



*Sustainably Wise*

# Creating a Global Campaign to Restore the Whole Earth

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For decades now humanity has been causing grave harm to the natural environment with little thought as to our impacts on our planetary ecosystems and the web of life. Now we know that we have crossed over several planetary boundaries; are seriously exceeding the carrying capacity of the earth; and are rapidly depleting our natural base, destroying endangered species and driving biodiversity loss. In fact there are now more than 2 billion hectares of degraded lands on planet earth that urgently need to be restored, an area as large as all of South America.

Restoring these lands would have enormous benefits for humanity, including the ability to sequester many giga-tons of carbon, stabilizing the climate and reducing the impacts resulting from global warming; repairing natural water cycles and recharging depleted ground water; restoring soil health; protecting biodiversity and endangered species; and reversing the ominous spread of desertification.

It is thus essential that we undertake an ambitious global effort to fully restore as much of these degraded lands and ecosystems as possible and as quickly as we can. We all have to appreciate and be grateful that the United Nations is launching the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration; but on it's own this effort is not likely to be nearly enough. A global campaign will also be needed to promote and support the UN Decade that includes as many people as possible in a concerted and on-going effort to build political

support and ensure that our governments do what is really needed to restore the Whole Earth and all of its endangered species and ecosystems.

Those that follow UN processes are well aware that while the agreements and commitments that our governments typically make are usually quite helpful it is not too often that sufficient programs, resources, and means of implementation are put in place that might make it possible to achieve the goals that have been set. The recent reports by both a scientific experts panel organized under the UN and the Secretary-General's 2019 SDG report are quite clear in stating that the global community is NOT on track for achieving its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Even more troubling is the finding that only 2% of the funding for climate mitigation goes for ecosystem restoration. And the same is true with agriculture and the need to transition to regenerative farming practices. While the UN Member States and UN agencies are now talking about and beginning to champion "Nature Based Solutions"; there is still a great need to shift our funding priorities and to provide the necessary funding to restore our severely damaged natural environment and to heal the earth. Thus a major effort must be undertaken within a Global Campaign to Restore the Earth to identify the best strategies and funding mechanisms and to determine what would be required and needs to be put in place to fully restore the earth.

Similarly, if we are to be serious about our efforts to achieve the goals of the UN Decade then it is essential that a holistic systemic approach is undertaken. I will attempt to describe what ought to be included in such a holistic approach below.

Again we will need to begin to start by building sufficient political will, which will likely be a tall order in and of itself. It will require a major public relations and educational campaign - one that can only be undertaken and successfully achieved if it is a partnership effort that includes many stakeholder groups including the lead UN agencies and treaty bodies, leading civil society organizations and networks, educational institutions and even the business community (but restricted to socially responsible businesses and corporations).

The resolution establishing the UN Decade encourages UN Member States to foster political will, mobilize resources, support capacity-building and scientific research, and build momentum for ecosystem restoration at all levels of government. It thus calls for many of the very same things that I am suggesting should be included in a Global Campaign to Restore the Whole Earth; however it does not lay out any strategies or guidelines for how these things ought to be promoted or achieved.

I would thus suggest that we should begin with a campaign to build real political will - in other words every country should be expected and called upon by civil society to make a serious commitment and to adopt legislation including all government entities at all levels from local to global. Guidelines should be developed under and through UNEP and FAO, the lead agencies for the Decade, in consultation with civil society to determine what ought to be included in such legislation and funding mechanisms, etc. This could be developed through discussions with governments at UNEA 5 and upcoming HLPF sessions.

If we are going to develop effective legislation then we will need to begin with the development of ecosystem analysis and work plans. Each government ought to be required to do an ecosystem assessment to determine first the state of the natural environment within its jurisdiction; and then what would be needed to restore each and every bio-region to as close to eco-system health and integrity as is possible.

