United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification | United for land

Desertification and Drought Day 17 June 2025

FACTSHEET

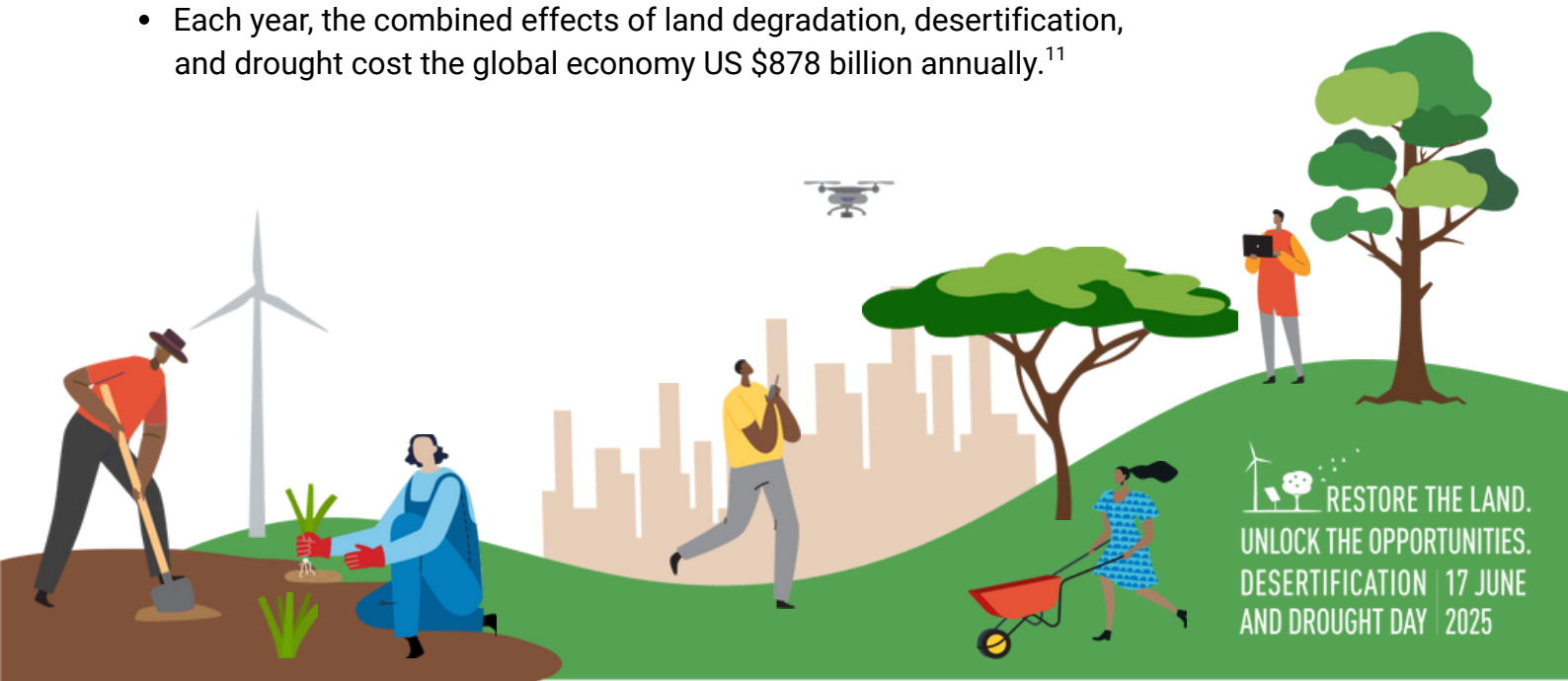
Land - the foundation of it all

Healthy land underpins thriving economies, with more than half of global GDP dependent on natural capital.[1] Standing at 51%, the soil's nutrient cycling provides the largest contribution of the total value of all ecosystem services provided each year.[2] Yet we are depleting this resource at an alarming rate— approximately 1 million km2 of healthy and productive lands are becoming degraded every year.[3]

