



## INCREASING THE AMBITION AND MEASURABILITY OF RESTORATION IN THE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

### PROPOSALS FOR TARGET 2

#### Summary

- GBF Target 2 proposes only 20 % restoration (Ensure that at least 20% of degraded ... ecosystems are under restoration...). This is not ambitious enough; as framed, the Target would allow 80% of degraded ecosystems to have zero restoration by 2030. The area to be restored by 2030 should therefore be increased to 50%, implemented with urgency
- This would go further to meet the overall goals of the GBF and to match existing commitments from the UNCCD, UNFCCC, UN Strategic Plan for Forests, Ramsar Convention, UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- This target will not be effective unless it is supported by an agreed definition of degradation for a range of ecosystems, along with a clear baseline against which to measure progress. The failure to report on restoration in the Aichi targets, due to the impossibility of tracking progress, is proof of the importance of this.
- Additionally, any restoration target needs to be accompanied by environmental and social safeguards, to avoid perverse results (see GBF Target 18) such as afforestation of ecologically important grassland and savannah, damage to wildlife, or negative social or economic impacts to human communities, noting that many badly degraded lands are home to some of the world's poorest people.
- WWF's proposal for the target would read: "Ensure that at least 50 per cent of degraded freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems are restored, ensuring connectivity among them and focusing on priority ecosystems".
- Urgent action is needed to define and agree a baseline against which to measure progress on the target, driven by the CBD and drawing on global expertise, aiming to have a working methodology and baseline by the beginning of 2024.
- This process should not delay urgent and ambitious restoration action.
- The need for a baseline for Target 2 and steps towards defining the baseline are outlined below.

#### POLICY ASKS FOR TARGET 2

- Target 2 is not ambitious enough and should be increased to 50% of degraded lands restored.
- Target 2 needs to be supported by a major effort to agree a definition of degradation for different ecosystems and then to set a baseline against which to measure progress.
- Target 2 should be implemented in close concert with a strengthened version of Target 18 on the repurposing of subsidies,
- Target 2 should be accompanied by detailed social and environmental safeguard procedures, including FPIC.

## The need for a more ambitious target

**Loss and degradation of global ecosystems have already advanced to a stage when large-scale restoration is essential.** Many ecosystems have undergone such severe loss and degradation that conservation alone is no longer enough to secure biodiversity and ecosystem services. Forty percent of grassland, savannah and rangeland ecosystems have been converted,<sup>i</sup> mainly to agriculture, and more has undergone severe degradation. Forests once covered half the land surface but have been reduced to 30%,<sup>ii</sup> with rapid losses continuing;<sup>iii</sup> some ecoregions have almost completely lost forest cover. Inland waters are declining rapidly, with 35% losses since 1970 where data are available.<sup>iv</sup> Global mangrove cover has declined by 20-35% in the last 50 years.<sup>v</sup> The *World Atlas of Desertification* estimates that from 1998 to 2013, around 20% of the vegetated land surface showed persistent declining trends in productivity.<sup>vi</sup> Over 1.3 billion people are trapped on degrading agricultural land.<sup>vii</sup>

Connectivity within and between ecosystems has also declined markedly over the last few decades, isolating populations inside protected areas and elsewhere. Restoring connectivity is therefore a major focus of conservation action.<sup>viii</sup> The current wording “ensuring connectivity among them” does not give emphasis on within-protected area connectivity, while “ensuring connectivity *within and between* them” might be clearer.

These changes are catastrophic for biodiversity but they also directly impact human communities, through loss of ecosystem services. For example, seagrass, mangroves, coral reefs and other coastal habitats provide multiple goods and services to coastal communities, such as food, building materials, coastal protection, cultural value and traditional knowledge.<sup>ix</sup> The poorest people are almost always the worst hit,<sup>x</sup> with women paying a disproportionate price.<sup>xi</sup> Resource shortages and land degradation are increasingly recognised as important causes of human migration<sup>xii</sup> and of social and political conflict.<sup>xiii,xiv</sup> There are projections that up to 200 million people will be displaced for environmental reasons by 2050.<sup>xv,xvi</sup>

**POLICY ASK:** *Target 2 is not ambitious enough and should be increased to 50% of degraded lands restored: “Ensure that at least 50% of degraded ... ecosystems are restored...”.*

### **An aim to restore half the world’s degraded lands matches other global commitments.**

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification has a target for Land Degradation Neutrality, already agreed by 129 countries: “A state whereby the amount and quality of land resources, necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security, remains stable or increases ...” A 2030 deadline for LDN is set in target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals: “By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil ... and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world”. Both imply huge levels of restoration. The role of ecosystem restoration in climate mitigation is recognised,<sup>xvii</sup> and is an increasingly important component of Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement. Forest Goal 1 of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests seeks to increase the forest area worldwide by 3% (120 million hectares) and parties to the New York Declaration on Forests / Bonn Challenge committed to bring into restoration 350 million ha of forest(-landscapes) by 2030, with 170 million ha already pledged. Regional leadership had been spurred through initiatives in Africa – AFR100- and in Latin America – 20x20. The Ramsar Convention on

Wetlands has a commitment to restoration in Target 12 of its strategic plan “*Restoration is in progress in degraded wetlands, with priority to wetlands that are relevant for biodiversity conservation, disaster risk reduction, livelihoods and/or climate change mitigation and adaptation*”.<sup>xviii</sup> A higher target also fits the ambitions of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and is in line with the wider 2050 goal and timescale of the CBD ambition to be “*living in harmony with nature*”, which assumes 100% restoration. It also fits with the aspirations of the Nature Positive by 2030 campaign.<sup>xix</sup>