It would be good if a joint office could be established by UNEP, FAO and the various convention bodies, perhaps in partnership with the Global Landscapes Forum, in order to oversee the development of an effective assessment process and analysis and to assist countries in implementing and carrying it out. Such an agency could work with governments to set up a certification process to certify work plans as being adequate at all levels of government - with review built into the process by civil society and expert witnesses, etc.

There is such a large need for ecosystem restoration that we will have to train and certify many more people as experts, consultants and even trainers. UNEP and FAO could work with the ISO Standards organization to develop criteria and course material in order to issue certificates for such people.

The enabling Resolution for the UN Decade also calls for the “sharing of experiences and good practices in ecosystem conservation and restoration.” This is essential and steps must be taken as soon as possible to develop the means to do so. A website should be created where people and organizations can post information about what they are doing along with the resources that they can help make available.

This website or clearinghouse could also include all of the work plans that are developed all over the world; a listing of experts, consultants and trainers that have been certified; the assessments that have been carried out; activities that are underway; partnership initiatives that are being developed; and the listing of best practices.

### **Building off of and including Existing Initiatives**

In order to move forward effectively with implementation we will need many multi-stakeholder partnerships with funding provided to support civil society participation throughout. For example, this could include partnerships that focus on wetland restoration, regenerative agriculture, water retention management, and the use of biochar soil amendments, etc.

The enabling resolution also calls on governments to “facilitate synergies and a holistic view of how to achieve international commitments and national priorities through the restoration of ecosystems.” It should thus be recognized that there are many initiatives and efforts that we can take advantage of and build on.

Supporting the **Global Deal for Nature** which is a call for the UN to protect and restore half of the terrestrial biosphere for Nature thru the 2020 Convention on Biological Diversity review process supported by the World Wildlife Fund and others.

The DiCaprio Foundation's **One Earth Plan** to transition to 100% renewable energy; protect, connect, and restore 50% of the Earth's natural ecosystems; and switch to regenerative carbon negative farming practices.

George Monbiot's initiative calling for **Natural Climate Solutions** to sequester carbon in plants and soils through Ecosystem Restoration. See: [www.naturalclimate.solutions](http://www.naturalclimate.solutions)

Encouraging all countries and civil society organizations to support and participate in France's **4/1000 Regenerative Agriculture** Initiative to increase carbon in soils by 0.04% each year. See: <http://4p1000.org>.

**The Ankara Initiative** for achieving Land Degradation Neutrality: UN CCD COP 12 in 2015

The **Bonn Challenge** to Reforest 500 million hectares of degraded lands while also introducing and adopting a plan to stop the cutting of the 29.4 m hectares of forest that is lost each year.

Supporting the effort to create **Ecosystem Restoration Camps** all around the planet utilizing volunteers working in tandem with local organizers to regenerate and restore whole bio-regions. See: [www.ecosystemrestorationcamps.org](http://www.ecosystemrestorationcamps.org)

Join an international family of almost **10,000 Earth Protectors** calling to make it a crime to destroy the Earth. See: [www.missionlifeforce.org](http://www.missionlifeforce.org).

Supporting the **Global Action Plan for the Restoration of Natural Water Cycles and Climate**. Target 6.6 of the UN's SDGs clearly states that: "By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes." The question then becomes how are we going to collaboratively do and achieve this?

Michal Kravčík, an internationally recognized Slovak water scientist, has led integrated river basin management and restoration projects throughout Slovakia and has done amazing work with Tamera Ecovillage to restore the natural environment in an arid dry region of Portugal through the use of water retention landscaping. He has produced, with Jan Lambert, an excellent full scale proposal for A Global Action Plan for the Restoration of Natural Water Cycles and Climate, which ought to be considered and supported as a part of the activities for the UN Decade.. See: [www.tamera.org/article-the-secret-of-water-as-a-basis-for-the-new-earth](http://www.tamera.org/article-the-secret-of-water-as-a-basis-for-the-new-earth) and [https://bio4climate.org/downloads/Kravcik\\_Global\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](https://bio4climate.org/downloads/Kravcik_Global_Action_Plan.pdf)

Supporting the effort to create a **Global Pact for the Environment** or whatever other type of outcome is agreed upon through UNEA 5 to strengthen International Environmental Legislation and its implementation. See: <https://globalpactenvironment.org>.

