

EVENT REPORT



DIGITAL FORUM | 29.04.2021

# NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

How **Restoration** Can Support a Healthy Climate, Economy and Planet

[bit.ly/FLRForum](https://bit.ly/FLRForum)



THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP ON FOREST AND LANDSCAPE RESTORATION



CPF  
Collaborative Partnership on Forests



Global Landscapes Forum



Photo by Axel Passio/CIFOR

## Key messages

- Restoration is a proven nature-based solution to solving our most pressing global challenges, including the climate crisis, a post-COVID economic and jobs recovery, and slowing and reversing the loss of the world's biodiversity.
- While countries are making substantive progress towards implementing restoration at scale, the power of restoration in addressing global challenges is still not sufficiently known or capitalized on.
- Restoration activities, including restoring degraded forests and wetlands, adopting improved soil management practices and more, can sequester carbon and contribute to the resilience and adaptive capacity of people and ecosystems in a warming world.
- Restoration activities can promote small business development, create needed employment, and increase incomes in rural communities.
- By working and planning at the landscape scale in how we manage, protect and restore our lands, we can find a balance between nature and what is needed for a thriving economy.
- Restoration can play a significant role in addressing biodiversity loss, such as by helping to restore and mitigate the loss of critical habitat for threatened species and ecosystems.
- Strengthened collaboration is needed to address implementation challenges such as insufficient technical support, resourcing, tapping of private sector input and cross-sectoral alignment.

On 29 April 2021, the Global Landscapes Forum held a [digital forum on restoration](#) hosted jointly by the [Collaborative Partnership on Forests \(CPF\)](#) and the [Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration \(GPFLR\)](#). The event served to promote an understanding of how restoration can help address three pressing global challenges: mitigating and adapting to the climate crisis; recovering from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic; and conserving the world's biodiversity. Over 1,900 viewers from over 100 countries tuned into the forum, which featured conversations with preeminent leaders, thinkers and practitioners in the field of restoration and reached an additional 2.2 million people through social media.

There is growing support for restoration of degraded and deforested lands. Through the **Bonn Challenge**, countries and partners have committed to restoring over 200 million hectares of degraded land by 2030, while the **United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration** is set to run from 2021 to 2030 and will issue a massive call to action for halting land degradation and promoting restoration at a global level. However, restoration still remains far below the levels needed. One major barrier has been insufficient knowledge of the contribution that restoration can make.

## Opening plenary

The event kicked off with a high-level plenary session exploring the context of how restoration and other nature-based solutions can help the world recover from the interlinked climate, biodiversity and COVID-19 crises. This included a discussion on some of the main barriers to implementing restoration at scale.

The plenary began with an opening address by [Jochen Flasbarth](#), state secretary at the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany (BMU). This was followed by a discussion with three global leaders at the forefront of global restoration efforts: [Bruno Oberle](#), director general of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), [Fran Price](#), forest practice leader at WWF, and [Manish Bapna](#), acting president of the World Resources Institute (WRI).

Moderator Musonda Mumba, chair of GPFLR, began the discussion with a focus on the COVID-19 crisis, raising the question of how we can ensure that an economic recovery is not a 'return to normal' but rather an opportunity to 'build back better.' Oberle saw the challenge as one of staying within the boundaries of what is sustainable, stating that we are presently demanding more from nature than nature can sustainably deliver, and restoration is one key way to safeguard and "increase" the supply of nature and the supply of ecosystem services that is essential to ensuring a habitable planet and a healthy and prosperous future for everyone.

To solve the puzzle of restoration, we need to put each piece in place, from attracting investors to building the capacity of local communities to carry out restoration work on the ground, said Bapna. This includes granting land tenure rights to help rural people restore the land that they work on, added Price.

Looking ahead, the panelists and Flasbarth announced the launch of a new facility by IUCN, WRI, and WWF with support from the German government in 2023. The Forest Landscape Restoration Implementation Hub will focus on helping countries address key challenges to restoration, including mobilizing funding, building capacity, and working with the private sector to help embed restoration in commodity supply chains and other processes.

## Fighting the climate crisis through restoration

According to [the UN's latest projections](#), the planet is on course to heat up by 3°C above pre-industrial levels by 2100 unless significant action is taken. Restoration provides an important part of the solution by storing carbon and building the resilience and adaptive capacity of human and natural systems to the climate crisis. [Peter Minang](#) of World Agroforestry and panelists explored the potential role of restoration in climate mitigation and adaptation in the event's first session.

Forest restoration could remove as much as 8–10 Gt of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere per year, noted [Susan Cook-Patton](#) of [the Nature Conservancy](#). However, not all land is created equal: [some areas of the world could store up to 100 times more carbon than others](#). Cook-Patton introduced a tool to estimate which sites offer the greatest mitigation potential to inform future restoration work.

