ACT I - ADVOCACY

# Post-Webinar Booklet
## *Climate Action Conversations (C.A.C.)*



*Episode - 7*

# HOW TO RESTORE DEGRADED ECOSYSTEMS?

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*Prepared by GEAF | CYP Pavilion Steering Committee Member*

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# Executive Summary

Land degradation is among the most consequential and least visible environmental challenges of the present era: an estimated 40% of the world's land is already degraded, affecting close to half of the global population and placing food security, water availability, biodiversity and rural livelihoods under increasing strain (UNEP, 2024). The pressures behind it are intensifying: on current trends, three in every four people worldwide could be affected by drought by 2050 (UNCCD & EC-JRC, 2024), while close to 1.4 billion hectares, more than a tenth of the world's land, are already affected by salinity (FAO, 2024). Much of this decline advances gradually and attracts little public attention.
The seventh episode of GEAF's Climate Action Conversations series examined a question now central to the international land agenda: How do we Restore Degraded Ecosystems? It brought together researchers, practitioners and community voices to move the discussion beyond the scale of the loss toward the practical, financial and governance responses that restoration now demands.

The discussion converged on three points. Restoration is not a planting exercise but an ecological, social, financial and governance undertaking, and it is judged by whether ecological function recovers and whether communities can manage the landscape over the long term, not by the number of hectares treated. Context decides outcomes, and, as the panel put it, there is no blueprint for ecosystem restoration: what works in a Namibian conservancy, a hyper-arid Saudi rangeland and a Timorese mangrove coast shares principles rather than methods. And restoration has to pay its way, since public and donor finance alone cannot close a biodiversity finance gap of some US$700 billion per year (CBD, 2022). The panel pressed for restoration designed as an economic activity, for grants treated as a bridge rather than a destination, and for the dependencies and impacts of business on nature to be made visible in company accounts (IPBES, 2026).



*“Moving from project to process: projects are maybe two, three, four years long, and they end, and they are often driven by external funding. We need to get away from that model and think about longer-term engagement, which is more organic, harnessing the grassroots governance systems that are already in place.”*

— Dr. Terry Sunderland, Professor, Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia (C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)

Running through all three was the insistence that those who live on the land hold both the knowledge and the stake that determine whether recovery lasts. This booklet sets out what that requires in practice, drawing on the panel's expertise and on recent global assessments of land, drought and restoration.

# About the Green Earth Action Foundation (GEAF)

The Green Earth Action Foundation (GEAF) is a Geneva-based non-profit organisation advancing inclusive, evidence-informed climate action within multilateral environmental governance. Accredited to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), GEAF contributes to international dialogue and implementation efforts aligned with global sustainability objectives.

GEAF works at the meeting point of policy dialogue, youth leadership, and institutional cooperation. In 2026, its GEAF Ambassador Programme brought together 23 ambassadors from 20 countries across five continents, supporting community-led environmental initiatives that span freshwater ecosystem restoration around Lake Tana in Ethiopia and Lake Olbolosat in Kenya, youth-driven climate action along the River Beas in Pakistan, and coastal resilience work near the Sundarbans in Bangladesh.

Through its Climate Action Conversations series, GEAF convenes policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and civil society actors around the social, economic, and governance dimensions of climate transformation, deepening understanding of complex challenges while pointing toward practical pathways for action.



# About the Webinar

The seventh episode of the Climate Action Conversations series asked a fundamental question: How to Restore Degraded Ecosystems? The discussion took place at a timely moment, within the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021 to 2030) and between this year's two Rio Convention Conferences of the Parties (COPs): the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD's COP17) in August, themed “Restoring Land, Restoring Hope”, and the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP17) in October, themed “Taking Action for Nature”, which reviews progress towards restoring the ecosystems on which its biodiversity targets depend.

Restoration is not a single intervention but a sequence of interdependent ecological, social and financial conditions, each of which must hold if recovery is to last. The session followed that chain end to end. From the health of the soil to the security of land rights to the flow of funding, the panel traced what has to hold together for degraded land to recover and stay recovered.