One of the most important things that we can do to ensure that we do not do further damage to impacted, degraded, or even healthy ecosystems is to **protect the rights of**

**nature.** Many countries are already adopting and implementing laws to protect the natural environment and respect the rights of nature. Indigenous peoples across the world have recognized Nature's inherent value and rights for millennia. Already, Ecuador and Bolivia recognize rights of Nature in their Constitutions and at the national level, and dozens of local and regional governments recognize Nature's rights, as well. The rights of rivers in particular are being recognized worldwide, including in New Zealand, Columbia, and Mexico City. A listing of such laws along with establishing court cases can be found at: [www.harmonywithNatureun.org/rightsofnature.html](http://www.harmonywithNatureun.org/rightsofnature.html)

## **Taxing Resource Use and Phasing Out Harmful Subsidies**

As mentioned above, the world's governments have repeatedly made ambitious commitments and agreements that they have then failed to keep. The funding made available is orders of magnitude beneath what would be required to adequately address the need. It is not a huge sum of money we are talking about. Less than what we spend on pet food, or for cigarettes or alcohol or even snack foods. Certainly far less than what our governments spend on the military and yet the threats and impacts facing humanity are many times worse from the damage that we are doing to the natural environment and ecosystems than come from armed conflict - as horrific as that still remains.

If our governments and the United Nations are serious about achieving the SDGs then they are going to have to come up with significantly more money and other resources to be able to do so. We will need to increase funding for programs that have proved their value and worth many times over including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Small Grants Program, and the Green Climate Fund to name only a few. While GEF continues to be replenished the total amount of funding provided to date is something like \$25 billion spread out over 25 years or just a billion dollars a year while the international community spends something like \$1.6 trillion on the military each year.

Some means of raising and providing additional funding for ecosystem restoration could include taxing excessive resource use, such as from airline travel, the purchase of new cars that are not fuel efficient, and the placement of taxes on the purchase of recreational vehicles, yachts, race cars, private airplanes and the like.

A major effort ought to be made to rapidly phase out unsustainable subsidies and phase in regenerative and restorative practices. Suggestions for how to best do so are provided by the Global Subsidies Initiative and can be found at: [www.globalsubsidies.org](http://www.globalsubsidies.org).

## **Recognizing the fundamentals:**

If we truly wish to restore the health of the natural environment and live within the carrying capacity of the earth, then we are going to have to address the fundamentals required in a holistic manner and plan accordingly. We will thus have to consider and address such things as follows:

- ensuring humanity's long term survival and well-being
- climate change

- biological diversity
- ecosystem integrity
- ecosystem services
- regenerative agriculture and, soil health and productivity
- water cycles and overcoming water scarcity
- sustainable consumption and production
- becoming stewards of the land
- the role of indigenous peoples
- standards: forest stewardship & regenerative agriculture
- education for sustainable development
- eco-literacy
- and include a primary focus on the oceans
  
- end exponential growth
- limit population growth
- discourage over-consumption

### **Best Practices and Success Stories**

The enabling resolution for the UN Decade encourages governments to build on and reinforce existing restoration initiatives in order to scale up good practices. While this is certainly essential it is not nearly good enough. We also need to enact programmes and policies that will assist humanity in transitioning to sustainable consumption and production processes overall if we are to be serious in carrying out ecosystem restoration and restoring the natural environment upon which all of life depends.

