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Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancing Forest and Landscape Restoration

Executive Summary

This document provides an update on the progress of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 (the UN Decade), co-led by FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It highlights regional progress, including the recognition and ongoing efforts of World Restoration Flagships, the operationalization of monitoring tools such as the UN Decade Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM), and pilot experiences in countries like Brazil, Peru, and those in the Central American Dry Corridor.

It also outlines key challenges, including institutional fragmentation, gaps in monitoring systems, and limited access to financing and inclusive governance mechanisms. Despite these challenges, the region has a unique opportunity to position restoration at the heart of its environmental and development agendas.

The document calls on Members to integrate restoration into national forestry, biodiversity, and climate strategies; to adopt the UN Decade's principles and standards of practice; and to scale up efforts through inclusive governance, tenure security, and technical and financial cooperation.

The Commission is invited to consider these policies and technical recommendations to accelerate the implementation of forest and landscape restoration as a catalyst for biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and rural development in the region.

Points for consideration

The Commission is invited to encourage Members to:

- a. seize emerging policy opportunities by integrating restoration into national climate, biodiversity, and land-use strategies, aligning with international commitments and fostering enabling conditions such as tenure security, intersectoral coordination, and access to finance;

- b. include restoration in national forestry and sustainable development strategies, as well as in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), REDD+ strategies, and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), as an important part of climate and biodiversity policy;
- c. continue supporting the UN Decade by integrating its principles and standards of practice into national plans and projects, upscaling restoration commitments and activities, and fostering collaboration and coordination among stakeholders and sectors at different levels;
- d. promote inclusive, rights-based approaches by upholding the biocentric perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, ensuring gender equality and social inclusion, and protecting land tenure rights;
- e. use the FERM to document restoration initiatives and best practices and to report areas under restoration for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) Target 2, which has also been identified by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as an indicator for monitoring Climate Adaptation for Ecosystems and Biodiversity¹ and supports addressing land degradation, as supported by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD);² and
- f. implement the "Action Plan for the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean"³ developed within the framework of the UN Decade and adopted by the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Commission is invited to recommend FAO to:

- a. support Members, upon request, with technical expertise, tools, methodologies and capacity development initiatives to scale-up forest and landscape restoration efforts, mobilize different partners and stakeholders, share good practices and monitor progress;
- b. support Members, upon request, with policy integration and inclusion of restoration in their national regulations and policy frameworks; and
- c. provide technical support to Members, upon request, to facilitate their access to bilateral or multilateral instruments financing ecosystem restoration, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF-9), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the German International Climate Initiative (IKI).

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¹ <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/workstreams/gga#Background>

² https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2023-05/Synergy%20Brief_UNCCD-CBD_March%202023.pdf

³ <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/34950>

I. Introduction

1. Latin America and the Caribbean, a region with one of the world's most ecologically valuable forest ecosystems, reported in 2020 Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA)⁴, 941 million hectares of forests, and an alarming rate of deforestation and degradation of 2.7 million net hectares from 2015 to 2020. Agriculture, infrastructure development, and mining have been identified as the main causes.

2. About 20 percent of the world's vegetated land—covering forests, croplands, grasslands, and more—shows declining productivity. By 2050, land degradation and climate change are expected to reduce agricultural crop yields by approximately 10 percent globally and up to 50 percent in certain regions.⁵

3. Through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global commitments such as the Bonn Challenge and the KMGBF, the international community is committed to putting the management of Earth's natural capital onto a more sustainable track. Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR), a process that aims to regain ecological functionality and enhance human well-being in deforested or degraded landscapes, has emerged as a key element in strategies to meet this challenge, encompassing efforts to address land management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change. FLR is not an end in itself, but a means of regaining, improving, and maintaining vital ecological and social functions, in the long term, leading to more resilient and sustainable landscapes.

II. Progress on the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030

4. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, launched on June 5, 2021, is a call to action to protect and restore ecosystems globally. It is an opportunity for national, sub-national, and local governments, communities, and citizens to come together to support restoration as a way to recover biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, enhance human health and well-being, including sustainable delivery of ecosystem goods and services, and reduce risks caused by climate change. It aims to accelerate and upscale efforts to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide by creating a global restoration movement, fostering political will and enhancing technical capacities across sectors.

5. FAO and UNEP are co-leading the implementation of the UN Decade, in collaboration with the secretariats of the Rio Conventions and several other key partners. FAO takes an active role in framing a vision for the implementation of the UN Decade to make agrifood systems (crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) more productive, efficient, resilient and sustainable, while sustainably managing and protecting the environment and the natural resources base that these systems depend upon. For these systems, the primary objective of the UN Decade is to restore them to their full capacity to provide goods and services.