The session was moderated by GEAF with contributions from:

- **Ms. Alfredina Dos Santos,** GEAF Ambassador (2026 Cohort)
- **Ms. Mariam Gibson Bwire,** GEAF Ambassador (2026 Cohort)
- **Mr. Prince Tsiaterimila,** GEAF Ambassador (2025 Cohort)
- **Ms. Inonge Guillemin,** Doctoral Researcher: Biodiversity Economy & Sustainability Nexus, United Nations University - FLORES
- **Mr. Eduardo Mansur,** Senior Environment Advisor, former Director of Climate and Environment at UN FAO, former General Manager of Forests of Saudi Arabia
- **Dr. Terry Sunderland,** Professor at Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia



Their contributions are drawn together in the pages that follow, tracing that chain from the soil upward to the communities, institutions and finance on which lasting recovery depends.

# Introduction:

## Land Degradation, Drought and the Imperative of Restoration

Desertification, land degradation and drought are closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing. As land degrades, it loses vegetation, soil fertility and the capacity to retain water; this in turn heightens vulnerability to drought, which accelerates further degradation. The result is a negative feedback loop that erodes the productive base on which food systems and rural livelihoods depend (UNCCD, 2025).

The scale of the problem is considerable. Around 40% of the world's land is already degraded, affecting almost half of the global population (UNEP, 2024). The burden falls heavily on regions dependent on rain-fed agriculture; in parts of Africa, where an estimated 94.5% of cultivable land is rain-fed, degradation contributes significantly to the vulnerability of agricultural systems (UNCCD, 2025). Over the past three decades, disaster events have caused an estimated US$3.8 trillion in crop and livestock losses, equivalent to more than 5% of annual global agricultural output (UNCCD, 2025). Land degradation is, moreover, inseparable from the wider decline of nature: scientific assessments cited by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework estimate that around one million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless the drivers of biodiversity loss are reduced (CBD, 2022).



*“There is no country in the world that has no land degraded. There is no ecosystem degraded [only] in one place. It's everywhere, in developed and underdeveloped countries.”*

— Mr. Eduardo Mansur, Senior Environment Advisor, former Director of Climate and Environment, FAO (C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)

Against this backdrop, the international community has placed ecosystem restoration at the center of its response. The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021 to 2030) has mobilized action worldwide, and 2026, in which each of the three Rio Conventions holds its conference of the parties, offered a rare opportunity to align the land, biodiversity and climate agendas. It is within this context that GEAF convened the seventh episode of the Climate Action Conversations series, to ask not only what is being lost, but how it can be recovered.

# Understanding Ecosystem Restoration

Ecosystem restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged, or destroyed, while conserving those that remain intact (UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, 2021). It is distinct from, though complementary to, conservation, which protects ecosystems that are still healthy. Land is considered degraded when it has lost part of its capacity to provide the goods and services on which people and nature depend, whether through the erosion and salinisation of soils, the loss of vegetation and biodiversity, or the disruption of the water cycle (UNCCD, 2025).

Restoration is best understood as a systemic undertaking rather than a single technical intervention. It touches soil, water, vegetation, biodiversity, and livelihoods simultaneously, and its success is measured not only in area treated but in the durability of the recovery achieved. This understanding aligns with the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality, adopted under Sustainable Development Goal target 15.3, which seeks to balance losses of healthy and productive land with equivalent gains through restoration and sustainable management.

*“Successful restoration should not only ask how many hectares we restored. It should ask whether ecological function improved, and whether communities can manage the landscape over the long term.”*

— Ms. Inonge Guillemin, Doctoral Researcher, United Nations University (UNU-FLORES) (C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)



**MS. INONGE GUILLEMIN**

The Global Land Outlook thematic report on rangelands and pastoralism emphasises that lasting recovery depends on more than technical measures. It requires sustainable land management and inclusive, responsible governance, so that those who live on and steward the land participate meaningfully in decisions about it (UNCCD, 2024). Restoration, in this sense, is as much a social and institutional process as an ecological one.

# The State of the World's Land

Ecosystem degradation is the product of several interacting pressures. Among the most significant, and the two examined most closely in the webinar, are the intensification of drought and the spread of soil salinity.

## Drought as a systemic risk

Drought is frequently misunderstood as a simple deficit of rainfall. The World Drought Atlas emphasises that it is instead a systemic phenomenon arising from the interaction of natural climate variability, anthropogenic climate change and the human mismanagement of water and land. Its impacts cascade across interconnected systems, from water supply and agriculture to energy generation, inland navigation and ecosystems (UNCCD & EC-JRC, 2024).

