



Global



Forest landscape restoration: Unlocking the mitigation and adaptation potential of the forest and land sector

“Land use is a significant part of the problem contributing to climate change, but forests and forest landscapes can also be some of our best solutions.”

— Zhang Xinsheng, President, IUCN

Achieving the adaptation and mitigation objectives of the Paris Agreement will only be possible by halting deforestation and reversing its impacts through effective protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests. Well-managed forests can provide essential ecosystem services and social benefits, and support thriving, climate-resilient ecosystems and societies.

Meanwhile, deforestation and forest degradation, together with agriculture, account for about a quarter of total global emissions. What is more, the loss of healthy soils and nutrients through land degradation can lead to food insecurity, with the potential to reduce global food production by 12% and increase the price of some commodities by as much as 30%.¹

On the road to achieving the sustainable development goals, IUCN has been engaging with state and non-state actors to build low carbon, resilient and productive landscapes, advance the rights and interests of forest communities, protect natural forests, engage private investors, and design and support the implementation of effective forest and land-use policies. To achieve these goals, IUCN champions forest landscape restoration, which promotes multifunctional landscapes and aims to regain a balance of ecological, social and economic benefits from forests and trees.

Forest landscape restoration benefits extend well beyond an increase in the density of trees on the land, including: boosting landscape productivity; improving food and water security; conserving biodiversity; strengthening the governance of forest landscapes; reducing disaster risk, combatting desertification; and, importantly, unlocking the adaptation and mitigation potential of forest and non-forest ecosystems.

Climate action is underway, but greater ambition is needed

And it is possible. **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**² submitted by parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are the foundation for transformative development through mitigation and adaptation strategies. Forest references are deeply embedded in countries' NDCs, however they vary significantly. An in-depth analysis conducted by IUCN and Climate Focus on countries' NDCs suggests that forest landscape restoration is broadly captured in their national priorities, however only eight NDCs include unconditional sectoral targets.

IUCN advocates that NDCs, in order to be strengthened, should be translated into robust, ambitious and implementable policy instruments to bridge the global emissions gap and enhance the adaptive capacity of social and environmental systems.

What does this mean for COP23 discussions on the design of the Paris Agreement Rulebook and the 2018 Facilitative Dialogue?³ Can forest landscape restoration approaches inform enhanced and robust NDCs by promoting mosaic landscape approaches and taking pressure off of remaining forests?

Analysing Nationally Determined Contributions

The crucial role of the forest sector in achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement is broadly acknowledged by most of the parties to the agreement, as evidenced by their NDCs. While 77% of NDCs submitted by parties contain references to ambitious and detailed – ongoing or planned – efforts in the forest sector, that are relevant for national actions in the context of climate change, particularly related to forest landscape restoration approaches, only 74% of NDCs include forests-related targets and only 20% of those include quantifiable targets corresponding to the forest sector, either under economy-wide or sectoral approaches. Furthermore, when considering those NDCs with forests-relevant elements,⁴ only 8% include targets expressed in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

In terms of the scope and nature of the commitments, 91 parties have included forests in economy-wide NDCs, yet 65% of those are conditional upon the provision of international support. For example, Brazil's NDC, while emphasising the unconditional nature of the country's economy-wide target, reiterates the need for increased international support for actions that require large-scale transformations to the forest sector, particularly concerning the permanence of results-based REDD+ actions and ambitious efforts for forest restoration and reforestation.



When it comes to forest specific targets, notably only 20 are sectoral NDCs and eight of those are of an unconditional nature. This is the case for Chile and Malawi. Chile has committed to sustainably develop and recover forest land, as well as to reforest, contingent on the strengthening and enforcement of national legislation. In the case of Malawi, non-binding but anticipated efforts are enshrined in actions to enhance the protection and conservation of protected areas as well as restoration.

A significant number of those countries making references to the forest and land sector in their NDCs have explicitly excluded forests from their NDC targets (26%). Such exclusion of the forest sector from NDC targets results from multiple reasons, including: on-going or planned national policies and efforts not considered under NDC targets; national priorities in the forest sector with a focus on REDD+ implementation that are beyond, or complementary to, NDC targets; limited capacities – or need for further methodological clarifications; adaptation priorities in the forest sector; and conditionality to international support.

It is noteworthy that the vast majority of NDCs emphasised the importance of the forest sector for their adaptation priorities, either in the context of ensuring food security through sustainable and productive forest landscapes; reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilient ecosystems and rural economies; or as part of their international commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

This rapid analysis highlights the valuable insights that can be gleaned by reviewing parties' NDCs. While NDCs express great ambition and mitigation potential at the national level, when considering the number of NDCs with references to actions in the forest sector, a significantly smaller number of countries express unconditional commitments in the form of NDC targets. Further analysis and understanding of the challenges and opportunities stressed in the parties' NDCs that would enable moving from ambition to actual targets, would provide relevant insights to inform the design of the Paris Agreement Rulebook and the 2018 Facilitative Dialogue.

Overall, this analysis reinforces the importance of forest landscape restoration for countries as a cost-effective nature-based solution which would support countries in addressing their remaining needs, challenges and barriers in order to scale-up ambition and action through NDCs to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement.



Photo: Patricia Ugalde



Footnotes

1. IFPRI. 2012. Global Food Policy Report <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/2012-global-food-policy-report>
2. Considering both NDCs under the UNFCCC Interim NCD Registry: <http://www4.unfccc.int/ndcregistry/Pages/Home.aspx> and those additional INDCs under the submissions portal <http://www4.unfccc.int/Submissions/INDC/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>
3. Paris Agreement, Decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 20.
4. 127 Nationally Determined Contributions under the Interim NDC Registry and those additional INDCs under the submissions portal.

Further reading

- UNFCCC Paris Agreement webpage http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php
- InfoFLR.org - For additional data, download the accompanying NDCs analysis table

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