

Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program

The Issue

An estimated 2 billion hectares (ha) of agricultural land, pasture, forest, and woodland are degraded globally, with negative impacts on food systems, ecosystem services, and habitats for wildlife. While restoration efforts are underway in many regions, degradation continues at a large scale. There has thus never been a more urgent need to arrest further degradation and to restore and heal ecosystems.

Ecosystem restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of ecosystem types and habitats that have been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. It encompasses a continuum of activities that contribute to protecting intact ecosystems and repairing degraded ecosystems. Restoration can range from rehabilitating and improving systems under human use to restoring disturbed natural ecosystems to their natural state and ensuring their conservation.

Restoration, a key nature-based solution, has both economic and environmental benefits. Restoration contributes to green recovery by stimulating investments, creating jobs primarily in rural areas, and helping to secure livelihoods of local communities. It generates ecological benefits by safeguarding ecosystem services, such as soil protection, pollination, nutrient cycling, and soil water-holding capacity. Such services are crucial for both short- and long-term agricultural productivity and food security. In addition, restoration provides biodiversity benefits,

including avoided species extinctions, as well as climate change mitigation benefits through carbon sequestration.

The Integrated Solution

The Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program aligns with the vision of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and supports the global commitments toward restoration under the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). As such, it mobilizes a diverse coalition of stakeholders from all relevant sectors, catalyzing finance, and fostering global cooperation.

The program aims to generate multiple environmental and socioeconomic benefits by applying integrated approaches to restore degraded ecosystems. It will focus on restoration of ecosystem types with a high potential to generate multiple benefits, including the following:

- Converted or degraded ecosystem types and habitats, such as wetlands; peatlands; headwaters and watersheds; estuaries; riverine forests; mangroves; coastal areas, including near-shore coral reefs and seagrass ecosystems; native woodlands; shrub and grasslands; ecological networks and corridors; and steppingstone habitats. It will use best practices for ecological restoration.
- Degraded natural forest landscapes, drylands, grasslands, and pastures. It will apply a range of best practices and cost-effective interventions such as natural regeneration and assisted natural regeneration to restore ecosystem functions and services.
- Degraded agro-ecosystems in mosaic landscapes with a high potential for multiple environmental benefits. It will achieve this through investments in sustainable land management, including agro-silvo-pastoral models and agro-ecological diversification, and rangeland restoration



Approach

Conventional planning and policy decisions for natural resource management at landscape level are still siloed in individual ministries and discussed with different stakeholders ad hoc. The program will apply comprehensive integrated land-use planning, including spatial land-use planning. It will also promote cross-sectoral coordination between environment, agriculture, forestry, water, energy, tourism, transport, mining, and finance sectors. In this way, it will harmonize policies and financing streams.

The program will also engage with stakeholders more strategically. A programmatic approach will complement biophysical and technical interventions on the ground. Instruments focused on national policies, governance, institutional, financial, and local social structures will bring all relevant stakeholders together for transformational impact on reversing environmental degradation globally.

The lead agency of the program will provide technical- and science-based expertise, and support spatial land-use planning built on multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral participatory processes. This will facilitate Indigenous- and community-led restoration that fosters capacity of civil society organizations. It will design and deploy innovative financing solutions to sustain impact. Finally, it will conduct effective policy engagement to strengthen enabling conditions for restoration interventions.

As part of this approach, a global platform will deliver program-level objectives by guiding and supporting national child projects under the program in:

- Outreach and communication
- Knowledge generation and exchange
- Policy support
- Mobilization of finance
- Monitoring and evaluation

The program will work with and through existing platforms to create the global cooperation and synergies needed for transformational change and scaling, and enhanced impact.

Expected Impacts

The program provides a vehicle to meet many of the restoration targets that countries have set within their MEAs and other international commitments. This includes avoiding further degradation of land and ecosystems. Besides these indirect impacts, the program will generate the following direct global environmental benefits:

- 4.3 million ha under restoration
- 9.4 million ha under improved management
- 80 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) sequestered/avoided
- One shared freshwater ecosystem under new/improved cooperative management

The Global Environment Facility is the world's largest funder of biodiversity protection, nature restoration, pollution reduction, and climate change response in developing countries. **In June 2022, donor governments pledged \$5.33 billion to the GEF for its next four year operating period (GEF-8). Much of the funding will be delivered through a set of 11 integrated programs that address multiple environmental threats at once.**

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