These developments present not only serious challenges for our climate but also create immense social and economic burdens on countries worldwide. Drought, land degradation, and desertification are costing the global community an estimated US$ 878 billion every year.[4]

Quick facts

- Every second, an equivalent of four football fields of healthy land becomes degraded, adding up to 100 million hectares every year.[5]
- Up to 40% of the world's land is degraded[6], affecting more than 3 billion people[7] worldwide and with dire consequences for our climate, biodiversity and livelihoods.[8]
- One billion people under the age of 25 live in regions directly dependent on land and natural resources for jobs and livelihoods.[9]
- If current trends continue, restoring 1.5 billion hectares of land by 2030 will be necessary to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world.[10]
- Each year, the combined effects of land degradation, desertification, and drought cost the global economy US $878 billion annually.[11]



RESTORE THE LAND.
UNLOCK THE OPPORTUNITIES.
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We have the power to bring land back to life.
A restored land is a land of endless opportunities.
It's time to unlock them now.

A quick glimpse at Colombia and Latin America

- Nearly **30% of Colombia's territory** — equivalent to 34.39 million hectares — **is affected by land degradation**, encompassing issues such as erosion, deforestation, overgrazing, and declining soil fertility. This degradation directly impacts the livelihoods of approximately 5.8 million people across the country.[12]
- To date, **559,509 hectares** of land in Colombia are under active restoration.[13]
- **Over 40% of Colombia's land is susceptible to soil degradation from salinization.** Currently, an estimated 11.6% of the country is already experiencing some level of salinization, with 1.5% classified as severe or very severe.[14]
- In Colombia, approximately **23.6%** of the national territory, equivalent to 26.9 million hectares, is **affected by some degree of soil degradation** as a result of desertification.[15]
- **In 2023**, Colombia achieved a **49% decrease in primary forest loss** compared to 2022. However, the longer-term trend of forest loss has not changed significantly.[16]
- **Latin America accounts for 14% of the world's degraded land.** The primary drivers in the region include deforestation and overgrazing.[17]

Reviving our planet

Revitalizing our lands brings profound benefits for both people and nature. It allows us to safeguard biodiversity, drive economic growth, mitigate natural disasters like floods, and enhance soil productivity and food security. Land restoration is all about reversing degradation and breathing new life into our ecosystems – it is not just about planting trees; it represents a holistic approach that includes soil-friendly farming practices, protecting essential pollinators, enhancing water quality, bringing nature back to cities, and keeping a close eye on freshwater health. It is a multifaceted effort to restore balance and ensure a thriving planet for generations to come.[18,19]

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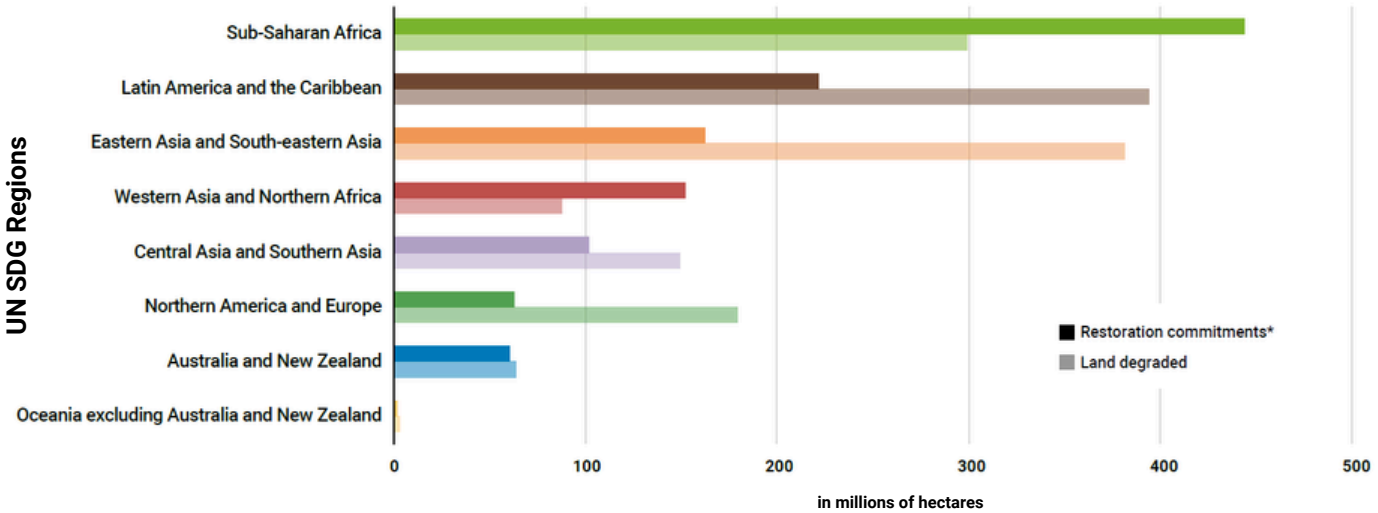
To date, every dollar invested in restoring degraded lands generates between US$7-US$30 in economic returns.[20] But despite such a strong investment case, land restoration is not happening at the scale and pace so urgently needed. Only recently have global voluntary commitments to restore degraded land by 2030 **reached one billion hectares.**[21] This includes approximately 600 million hectares under the UNCCD's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) target, 200 million hectares under the Bonn Challenge, and 290 million hectares under Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).[22]