The trajectory is one of intensification. Droughts are becoming more frequent and more severe, and on current trends, three in every four people worldwide could be affected by drought by 2050 (UNCCD & EC-JRC, 2024). The consequences are unevenly distributed: in many regions the burden falls disproportionately on women and girls, whose responsibility for collecting water can grow substantially as local sources fail.

*“Drought is all about preparedness. Droughts are going to come anywhere. Southern Brazil has always been rainy, and it's now affected by very severe droughts.”*

— Mr. Eduardo Mansur, Senior Environment Advisor, former Director of Climate and Environment, FAO (C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)



**MR. EDUARDO MANSUR**

# The spread of soil salinity

As land dries, its soils begin to change. With less water available to flush salts from the root zone, and with intense evaporation drawing saline moisture upward, salt accumulates in the soil. The FAO's Global Status of Salt-Affected Soils, the first global assessment of its kind in five decades, found that close to 1.4 billion hectares, more than a tenth of the world's land, are already affected by salinity, with a further billion hectares at risk from the combined pressures of the climate crisis and unsustainable management (FAO, 2024).

Salinity arises both from natural processes and from human activity, including poor irrigation practices and the excessive use of water. In the most affected areas, it can reduce the yields of staple crops such as rice by as much as 70%, and under continued warming, the salt-affected area could reach as much as a third of the global land surface (FAO, 2024).



*GEAF Facilitator Alfrida dos Santos, from project site of Roots of Hope Reforestation Series, ACT For Nature initiative, Timor Leste (2026)*

# The human and economic toll

The cumulative effect of these pressures is a steady erosion of the foundations of food and water security. Degradation reduces agricultural productivity, destabilises rural incomes, and deepens existing inequalities, with the heaviest costs borne by communities that are least able to absorb them. The figures below indicate the scale of the challenge.

**40%**
OF LAND ALREADY DEGRADED

**3 in 4**
PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DROUGHT BY 2050

**1.4bn ha**
AFFECTED BY SALINITY

# Soil Health: The Foundation of Restoration

Soil health is foundational to ecosystem function, yet it is frequently overlooked in restoration policy. Fertile soil retains water, cycles nutrients and supports the vegetation on which wider ecosystems depend. Salinity and erosion undermine each of these functions, stripping the soil of fertility, thinning the vegetation it can support, and unsettling the balance of the ecosystems that rely upon it (FAO, 2024).

A particular difficulty is that degraded soil can retain an ordinary appearance while having lost much of its underlying capacity. As a result, the true extent of degradation is often underestimated, and restoration efforts that address only surface vegetation may fail to endure. Effective restoration therefore requires attention to the condition of the soil itself. The FAO assessment calls for stronger protection of natural saline ecosystems and for improved soil-health monitoring and metrics, so that restoration can be targeted where it is most needed (FAO, 2024).

A range of sustainable land management practices can restore and safeguard soil health, including conservation tillage, agroforestry, and improved irrigation techniques. These practices preserve soil structure, enhance water retention and support biodiversity, though their adoption is often constrained by high initial costs, limited access to finance and insufficient technical support (UNCCD, 2025).

> *"While unsustainable land use practices have a better cost of opportunity than sustainable ones, they are going to be pushed ahead. When the poor have to use slash and burn to produce, instead of having ways of increasing the fertility of the soil by natural means, this is going to cause degradation."*
>
> — Mr. Eduardo Mansur, Senior Environment Advisor, former Director of Climate and Environment, FAO

# Land, Livelihoods and Governance

## WHO BEARS THE COST

The consequences of degradation fall disproportionately on populations whose livelihoods depend directly on the land, including smallholder farmers, pastoralists, rural workers and Indigenous communities, many of them in lower-income and climate-vulnerable regions. Rangelands alone cover roughly half of the world's land surface and generate close to one-sixth of global nutrition, yet a substantial share is degraded (UNCCD, 2024). More than two billion people depend, directly or indirectly, on the pastoral systems and rangelands sustained by some of the most fragile landscapes (Louhaichi et al., 2024).

## GOVERNANCE AND LAND TENURE

Governance is a decisive factor in restoration outcomes. The evidence indicates that recovery is most durable where it is designed with the participation of local communities and supported by secure tenure and inclusive, responsible governance, and least durable where it is imposed externally (UNCCD, 2024). Where communities lack a meaningful voice in decisions about land, restoration efforts are more likely to falter. Equity is therefore not only a normative consideration but a determinant of effectiveness.