6. The UN Decade is globally guided by a strategy⁶ and an action plan⁷. For the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, a regional Action Plan⁸ was also adopted by the XXII Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment from Latin America and the Caribbean and released in February 2021.

7. The UN Decade is supported by a robust governance structure comprising over 250 partners, five taskforces (Monitoring, Best Practices, Finance, Science and Youth), an Advisory Board, and a Strategy Group. In addition, a Multi-partner Trust Fund was established by FAO and UNEP to support the implementation of the UN Decade and its flagships, with current contributions from Germany and Denmark.

⁴ FRA open database: <http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/en/>

⁵ https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/new-un-decade-ecosystem-restoration-offers-unparalleled-opportunity?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁶ Original version of the Strategy: <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/strategy>; Summary in Spanish: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/31813/ERDStrat_sp.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y

⁷ [UNDecade_ActionPlan.pdf](#)

⁸ https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34950/ResAPLAC_SP.pdf?sequence=9&isAllowed=y

8. The *Monitoring* Task Force⁹ is led by FAO and supports the development of the FERM¹⁰ for the transparent monitoring and reporting on the progress in the UN Decade by providing monitoring tools and geospatial information related to ecosystems.
9. The FERM registry¹¹ was launched in May 2022 in Seoul at the XV World Forestry Congress to harmonize and collect information on ecosystem restoration projects and programs. The FERM has been developed to support monitoring and reporting to the KMGBF restoration target and is recommended by the CBD to share spatial information on restoration areas. In March 2025, the FERM platform was made available in Spanish¹² and in Portuguese¹³ to facilitate the use by partners in the region.
10. Accelerating Innovative Monitoring for Nature Restoration (AIM4NatuRe) is an FAO-led initiative building on the leadership of the Task Force on Monitoring to enhance countries' capacity to monitor and report ecosystem restoration progress. AIM4NatuRe leverages cutting-edge technology, standardized data frameworks, and capacity development to support global efforts to restore at least 30 percent of degraded ecosystems by 2030, as outlined in Target 2 of the KMGBF. By fostering transparency, accountability, and data interoperability, the initiative will enable countries to track restoration efforts across forests, wetlands, grasslands, marine ecosystems, and agricultural landscapes.
11. The Task Force on *Best Practices*¹⁴, also led by FAO, is focused on supporting capacity development efforts for effective ecosystem restoration, including the development of i) principles¹⁵ and standards of practice¹⁶ for ecosystem restoration; ii) a capacity, knowledge and learning action plan for the UN Decade¹⁷; and iii) a framework for documentation and dissemination of good practices for restoration of all types of ecosystems currently integrated into the FERM.¹⁸
12. Ongoing efforts of the Task Force on Best Practices include i) the development of strategies to facilitate adoption of the principles and standards of practice for ecosystem restoration including their translation into multiple languages, the preparation of an e-learning course, and the development of tools to facilitate navigation, self-assessment and decision making; ii) the implementation of the UN Decade Capacity, knowledge and learning action plan; and iii) the expansion of the good practices database of FERM.
13. In January 2022, the UN Decade launched the first call for countries to nominate their World Restoration Flagships, and the 10 best initiatives were unveiled at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP 15), held in Montreal, Canada, in December 2022. Seven additional initiatives were announced at the 6th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in Nairobi, Kenya, in February 2024¹⁹. Three of the Flagships are from the region, two from the first cohort, the *Trinational Atlantic Forest Pact* and the *Central American Dry Corridor* Flagship, and one from the second cohort, *Acción Andina*. In February 2024, a second call for nominations of World Restoration Flagships was launched, receiving 202 expressions of interest and 89 government-endorsed nominations. Three Flagships were already announced in June 2025 during the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, including the initiative *Comprehensive Island Restoration in Mexico*. Further Flagship initiatives will be announced during different global events throughout the second half of 2025.