Global Restoration Commitments in relation to area of land degraded



*high estimate assuming no overlap between commitments by countries. Figures based on the data submitted by country Parties. [23]

Across the world, land restoration is supporting the creation of jobs, strengthening businesses, and driving sustainable development.[24] At the same time, innovation and technology—from data-driven land management to consumer apps tracking environmental impact—are unlocking new ways to scale restoration efforts. Investing in land is investing in a more resilient and prosperous future for all.

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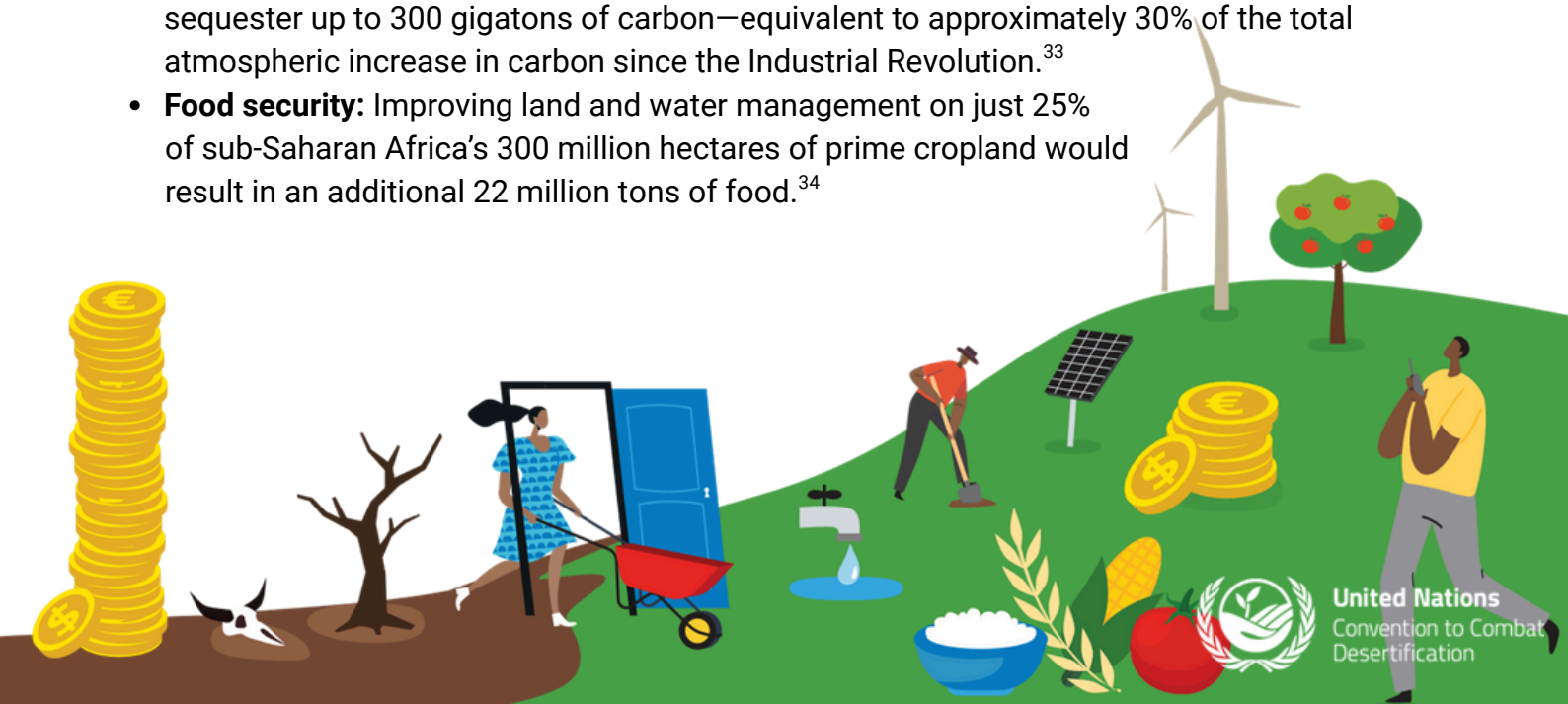
While the benefits of land restoration far outweigh the costs, achieving meaningful impact requires significant upfront investments. Despite the growing momentum following the successful UNCCD COP16, the true value of land restoration remains largely overlooked on the global stage. To bridge the US$ 355 billion annual funding gap[25], it is crucial to unlock private capital through public-private partnerships, blended finance models, and green bonds. Scaling up these financial mechanisms will be pivotal in driving global restoration efforts and ensuring sustainable, long-term impact.[26]