Nonetheless, carbon sequestration is just one of many considerations when deciding which landscapes to restore first. Drylands, for example, are particularly vulnerable to desertification in the face of the climate crisis, which could jeopardize livelihoods across the globe. Based on a case study in Burkina Faso, [CIFOR's Houria Djoudi](#) revealed that restoration can provide a key safety net against the effects of the climate crisis for a wide range of vulnerable groups, from pastoralists to women, by preserving biodiversity.

**"The beauty of restoration is that it considers human beings and ecosystems as components of one single unit, which has to be well balanced."**



**Jochen Flasbarth**, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety of Germany (BMU)

**"We tend to focus on individual pieces of what it takes to create more inclusive and sustainable restoration. Part of the problem is that no one is looking and recognizing that multiple things have to happen at the same time."**



**Manish Bapna**, Acting President, WRI

**"Restoration of forest cover is a really potentially powerful climate solution, but it does require changes in land use and can be expensive. So, there is a need to determine how we can best deploy it in places with the largest climate returns per hectare invested."**



**Susan Cook-Patton**, Senior Forest Restoration Scientist, The Nature Conservancy

**“What we see is a lot of discussion about mitigation, but there is not so much about adaptation. So we looked at existing initiatives and asked: what are their contributions in terms of adaptation?”**



**Houria Djoudi**  
Senior Scientist,  
CIFOR

**“When we look at the devastation of COVID, there is an urgent need that we look for real long-term solutions to both socioeconomic and environmental challenges. Nature-based solutions have proven to be some of the most sustainable.”**



**Paul Elvis Tangem**  
Coordinator of the Great  
Green Wall Initiative

**“In order to sustain a green recovery for our economy through restoration, we first have to tackle a mindset change. In countries like the Philippines, farming is associated with poverty, unsustainability and failure. So we have to destigmatize green and agricultural jobs.”**



**Louise Mabulo**  
award-winning chef,  
farmer and entrepreneur

**“We synthesize traditional organic and natural farming practices with technology and, most importantly, operational discipline. One of the key things nature demands is discipline.”**



**Ved Prakash Sharma**  
co-founder and CEO,  
Gratitude Farms

Across the African Sahel, one of the world’s most ambitious dryland restoration initiatives is taking place in the form of the [Great Green Wall](#), which aims to restore some 100 million hectares of degraded lands and create 10 million jobs by 2030. When completed, the wall will span some 8,000 kilometers from Senegal to Djibouti. The initiative highlights the importance of strong partnerships between policymakers, researchers, practitioners, financiers and local communities in restoration, said [Paul Elvis Tangem](#), the initiative’s coordinator at the African Union Commission.

## Creating jobs in restoration

The second session examined how restoration can promote small business development, create millions of green jobs, and provide a valuable source of income for rural communities.

With hundreds of billions of dollars needed to combat land degradation at a global scale, it is crucial to make a strong business case to attract private finance to restoration projects. FAO’s [Marco Boscolo](#) presented a new guide for forest producers and communities to [develop bankable business plans](#), while UNEP’s [Jonathan Gheysens](#) announced two new initiatives to [incubate restoration projects](#) and [raise capital for them](#).

Following these presentations, the session moved to a panel discussion featuring five green entrepreneurs from across Asia and Africa, moderated by [Ulrich Apel](#) of the [Global Environment Facility](#). A common theme was barriers to youth engagement in agriculture due to the difficulties of pursuing farming as a livelihood, which could eventually threaten food security.

Award-winning chef, farmer and entrepreneur [Louise Mabulo](#) introduced [The Cacao Project](#), which addresses the problem by providing seeds, resources and training for farmers in the Philippines to cultivate sustainable and resilient farms powered by agroforestry. The project has worked with over 200 farmers to reforest and restore water sources across 85 hectares of land to date.

Indian Army veteran and social entrepreneur [Ved Prakash Sharma](#) presented [Gratitude Farms](#), a start-up that supports military veterans, rural women and youth in taking up organic farming. Sharma highlighted the issue of rural–urban migration in India, pointing out that veterans who move to cities often end up working low-paid menial jobs. The enterprise works to transform unused barren land into high-yield ‘food forests’ that intercrop fruit trees with vegetables, providing both employment and food security for local communities.

## How restoration can conserve the world’s biodiversity

With biodiversity being lost at unprecedented rates, scientists have warned that the world now faces a [sixth mass extinction](#). Part of this biodiversity loss is driven by land degradation and the conversion of natural habitats into other forms of land use. Restoration can play a significant role in addressing this loss, such as by helping to mitigate the loss of critical habitat for threatened biodiversity and by restoring lost habitat for threatened biodiversity. However, many questions remain around the links between restoration and biodiversity conservation efforts and how restoration initiatives can be designed to maximize benefits to biodiversity while balancing other important needs.

The Forum's third and final session examined these issues from a number of perspectives. Jim Hallett, chair of the Society for Ecological Restoration and Vice Chair of the GPFLR, noted that when ecological systems are degraded or converted into other forms of land use, they usually become simplified and less biodiverse. This means food, water, habitat and other resources that are critical for species survival become scarcer, resulting in species loss and declining population sizes. Moreover, some species may adapt by migrating elsewhere, which can lead to closer contact with humans and thus increase the risk of zoonotic diseases spilling over.