## **The need for a baseline for degradation**

**However, percentage restoration targets urgently need a baseline against which to measure progress.** Experience with the Aichi targets proves that governments respond better to measurable targets than to qualitative targets or vague statements of intent.<sup>xx</sup> Target 15 to restore 15% of degraded land<sup>xxi</sup>, was one of the few Aichi targets that had to be assessed as “unknown”. Lack of quantitative metrics resulted in a lack of quantitative targets and thus poor reports of progress, with the few quantitative targets set focusing narrowly on area to be restored in hectares, with no baseline against which to compare. While a few indicators identified the degree of degradation (e.g., water quality or forest composition), they had no associated quantitative national target. Furthermore, most restoration targets focused exclusively on forests, due to greater data availability, at the expense of ecosystems such as grasslands or freshwater ecosystems. If a government does not have information about the level of degradation in the country, it is impossible to set out an action plan to restore an agreed percentage.

The UNCCD acknowledges the importance of setting a baseline for measuring LDN for example,<sup>xxii</sup> and works with governments to set such a baseline at national level, but the UNCCD *Global Land Outlook* still has problems in giving global figures for degradation. Similarly, the WET Index devised by the Ramsar Convention to measure the state of wetlands is hampered by lack of data in many places. And although change in total forest cover can now be measured quite accurately through satellite imagery, details of forest degradation remain much more difficult to define.

**POLICY ASK:** *Target 2 needs to be supported by a major effort to agree a definition of degradation for different ecosystems and then to set a baseline against which to measure progress.*

## **Steps towards developing a metric to measure progress on the target**

Measuring the degradation of ecosystems is a complex challenge because (i) it requires baseline reference and indicators along with tracking, monitoring and assessment tools; (ii) data collection is specific to the structure, composition and function of each ecosystem; and (iii) views of degradation are highly subjective and influenced by personal or collective value systems, but measurement under Target 2 will require agreement for a definition of degradation for a range of ecosystems. The diversity of variables that can be considered to assess degradation is a major issue for the development of consistent indicators that could be used at the national and global scale.

The process of development will take a number of steps:

- A review of data, tools and definitions that are already available for different ecosystems
- A consultation with expert stakeholders to draft a definition of degradation for different ecosystems
- Development of a set of indicators
- Field testing in a number of ecosystems/countries and further refinement
- Adoption by CBD Parties at the next Conference of Parties
- Capacity building efforts to ensure Parties understand and use the baseline

This cannot be completed by COP 15. However, steps to scale up the reach and ambition of global restoration targets should be implemented immediately, and the need for a baseline not used as an excuse for delaying action. But in parallel, urgent development of a baseline is required.

## Implementation with safeguards

Targets such as the Bonn Challenge have sometimes created perverse results, such as afforestation (even plantations of exotic tree species) on ecologically valuable natural grasslands in the name of carbon sequestration. Such actions damage biodiversity, disrupt water services and probably release more carbon (from ploughing the soil) than will be captured in the medium term, creating faster climate change. There are also concerns about large-scale restoration because of its potential negative impact on people. Many of the world's poorest people live on degraded land, which nonetheless provides them with necessary life support. Restoration activities that do not take these issues into account are likely to result in dispossession of people from land and resources and more damage to biodiversity and wildlife. Restoration activities therefore need to follow environmental and social safeguards, in the latter case by implementing Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) on territories of Indigenous peoples, full consultation with all rightsholders and stakeholders, including women and youth, and equitable benefit sharing.

**POLICY ASK: *Target 2 should be implemented in close concert with a strengthened version of Target 18 on the repurposing of all harmful subsidies.***

**POLICY ASK: *Target 2 should be accompanied by detailed social and environmental safeguard procedures including FPIC.***

## Implementing a GBF target

Global restoration efforts under the restoration target of the GBF should:

- Be representative of all terrestrial, freshwater, marine and coastal ecosystems, including agricultural soils.
- Aim for 50% of degraded systems restored rather than 20% under restoration as in the current proposals and call for strong action starting immediately

- Prioritise the most critical ecosystems from the perspective of biodiversity and other ecosystem services, including ecosystems like forests but also and importantly others such as grasslands, savannahs and coastal ecosystems that have tended to be under-represented so far
- Include habitats that contribute to mitigating and adapting to climate change, based on both their carbon storage and sequestration capacity, and ability to buffer against climate impacts
- Include sub-targets for the restoration of a variety of ecosystems
- Use several metrics to balance the complexity of assessments needed to adequately establish baselines
- Focus on benefits for biodiversity (reduced extinction debt, increased species populations, increased habitat connectivity etc.) and other benefits (the full range of ecosystem services) expected from restoration
- Explicitly refer to the need to avoid the transformation of natural ecosystems or important cultural ecosystems
- Define what is acceptable in terms of restoration, to avoid e.g., monoculture forest plantations or highly simplified grassland ecosystems being counted within restoration targets

## **The way forward**

Restoration action should start immediately, and with urgency. Simultaneously, urgent action is needed to define and agree a baseline against which to measure progress on the target. This should be a CBD-driven process, through an international working group reporting to the next COP, drawing in addition on expertise from the Society for Ecological Restoration, Science and Monitoring Task Forces of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, UNCCD working group on Land Degradation Neutrality, etc. While the task is complex it is also time-bound and should at the latest have a working methodology and baseline by the beginning of 2024.

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