*GEAF Ambassador Tapas Kumar Mollick, in preparation for the ACT For Nature initiative in Satkhira, Bangladesh (2026)*

# LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND INCLUSION

The knowledge held by pastoralist, Indigenous and local communities is among restoration's most valuable and underused assets. Traditional practices of grazing, water harvesting and land stewardship, developed over generations, are frequently well adapted to local conditions. Ensuring the full and effective participation of these communities, alongside women and young people, strengthens both the legitimacy and the durability of restoration, and is increasingly recognised as central to international policy.

Inclusion cannot, however, be assumed from the existence of a platform. Research on multistakeholder platforms finds that local knowledge holders can remain marginalised or underrepresented even within processes explicitly designed to be inclusive, because the terms on which knowledge is recognised, recorded and acted upon are themselves contested (Yanou et al., 2025). Genuine integration therefore depends on how knowledge is elicited and valued, and not only on who is invited into the room.

*"It is not sufficient to convene everybody around the same table, because even though you may be sat at that same table, there will be voices who are reluctant to speak. There needs to be a facilitation process that, using participatory tools, encourages the voices of those who are reluctant to share their views in the presence of more powerful actors in that landscape."*

— Dr. Terry Sunderland, Professor, Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia (C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)



**DR. TERRY SUNDERLAND**

# INTEGRATED LANDSCAPE APPROACHES

Restoration seldom succeeds when it is planned plot by plot. Integrated Landscape Approaches (ILAs) respond to this by taking the landscape, rather than the individual site or sector, as the unit of planning, bringing agriculture, forestry, water management, conservation and local livelihoods into a single negotiated process. The intention is to reconcile competing land uses through multi-stakeholder platforms rather than to optimise one use at the expense of the others (Ros-Tonen et al., 2025).

The approach is widely endorsed, though the evidence on delivery is more qualified. Recent research finds that the contribution of ILAs to just and sustainable development depends on how power, participation and benefit-sharing are handled in practice; where these questions are left implicit, landscape processes risk reproducing the inequalities they were designed to address (Ros-Tonen et al., 2025). Long-time horizons, unclear tenure, and the transaction costs of coordination compound the difficulty.

The practical implication is that the governance design of a landscape process matters as much as its technical content: who convenes it, who sets the agenda, how disagreement is resolved, and whether the arrangement survives changes in funding and administration.

# MANAGING TRADE-OFFS WITH FOOD PRODUCTION

Restoration takes place in landscapes that must also produce food. Agriculture is among the principal drivers of ecosystem degradation, yet it also underpins food security and the livelihoods of a large share of the world's population, and it is itself undermined by the degradation to which it contributes. The trade-offs are therefore real and cannot be resolved by framing alone.

In practice, the most workable responses reduce the trade-off rather than deny it: raising productivity on land already under cultivation, restoring the soil and water functions on which yields depend, and integrating trees, grazing and cropping within the same landscape. This is consistent with Target 10 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which calls for areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry to be managed sustainably through a substantial increase in biodiversity-friendly practices (CBD, 2022).

# COMMUNITY-LED RESTORATION IN PRACTICE

The keynote contributions from GEAF Ambassadors illustrated how these questions present themselves at community level, from coastal and mangrove restoration in Timor-Leste to community-based conservation in Tanzania and youth-led reforestation in Madagascar. Three themes recurred. Restoration is rarely a matter of planting alone, since what determines success takes place in the years that follow. Ecosystem condition and community health are closely linked, particularly where degradation affects water quality, food availability and exposure to hazards. And initiatives endure where communities hold a direct stake in the outcome, rather than participating in a project designed elsewhere.



*"Restoration must go beyond planting. We need to plant the right tree in the right place, involve the local community, and ensure restoration continues through long-term monitoring."*

— Ms. Mariam Gibson Bwire, GEAF Ambassador
(C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)

## MS. MARIAM GIBSON BWIRE



*GEAF Ambassador Mariam Gibson Bwire, 4.29 Green Earth Action Day, Tanzania, 2026*

# Regional Perspectives: Drylands and Small Island Developing States

Restoration approaches must be adapted to local ecological, social and economic conditions. Two Global Land Outlook regional reports published in 2026 illustrate how different the same challenge can appear across regions.

