal to deep sea, are also showing the increased impact of human action, with coastal ecosystems showing large historical losses in extent and condition. Deterioration of these ecosystems reduces service provision, as well as livelihoods opportunities to coastal communities.

4. In 2020, FAO produced an Information Note *Position paper on “Ecosystem Restoration” of production ecosystems, in the context of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030*⁴ 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

II. Implementation arrangements

7. FAO and UNEP are co-leading the implementation of the Decade, in collaboration with the secretariats of the Rio conventions, and with other relevant multilateral environmental agreements and entities of the United Nations system, among others. Implementing partner⁵ were invited to identify and develop possible activities and programmes within their mandates, using existing resources and additional voluntary contributions, as appropriate.

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 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.

² FAO and Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS). 2015. *Status of the World’s Soil Resources (SWSR) – Main Report*. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5199e.pdf>

³ IPBES. 2019. *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

⁴ COAG/2020/INF/13. <https://www.fao.org/3/nd425en/nd425en.pdf>

⁵ www.undecadeonrestoration.org/partners

9. As a first step, a strategy for the Decade⁶ 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 Decade.⁷ An action plan is being developed for the implementation of the Strategy.
10. Partnership is a cornerstone of the UN Decade. As of March 2022, the Decade's network of partners included over 100 organizations. Furthermore, five task forces were established,⁸ 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 experts from 100 organizations and supports the development of the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring,⁹ a platform which will enable transparent monitoring and reporting on the progress in restoration throughout the duration of the UN Decade by providing monitoring tools and geospatial information related to ecosystems.
12. FAO also leads the Task Force on Best Practices, which involves more than 40 organizations. This Task Force is collating good practices on ecosystem restoration and indigenous knowledge around the world. It will focus on the dissemination of restoration knowledge over the next ten years.
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 board¹⁰ 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.

III. Progress on the implementation

16. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration is now in the implementation phase with the operationalization of the 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.
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. Restoration Flagship Initiatives of the UN Decade are the most promising examples of large-scale and long-term ecosystem restoration in any country or region, embodying the ten Restoration Principles of the UN Decade.
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

⁶ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/strategy>

⁷ www.decadeonrestoration.org/publications/principles-ecosystem-restoration-guide-united-nations-decade-2021-2030

⁸ www.decadeonrestoration.org/task-forces

⁹ www.fao.org/national-forest-monitoring/ferm

¹⁰ www.decadeonrestoration.org/advisory-board

Multi-Partner Trust Fund of the UN Decade, for example through technical assistance by implementing partners at country or regional level.

IV. Flagships nominations and related activities

20. The assessment of all Flagship nominations received will be carried out by the UN Decade's Science Task Force (led by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 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 UNEP and FAO. 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 with the opening week of the 77th Session of the UNGA in 2022, and they will be promoted widely and considered as case studies 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: for *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 Wall¹¹, FAO developed a proposed Value Addition Impact Area Initiative 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 young and women in Land Locked Developing Countries, Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.

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

27. Therefore, the forthcoming *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

¹¹ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/action-against-desertification/overview/great-green-wall/en>

¹² Document under finalization.

impacts of FAO 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.

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

29. The FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors¹³ was approved by the FAO Conference in 2019. 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.

30. Through its current Strategy on Climate Change (2017),¹⁴ FAO aims to enhance the institutional and technical capacities of Member Nations, improve the integration of food security, agriculture, forestry and fisheries within the international climate agenda and strengthen the internal coordination and delivery of FAO's work. The new strategy is under development, and will build on the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and the shared goals and cooperation towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, as well as on other recent FAO thematic strategies. Ecosystem restoration activities would offer potential for both climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as resilience building.

31. The FAO Strategy on Science and Innovation is being developed, with the aim 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

32. 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.

33. 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.

34. 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.

35. 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.

36. 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://www.un.org/development/desa/dest/2021-2030/)

ⁱⁱ Please refer to endnote *i*.

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

¹⁴ <https://www.fao.org/3/i7175e/i7175e.pdf>