⁹ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb0424en/cb0424en.pdf>

¹⁰ www.fao.org/national-forest-monitoring/ferm

¹¹ <https://ferm.fao.org/>

¹² <https://ferm.fao.org/es>

¹³ <https://ferm.fao.org/pt>

¹⁴ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/un-decade/taskforce-on-best-practices/taskforce-on-best-practices/es>

¹⁵ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/1a1eff3-8821-4bc7-af01-6c4f0d57224f>

¹⁶ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/79174fa7-7cf2-413d-a4e4-6e5369e69394>

¹⁷ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/0bcbbc17-bca0-491e-8927-b0e54e9a10a3>

¹⁸ <https://ferm.fao.org/search/good-practices>

¹⁹ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/world-restoration-flagships>

III. Progress of Ecosystem Restoration Initiatives in the Region

14. Through its portfolio of projects and technical assistance on restoration, FAO currently supports 22 countries in the region. Through these projects, 568,874 hectares have been restored or are in the process of direct restoration, and 14 million hectares are under improved practices that involve the recovery of some ecosystem services. By implementing restoration activities, these projects seek to recover key ecological processes and ecosystem services in the landscapes where they are developed, as well as generate employment and improve livelihoods. The most commonly used restoration techniques and approaches are natural or induced forest restoration, sustainable forest management, silvopastoral systems, and other integrated agricultural and forestry systems.

15. FAO is the technical and administrative lead of the Central American Dry Corridor Flagship²⁰, implemented under the political leadership of the Central American Economic Integration System (SICA), through the Council of Ministers of Environment and Agriculture, and technically, under the executive secretariats of the CAC (Central American Agriculture Commission) and CCAD (Central American Council for Environment and Development), with the support of key implementing partners such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and UNEP. The objective of this flagship is the promotion of the restoration of productive ecosystems across the countries of the Central American dry corridor (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic), with pilot restoration activities in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. This flagship implements actions to scale the benefits of restoration, integrate ecosystem restoration monitoring systems and regulatory/policy frameworks, while considering the inclusion of local decision-makers. In this context, the Community of Practice for Ecosystem Restoration²¹ was launched in 2025 to strengthen restoration efforts, foster collaboration, and sharing knowledge among national and local governments, researchers, and other stakeholders. It seeks to document, scale, and disseminate knowledge, experiences, and outcomes of ecosystem restoration initiatives.

16. The AIM4NatuRe project includes pilot country work in Brazil and Peru. In Brazil, the work focuses on strengthening the implementation of the spatial intelligence and monitoring strategy of the National Plan for the Recovery of Native Vegetation (PLANAVEG). In Peru, the support focuses on enhancing technical and institutional capacity for monitoring ecosystem restoration and reporting on restoration to the CBD. The support includes institutional arrangements, facilitation of technical working groups, coordination meetings for the National Restoration Roadmaps, and direct technical assistance to ministries in charge of ecosystem restoration data collection. In both Peru and Brazil, efforts to scale up biocentric restoration practices led by Indigenous Peoples are being supported through active government engagement and collaboration.

17. FAO participates as a technical partner in the Initiative 20x20, a country-led effort seeking to change the dynamics of land degradation in Latin America and the Caribbean by protecting and restoring 50 million hectares of forests, farms, pasture, and other landscapes by 2030. In the context of this partnership, FAO was part of the organization and actively participated in the 2025 Annual Summit of the Initiative 20x20 and UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration on Landscape Restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Puerto Varas, Chile, entitled “Multifunctional Landscapes for Human Well-being: Supporting the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration”, with the objective of catalysing implementation of landscape restoration. Chile, as host country, brought the experience of the implementation of the National Plan of Landscape Restoration, co-led by the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, supported by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) project “Restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem services at the landscape scale on productive agroforestry areas and their natural environment”, where FAO act as implementing agency.

²⁰ www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/un-decade/world-restoration-flagships/central-american-dry-corridor

²¹ https://dgroups.org/fao/restauracion_de_ecosistemas

IV. Challenges and opportunities

18. The number of efforts and actions around the restoration of ecosystems is increasing. The UN Decade is the platform to coordinate these efforts, but also a source of knowledge and tools to support these actions at the global level, mainly through the work of its five task forces. Promoting the use and facilitating the adoption of these knowledge products and tools (e.g. the UN Decade principles and standards of practice) to the formulators and implementers of projects, laws and policies is essential.

19. The principles and standards of practice of the UN Decade emphasize the importance of monitoring the implementation, effectiveness, and impacts of restoration activities as a basis for measuring progress and enabling adaptive management. Monitoring should be integrated from the planning stage and sustained throughout the entire lifecycle of restoration projects—even beyond their completion. Therefore, continuing to promote efforts to feed and integrate local and global geospatial databases (e.g. FERM) can facilitate harmonization of data collection processes and a more precise analysis regarding reference ecosystems, areas and links with key processes and co-benefits (carbon sequestration, biodiversity, water, soil, among others).

20. Documentation and sharing of good practices are fundamental to enhance technical capacities for forest and landscape restoration. To that end, FERM plays a key role by allowing the direct documentation of good practices from registered restoration initiatives and by enabling access to over 2000 good practices through a common search engine that facilitates interoperability with several knowledge platforms.