For example, many renewable energy and appropriate technologies can be used and deployed, particularly in the developing world, in an effort to reduce the human impact on the natural environment. This would include the construction and usage of solar food dryers, solar cookers, bio-gas digesters and solar hot water systems all of which have been successfully used for decades around the world. Instructions for building and descriptions on using such technologies and systems are included on a website featuring best practices and success stories being developed in ecovillage communities to address climate change under the section on Renewable Energy and Appropriate Technology. See: [www.ecovillage.org/climatesolutions](http://www.ecovillage.org/climatesolutions)

There is also a section on Natural Building and Climate Friendly Architecture which includes articles about Passive Solar and Green Building; but perhaps the most important sections, at least in regards to ecosystem restoration, are the ones focusing on Biochar; Reforestation and Environmental Restoration; and on Water Retention Landscaping and Restoring Natural Water Cycles.

The Evergreen Agriculture Partnership focuses on integrating nitrogen fixing trees and shrubs within crop fields in Africa, These trees and shrubs then improve soil health, provide livestock fodder, increase crop yields, provide a substantial amount of biomass for bioenergy production and cooking through coppicing, and add to eco-system health, etc. The project can thus reduce impacts on the natural environment while providing essential resources to meet basic human needs. And can thus potentially contribute

significantly to the effort to restore degraded ecosystems. See: <http://evergreenagriculture.net>

KeyLine Farming and the use of key lining in ecosystem restoration projects is essential for restoring natural water systems. The idea is to re-contour the land and add swales etc so that we can retain as much water in plants and soils as possible, prevent erosion problems, regenerate soil health, and restore natural water cycles. Examples of how this can be done are included in the sections on climate friendly agriculture and on water retention landscaping at [www.ecovillage.org/climatesolutions](http://www.ecovillage.org/climatesolutions).

There are also many sustainable farming practices and crops that can make a significant contribution to our efforts at ecosystem restoration. This includes AgroForestry, AgroEcology and the growing of Hemp, Bamboo, Vertiver Grass, Moringa, etc. All of these can be used to help restore degraded landscapes, soil health, and water retention capacity. One example of how Hemp could be used in the developing world to help restore degraded ecosystems is provided at: <https://ehemphousecorp.com>.

A critical component that many people do not think about is the need to substantially increase the amount of paper products that are recycled along with the purchase of products made with recycled and sustainably produced materials. The reason that there are so many plantation forests is that we make such poor use of the wood and paper products that are produced. If we put in place policies and legislation that will substantially increase the amount of paper and paper products that are recycled then there will be less incentive to replace natural forests with tree plantations.

Similarly we need to do much more to encourage people to eat a plant based diet. One of the primary causes, if not the primary cause, of deforestation is to clear more land for agriculture and growing animal feed. If we reduce the demand for meat we can reduce the impacts on the natural environment, particularly in tropical regions.

Currently our landfills are filled with yard and food wastes and other green matter. Investing in composting this material instead could provide a huge boon for both agricultural productivity and lessening the human impact on the natural environment and provide valuable nutrients that can be used to restore degraded landscapes.

In the developing world 90% of the waste water goes back into the natural environment and watersheds untreated. 2.4 billion people lack access to basic sanitation. By investing in the construction of composting toilets and biological waste treatment we could enhance soil productivity and health, clean up our waterways, eliminate or greatly reduce water borne diseases, and make better use of scarce water resources. Likewise forests can provide one of the best and a natural means for filtering and providing clean water to urban communities.

The main take-away here is that if we focus only or most directly on eco-system restoration we will miss a big opportunity to address other causes of land degradation and the destruction of natural ecosystems. We need to adopt a holistic approach that incorporates all aspects of sustainable consumption and production, the need to

transition to a fully circular economy, and achievement of all of the SDGs at the same time.

**For more information contact Rob Wheeler at [Rob.Wheeler@ecovillage.org](mailto:Rob.Wheeler@ecovillage.org). For examples of regenerative practices for addressing climate change see: [www.ecovillage.org/climatesolutions](http://www.ecovillage.org/climatesolutions).**

**Sustainably Wise is a web portal that will provide the essential information that any stakeholder might need to help achieve the SDGs. If you are interested in helping to support or contribute to the development of the portal contact me. The website is under development; the web address will be [www.sustainablywise.org](http://www.sustainablywise.org).**