## CENTRAL ASIA: THE DRYLANDS

In the drylands of Central Asia, degradation is driven principally by aridity and the salinisation of irrigated soils. The regional report argues for a fundamental change of posture, from responding to degradation after it occurs towards investing in prevention, restoration, resilience and the sustainable management of natural capital. It frames healthy land and shared water as foundations of regional stability, achievable only through coordinated action among governments, the scientific community, local authorities and communities, and highlights the potential of cross-border cooperation and integrated approaches under the Rio Conventions (UNCCD & IRG Central Asia-Russia, 2026).



*GEAF Ambassador Mohammed Saleh Saleh Hazeb leading 4.29 Green Earth Action Day, Yemen (2026)*



*4.29 Green Earth Action Day, Timor Leste (2026)*

## SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

In Small Island Developing States, comparable pressures are compounded by proximity to the sea. Declining soil health, freshwater scarcity and coastal salinisation strain food production in economies that already rely heavily on imports, while rising seas contribute to a steady loss of coastal land (UNCCD, 2026). The report characterises land restoration not as an isolated environmental objective but as the basis for food and water security, resilient economies and healthy ecosystems “from ridge to reef”. It identifies fragmented land governance, the erosion of traditional knowledge and limited local capacity as principal barriers, and calls for integrated, island-appropriate approaches to resilience (UNCCD, 2026).

## ARID LANDSCAPES AT SCALE

A third contrast is offered by the large-scale programmes now under way in arid and hyper-arid environments. At UNCCD COP17 in August 2026, UNEP and FAO recognised Saudi Arabia's National Greening Program as a World Restoration Flagship. The programme targets 2.5 million hectares under restoration and 215 million trees planted by 2030, and by June 2026 had brought around one million hectares under restoration and planted 159 million trees across rangelands, forests, deserts, urban areas and coastal mangroves (UNEP, 2026). Its methods, including controlled grazing, rainwater harvesting, natural regeneration and the use of treated wastewater, reflect the constraints of water-scarce landscapes.

Programmes of this scale raise questions that recur across regions: how restoration quality is monitored rather than assumed, how species and methods are matched to local ecology, and how state-led programmes connect with the communities whose land-use practices determine long-term outcomes.

*“Saudi Arabia's ecosystems vary, of course. It is not only desert: you have mountains, you have the coastal area. So the restoration was restricted to species native to that particular type of biome. With the mangroves it is only two species, Avicennia marina and Rhizophora mucronata, relatively easy to cultivate, and relatively easy to demonstrate the importance of mangroves for, for instance, shrimp production, which is important in Saudi Arabia. So you have to link the ecosystem with the business.”*

— Mr. Eduardo Mansur, Senior Environment Advisor, former Director of Climate and Environment, FAO

# Financing Ecosystem Restoration

## THE FINANCE GAP

Financing remains the principal constraint on ecosystem restoration. The economic case is strong: every dollar invested in restoration can yield up to thirty in ecosystem services (UNEP, 2024), and the losses avoided are considerable, given the estimated US$3.8 trillion in crop and livestock losses over the past three decades (UNCCD, 2025). Yet funding remains insufficient and is often poorly directed towards the communities and landscapes where it is most needed. Left unchecked, these pressures carry a heavy human cost: climate change could push an additional 135 million people into poverty by 2030, eroding food security and the sustainability of agri-food systems (UNCCD, 2025). The protection gap is stark in agricultural insurance: in Africa, only around 3% of smallholder farmers have access to agricultural insurance, compared with some 20% in other developing regions (UNCCD, 2025).

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework sets out the scale of the financial response required, calling for the mobilisation of at least US$200 billion per year by 2030, the reduction of incentives harmful to biodiversity by at least US$500 billion per year, and the progressive closing of a biodiversity finance gap of some US$700 billion per year. Within this, developed countries are to raise international biodiversity finance to developing countries to at least US$30 billion per year by 2030 (CBD, 2022).



*“There is a very significant mismatch between what biodiversity needs and what is currently being mobilized. According to UNEP, the funding gap is approximately 700 billion USD per year until 2030.”*

— Ms. Inonge Guillemin, Doctoral Researcher, United Nations University (UNU-FLORES)
(C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)

# INNOVATIVE INSTRUMENTS: SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT AND INDEX INSURANCE

The discussion identified several avenues for response: repurposing public support that currently incentivises degradation, mobilising private and blended finance, and designing instruments that reward sustainable land stewardship. One such model integrates sustainable land management with index-based, or parametric, drought insurance. By linking reduced premiums to the adoption of sustainable practices, and by paying out automatically when predefined weather thresholds are reached, the model provides immediate protection against shocks while incentivising the practices that keep soil healthy (UNCCD, 2025).