Restoration can help maintain ecological health and the integrity of natural systems, Hallett added, and it can achieve greater impacts when carried out at large scales, as small-scale restoration may not address all species needs.

Restoration is a necessary but long-term solution to conservation of biodiversity that can potentially take decades, said [Victoria Gutierrez](#) of [Commonland](#), warning that there are no quick fixes. Although tree planting is becoming increasingly popular in policy circles, it is just one of many forms that restoration can take, Gutierrez pointed out. Other potential solutions include replacing missing species and promoting natural regeneration.

It is essential to restore areas inhabited by critically endangered species, said [Louise Mair](#) of Newcastle University. Not only can this reduce their risk of extinction, but it can also benefit other species that share the same habitat.

However, restoration can be equally valuable outside of these areas, said Gutierrez, particularly in places where biodiversity conservation can be connected with other goals such as agricultural production. This can take the form of agroforestry or regenerative agriculture, which can also provide a reliable and sustainable source of food and income for local people – provided that they take an active part in carrying out restoration work.

Local communities not only possess valuable knowledge of the local environment but are also best placed to evaluate their own needs, said [Vance Martin](#), president of the [WILD Foundation](#).

**“Restoration is forward-looking: can we assist ecosystems to return to a trajectory that they would be on, had degradation or disturbance not happened?”**



**Jim Hallett**  
Chair of Society for Ecological Restoration and Vice Chair, GPFLR

**“Ecosystem restoration provides an opportunity to broadly improve the conditions of species and ecosystems and to reduce threats and pressures on biodiversity at scales of hundreds of millions of hectares worldwide.”**



**Anita Diederichsen**  
WWF Forest Landscape Restoration Global Lead

**“The local people don't see a difference between sustainable management and revenue. Both of those are benefits, because by taking care of the environment and restoring it where necessary, they live healthier lives.”**



**Vance Martin**  
President of the WILD Foundation





Photo by Rinze Van Dellen/Unsplash

## Looking ahead

Following inspirational talks from [GLFx](#) Lilongwe coordinator [Steve Makungwa](#) and [Modi Pontio](#) of the Tree Kangaroo Conservation Program in Papua New Guinea, the digital forum closed with remarks from [Lina Pohl](#), who is credited with conceiving the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration during her time serving as El Salvador's Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Echoing speakers and participants throughout the day's sessions, Pohl called for strong collaborations between scientists, practitioners, policymakers and civil society to tackle biodiversity loss, land degradation and the climate crisis through restoration.

To effectively restore the world's degraded and deforested lands, we first need to learn from past successes and failures to determine appropriate inputs, methods and actors, Pohl said. We then need to make a strong business case for restoration by demonstrating the potentially vast returns on investment, as well as putting in place regulations and incentives to reward participants for their work.

Powered by the traditional knowledge of local communities and well funded through a combination of private and public sources, a worldwide restoration effort can sequester carbon, protect biodiversity, and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy. In the face of a 3°C temperature rise, a grossly inequitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the potential loss of over 1 million species, the onus is on humanity to choose its path: countdown to extinction, or destination restoration?

[View all recorded sessions here.](#)

**"I would like to issue a challenge: each of us has to engage 10 other actors in restoration. Keep in mind that there are no small or big actors, no friends or enemies. Everyone must be involved."**



**Lina Pohl**  
El Salvador's Former  
Minister of Environment  
and Natural Resources

### Global Landscapes Forum

The Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) is the world's largest knowledge-led platform on integrated land use, dedicated to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Climate Agreement. The Forum takes a holistic approach to create sustainable landscapes that are productive, prosperous, equitable and resilient and considers five cohesive themes of food and livelihood initiatives, landscape restoration, rights, finance and measuring progress. It is led by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), in collaboration with its co-founders UN Environment and the World Bank and Charter Members.

**Charter Members:** CIAT, CIFOR, CIRAD, Climate Focus, Conservation International, Crop Trust, Ecoagriculture Partners, EFI, Evergreen Agriculture, FSC, GEF, GIZ, ICIMOD, IFOAM - Organics International, ILRI, INBAR, IPMG, IUFRO, Rainforest Alliance, Rare, RRI, SAN, UN Environment, (TMG) Think Tank, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, part of Wageningen Research, WFO, World Agroforestry, World Bank Group, WRI, WWF Germany, Youth in Landscapes Initiative.

### CIFOR-ICRAF

The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and World Agroforestry (ICRAF) envision a more equitable world where trees in all landscapes, from drylands to the humid tropics, enhance the environment and well-being for all. CIFOR and ICRAF are CGIAR Research Centers.

### Funding partners



Federal Ministry  
for the Environment, Nature Conservation  
and Nuclear Safety



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development