21. Considering the different levels of progress on the implementation and monitoring of restoration, countries of the region could benefit from the exchange of experiences and lessons learned within the framework of the UN Decade implementation and regional platforms.

22. Looking ahead, Latin America and the Caribbean face a unique opportunity to strengthen the enabling environment for forest and landscape restoration through ambitious and coordinated policy actions. Aligning restoration targets with national planning frameworks—such as climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, biodiversity action plans, land degradation neutrality commitments, and rural development agendas—can enhance coherence, mobilize resources, and generate long-term socio-environmental benefits. Mainstreaming restoration across intersectoral policies, improving land tenure governance, and leveraging innovative finance mechanisms will be key to accelerating implementation at scale. The region can also play a leadership role in shaping global restoration goals by showcasing inclusive, biocentric, and landscape-based approaches rooted in local knowledge and community-driven action.

V. Final remarks

23. The success of the UN Decade depends on restoring forests, agricultural production landscapes and seascapes, given their importance for preventing and reversing land degradation.

24. Effective restoration relies on sharing good practices, building technical capacities, and fostering inclusive communities of practice. Platforms like FERM and initiatives such as AIM4NatuRe and regional flagships demonstrate the importance of science-based, transparent, and collaborative approaches that engage governments, Indigenous Peoples, civil society, and the private sector.

25. Finally, considering the diversity of productive landscapes and ecosystems that support the livelihoods of millions of people in LAC, and the alarming rate of biodiversity loss and land degradation, the collaboration and coordinated action of stakeholders and sectors at different levels are key to advancing restoration targets.

Annex 1: Main tools promoted by FAO linked to FLR

[AURORA](#) (Assessment, Understanding and Reporting of Restoration Actions) is an online platform that supports the monitoring of forest and landscape restoration projects by providing a set of standard indicators. Based on the publication [The Road to Restoration](#), developed by FAO and WRI, it helps stakeholders select the most relevant indicators for their restoration context and suggests relevant data and metrics to monitor them.

[Open Foris Arena](#) and [Arena Mobile](#) are part of the Open Foris Initiative developed by FAO. Arena Mobile offers easy and efficient collection of biophysical, socio-economic, or biodiversity field data, while Open Foris Arena provides a powerful cloud-based platform for storing and processing data collected. They allow for offline data collection, data quality assurance, multilingual data entry forms and running robust statistical analysis.

[Kobo Collect](#) is a versatile mobile data collection application designed to gather field information through customized digital surveys. It supports offline data collection, making it ideal for remote areas with limited connectivity. The tool is integrated within the KoboToolbox platform, enabling easy survey creation, data storage, and analysis. It is used for spatial data collection in the field. It allows users to capture GPS data by adding a location question to a survey. Using GPS-enabled devices such as smartphones or tablets, field teams can automatically record coordinates during visits, collect multiple GPS points to map larger areas, and export the data in formats like CSV or GeoJSON for easy conversion into shapefiles compatible with GIS software. This facilitates accurate spatial analysis and documentation of the intervention zones.

[Ground](#) is a free, open-source tool developed by FAO and Google for primary field data collection. With a user-friendly interface, it can be used to easily delineate the areas of intervention with mobile devices and compile further information from the restoration area through simple Google-based surveys. It allows multiple users to collect data for one survey, that are then uploaded to a common database for data analysis.

[Collect Earth](#). Developed by FAO and part of the Open Foris Initiative, this tool enables stakeholders to visually interpret high-resolution satellite imagery for monitoring forest cover, land use, and land use change. It integrates seamlessly with Google Earth and Bing Maps, allowing easy data collection and analysis.

[Earth Map](#). Developed by FAO in collaboration with Google, Earth Map is a web-based tool providing easy access to environmental, climate, and socio-economic data. It allows users to analyse historical and current land-use patterns, monitor changes in vegetation and carbon stocks, and assess climatic trends across landscapes.

[Global Forest Watch](#). Global Forest Watch is an interactive online platform that provides real-time data on forest loss, gain, and degradation. It is widely used by FLR stakeholders to track forest cover changes and measure progress toward restoration goals.

[SEPAL](#) (System for Earth Observation Data Access, Processing, and Analysis for Land Monitoring). Another FAO-supported platform, SEPAL, facilitates analysis of satellite imagery for land use monitoring, offering accessible workflows for users with limited technical expertise.

[FERM](#) (Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring). The FERM consists of a geospatial platform and a registry of restoration initiatives. It is the official monitoring platform for tracking global progress and disseminating good practices for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. It also supports countries in reporting areas under restoration for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 2.