The design of such instruments matters. Requiring farmers to pay premiums in advance has proven a significant barrier; one study found that only 5 to 6% of farmers purchased insurance when asked to pay upfront, whereas deferring payment until after harvest raised uptake to 72%. Satellite and mobile technologies can further improve accuracy, lower costs and build trust in these instruments (UNCCD, 2025).




*GEAF Ambassador Mariette Soanambinina during the 4.29 Green Earth Action Day in Madagascar (2026)*

# EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE

A number of programmes demonstrate how these approaches perform in practice.

| Programme / location | Illustrative results |
|---|---|
| **Malawi** | A pilot combining conservation agriculture with index insurance led to a 30 per cent increase in maize yields and a significant reduction in soil erosion (UNCCD, 2025). |
| **Ethiopia** | Index insurance provided to pastoralists supported increased investment in livestock and better management of grazing, helping households avoid distress sales during drought (UNCCD, 2025). |
| **The Gambia** | The Africa Disaster Risk Finance programme (2019 to 2023) strengthened government capacity to manage drought response, targeting approximately 275,000 people (UNCCD, 2025). |
| **R4 Rural Resilience Initiative** | Launched by the World Food Programme in 2011, R4 combines risk reduction, insurance, investment and savings, reaching nearly 395,000 households across 14 countries (UNCCD, 2025). |
| **Horn of Africa (DRIVE)** | The De-risking, Inclusion and Value Enhancement initiative combines savings and insurance to build pastoralist resilience and financial inclusion, particularly for women (UNCCD, 2025). |

**US$3.8tn**

CROP AND LIVESTOCK LOSSES, THREE DECADES

**1 : 30**

RETURN ON RESTORATION INVESTMENT

# NATURAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTING AND THE ROLE OF BUSINESS

Public finance alone will not close the gap, which places business practice at the centre of the discussion. Natural capital accounting offers one route. It renders a company's dependencies on nature, such as water, soil fertility, pollination or fibre supply, and its impacts upon them, visible in the same terms as other business risks, so that they enter investment and procurement decisions rather than sitting apart in a sustainability report. Pilot applications, including a case study of a leather manufacturer in Namibia conducted through UNU-FLORES, show how such accounts can be constructed for a single firm and its supply chain, and where the data gaps lie (UNU, 2025).

The scientific basis for this shift was consolidated in February 2026, when the IPBES Methodological Assessment on the Impact and Dependence of Business on Biodiversity and Nature's Contributions to People was approved by more than 150 governments. The product of three years of work by 79 experts from 35 countries, it concludes that biodiversity loss now constitutes a systemic risk to economic and financial stability, and sets out approaches for measuring business impacts and dependencies alongside options for action (IPBES, 2026).

> *"When a business quantifies the water, energy and materials it uses, environmental inefficiencies also become business inefficiencies."*
>
> — Ms. Inonge Guillemin, Doctoral Researcher, United Nations University (UNU-FLORES)

# REACHING THE LOCAL LEVEL

A recurring concern is that finance designed at the international level does not reach the organisations doing the work. As biodiversity finance instruments grow more sophisticated, they also become more demanding in terms of reporting, verification and technical capacity, which risks excluding the smaller organisations and community institutions best placed to deliver and sustain restoration. Simplified access routes, pooled or intermediated funding and long-term core support are practical correctives, and they matter to outcomes as much as the headline volume of finance mobilised.

# Policy Coherence Across the Rio Conventions

Ecosystem degradation transcends institutional and national boundaries, and its reversal depends on coherence across the multilateral environmental agreements. Restoration has become a natural meeting point for the three Rio Conventions on land, biodiversity and climate, each of which holds its Conference of the Parties in 2026.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework makes the linkage explicit. Its 2050 vision is a world living in harmony with nature, in which biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, and its first goal calls for the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems to be maintained, enhanced or restored (CBD, 2022). Its Target 2 commits Parties to bring at least 30% of degraded terrestrial, inland-water, marine and coastal ecosystems under effective restoration by 2030, complementing the Target 3 commitment to conserve at least 30% of land and sea. Related targets reinforce the connection: Target 8 promotes nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches to climate change, Target 10 the sustainable management of agriculture, and Target 11 the maintenance and restoration of nature's contributions to people, including soil health and water regulation (CBD, 2022).