Quick facts

- Every **US$1 invested in land restoration** generates between **US$7-US$30** in economic returns through improved ecosystem services.[27]
- **Restoring over one billion hectares** of degraded land is projected to generate up to **US$ 1.8 trillion** annually.[28]
- To date, over 1 billion hectares have been pledged for restoration under global initiatives.[29]
- Despite progress, at least **$2.1 trillion** in cumulative investments is needed by 2030 to restore over 1 billion hectares of degraded land and meet global restoration targets.[30]
- Currently, the private sector contributes only **6% of global investments** in land restoration, a figure that must be significantly increased to address the scale of the challenge effectively.[31]

The Benefits of Land Restoration

- **Biodiversity:** Restoring 15% of converted or degraded lands in priority areas could avoid 60% of expected species extinctions.[32]
- **Climate:** Restoring 15% of degraded or converted lands in key priority areas could sequester up to 300 gigatons of carbon—equivalent to approximately 30% of the total atmospheric increase in carbon since the Industrial Revolution.[33]
- **Food security:** Improving land and water management on just 25% of sub-Saharan Africa's 300 million hectares of prime cropland would result in an additional 22 million tons of food.[34]



- **Water:** Sustainable land management can increase water productivity by up to 100%. Healthy lands are better at filtrating and storing water, thereby improving water availability, reducing water stress andwater-related disasters like droughts and floods.[35]
- **Health:** The annual cost of future pandemics could be as much as US$ 2 trillion – for just 1% of that cost, the world could prevent pandemics at their source by protecting nature.[36]
- **Energy:** Renewable energy powers up sustainable farming, enabling irrigation, storage and processing to reduce waste and support land restoration in remote areas.[37]
- **Technology:** From data-driven adaptive land and water management to apps enabling consumers to track their "land footprint", innovation and tech can unlock new pathways to scale up land restoration.
- **Tourism:** Costa Rica's investment in national parks and protected areas, through land restoration efforts, has contributed vastly to eco-tourism accounting for 5.8% of its GDP. [38]
- **Jobs:** In Africa, land restoration could create up to 10 million jobs in sustainable agriculture and forestry sectors.[39]

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