The land agenda advanced at UNCCD COP17 feeds directly into the biodiversity objectives under review at CBD COP17, and both are closely linked to climate resilience. Pursued in an integrated manner rather than in parallel, these agendas reinforce one another, and shared instruments, from restoration finance to monitoring, can serve all three. Aligning national strategies across the conventions is among the most effective ways of accelerating restoration at scale. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration provides the operational frame for this convergence as it enters its final years. Countries have collectively pledged to bring one billion hectares under restoration by 2030 through their commitments under the Rio Conventions and the Bonn Challenge, and the Decade's World Restoration Flagships track the progress and quality of leading initiatives. Twenty-seven flagships have now been recognised, among them three announced at UNCCD COP17, in Brazil's Cerrado, the Sahel and Saudi Arabia, which together aim to bring almost five million hectares under restoration by 2030 (UNEP, 2026).

Momentum on the land agenda has been building since UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh in December 2024, which mobilised more than US$12 billion to address desertification, land degradation and drought, launched the Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership in support of 80 of the most drought-affected countries, established a Caucus for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and laid the groundwork for a global drought regime intended for completion at COP17 (UNCCD, 2024b). Read together, these processes describe a single agenda advancing through three institutional channels.

# Recommendations

On the basis of the discussion, the following priorities emerge for advancing ecosystem restoration. They are addressed to governments, international institutions, the private sector and civil society alike.

1. **Treat restoration as an investment, not a cost.** Recognise its returns to food security, water, biodiversity and climate, and align public and private finance accordingly.

2. **Address soil and water together.** Tackle salinity, erosion and drought as interconnected drivers of degradation, and invest in soil-health monitoring and metrics.

3. **Shift from reaction to prevention.** Move from responding to degradation after it occurs towards preventing it, which is more cost-effective and less disruptive to livelihoods.

4. **Ensure inclusive governance and secure tenure.** Design restoration with the full participation of local, Indigenous and youth communities, and safeguard their rights to land and resources.

5. **Adapt solutions to context.** Tailor restoration to regional and local conditions, from drylands to small island developing states, drawing on traditional knowledge.




*GEAF Ambassador Fantina Wudindolo leading 4.29 Green Earth Action Day, Cameroon (2026)*

6. **Plan at the scale of the landscape.** Use integrated landscape approaches to reconcile competing land uses, and design them with explicit attention to power, participation and benefit-sharing.

7. **Repurpose finance and reward stewardship.** Redirect support that incentivises degradation, mobilise blended finance, and scale instruments such as index insurance that reward sustainable practices.

8. **Make nature visible in business decisions.** Support natural capital accounting and disclosure so that companies identify their dependencies and impacts on nature and act on them, and ensure finance is accessible to community-level actors.

9. **Strengthen policy coherence.** Integrate the land, biodiversity and climate agendas across the Rio Conventions, aligning national strategies and shared monitoring.

10. **Engage the public and young people.** Support education, awareness and community-led action so that restoration is understood and owned beyond specialist and institutional circles.

*"Restoration is not simply planting trees. It is restoring ecosystems, strengthening communities and empowering young people to protect our planet. Don't wait for a big action. Small actions can bring change."*

— Mr. Prince Tsiaterimila, GEAF Ambassador
(C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)




**MR. PRINCE TSIATERIMILA**

# Conclusion

The discussion underscored that ecosystem degradation, though extensive, is reversible. Restoration offers a practical and evidence-based response, with demonstrated benefits for biodiversity, food security, water availability and climate resilience. Its success depends on sustained financing, coherent and inclusive governance, and the integration of scientific evidence with the knowledge and priorities of affected communities.

For GEAF, the seventh episode of the Climate Action Conversations series reaffirmed that durable environmental progress requires connecting international ambition with implementation on the ground. Restoring degraded ecosystems is, ultimately, a means of safeguarding the foundations of food, water, biodiversity and human well-being, from ridge to reef. The task is demanding, but the evidence presented here indicates that it is both achievable and worthwhile.



*“My advice to the next generation is summed up in one word: hope. Don't ever think it's futile. Individually we can make a difference, but collectively we can make a very big difference.”*

— Dr. Terry Sunderland, Professor, Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia (C.A.C. Webinar, 29 September 2026)



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