



**Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment
of Latin America and the Caribbean**

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**The three Rio Conventions: promoting synergies for
sustainable development**

**A proposal for attention by the Forum of Ministers of
Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean**

Table of Contents

<i>Background</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Regional environmental challenges to sustainable development</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Promoting cooperation and synergies in the implementation of the Rio Conventions</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Enhancing regional political ambition to the implementation of the objectives of Rio Conventions</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Possible outcome of the Special Session of the Forum (January 2022)</i>	<i>7</i>

Background

The Rio Conventions

The objectives of the three Rio Conventions are closely linked to sustainable development and environmental management. The complexity of the interactions of the climate crisis, land degradation and biological diversity loss with the imperative of sustainable livelihoods needs to be simplified through a well-coordinated approach at the country level that focuses on efficient and effective implementation processes.

As Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) – the three Rio Conventions – countries have many possibilities to develop a synergistic approach to the issues pertaining to these treaties and others related to them. However, the complexities and challenges associated with the national implementation of the various multilateral environmental agreements tend to overwhelm the administrative structures and capacities of many countries.

The need to avoid duplication of efforts, decrease costs, maintain national priorities, and take advantage of the convergence of interests among the agreements, included in the Rio Conventions, is an overriding factor in pursuing closer collaboration. The environmental crisis call for a more effective and integrated implementation and a push to achieve concrete results globally and at regional and national levels.

Coherence between biodiversity loss, climate change, desertification, and disaster risk reduction and mitigation agendas would result in increased capacity and multiple beneficial interventions that can address the links between biodiversity and zoonotic diseases. This requires integration across policy reforms, institutional strengthening. Country leadership and increased support from development cooperation are critical for the coherent and synergetic implementation of the Rio Conventions and the social, economical and environmental dimensions of the SDGs ¹.

Regional environmental challenges to sustainable development

The LAC region has five million km² of arable land, 23 % of the world's forests, 29% of the rainfall and approximately 30% per cent of the world's renewable water resources (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD, 2019), as well as significant oil, gas, mineral and other non-renewable resources. Nevertheless, LAC has based its growing economy largely on primary sectors and it has maintained a tendency to unsustainably exploit nature-based goods (IPBES 2018a).

Desertification and degradation of natural resources seriously affect nearly all countries of the LAC region. The region's rural areas are home to 125 million people, including 60 percent of the poorest people in the region. These regions are particularly affected by land degradation, which is a factor in the vicious circle of land overexploitation, degradation, increased demands on production, greater poverty, food insecurity and migration. Poverty and pressure on natural resources are critical factors driving land degradation in much of

¹ [Decision 4.- XXII Forum of Ministers of the Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean.](#)

Latin America and the Caribbean. According to latest ECLAC estimations, in 2020 the extreme poverty rate was 12.5% and the poverty rate reached 33.7% of the population, i.e. 209 millions of inhabitants (ECLAC, 2021).

Populations and economies are already under pressure from trends in global climate change that are expected to become more extreme. For example, Andean glaciers, which provide a vital water resource, are melting at a faster rate, and the increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events has left no country in the region unaffected. **Agricultural conversion** is the main pressure driving ecosystem loss in the region, followed by mining activities, energy production and urban expansion. **Concerns are greater in regions like the Andes, the Chaco and the Amazon**, where these human activities advance into forests, wetlands, mountains, meadows and plateaus. Consequently, phenomena like droughts, wildfires and desertification are becoming more frequent, and the provision of essential ecosystem services, such as water and food, may be at stake. In the region, agriculture, deforestation and land degradation are the main sources of GHG emissions and are potential drivers to increase zoonosis risks.

Current emergencies taking place in the region in terms of increasing droughts and soil fertility and productivity loss have also been highlighted in the recent UN Food Systems Summit. Ecosystem based solutions, the inclusion of LULUCF sector in the NDCs, country restoration commitments, integrated landscapes approaches, sustainable livelihoods, and sustainable urban and rural food systems, etc. are viable integrated actions to bring forward this agenda and contribute to a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Promoting cooperation and synergies in the implementation of the Rio Conventions

Climate change, biological diversity loss, desertification, land degradation and drought are intricately related on the social, economic and environmental fronts. Synergies are found when addressing problems caused by climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), such as:

Forestry, sustainable land management (SLM), rural development, other land use sectors and agricultural production; reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+, Soil Organic Carbon programs).

Mitigation action under the Kyoto Protocol. This includes community non-forest fuel-related / energy efficiency, and bio-fuels.

Adaptation through ecosystem approach, resilience capacities; and training and education, awareness raising, information and science.

The Rio+20 Outcome Document states that “We emphasize the need for an improved and more effective institutional framework for sustainable development which should be guided by the specific functions required and mandates involved; address the shortcomings of the current system; take into account all relevant implications; promote synergies and coherence; seek to avoid duplication and eliminate unnecessary overlaps within the United Nations system; and reduce administrative burdens and build on existing arrangements.”

At the global level, the secretariats of CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC established a Joint Liaison Group (JLG) in August 2001 to enhance coordination among the three conventions. The JLG aims to collect and share information on the work programmes and operations of each convention. The Terms of Reference and Modus Operandi for the JLG of the Rio Conventions establishes that “The mandate of the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) comprising the Executive Secretaries of the three Rio Conventions (the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) is to:

Enhance coordination between the three conventions, including the exchange of relevant information, and
Explore options for further cooperation between the three conventions, including the possibility of a joint work plan.”

The work of the JLG is defined by a set of five guiding principles intended to ensure that the mandate and purpose of the JLG is reflected in its outputs. Among five areas of activities, one calls for “Developing technical papers to clarify and elaborate on specific policy and technical issues”.

At the national level, Parties to the Conventions establish national action programmes to combat land degradation (NAPs), national drought risk management plans, national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) and national adaptation programmes of action (NAPAs) to guide national implementation of the Conventions, as well as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the objectives of the Paris Agreement (table 1). In Latin America, some countries have legal frameworks, inter-sectoral coordination and implementation mechanisms for implementation that could bring convention synergies into action. There are some others that are in the process of developing their legal frameworks but are still lacking implementation mechanisms, and there are countries that have yet to start addressing these aspects to achieve effective implementation. Synergies between these conventions may represent an opportunity to develop accurate actions based in an integral approach that bring benefits and increased capacities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.²

Table 1.- National instruments to implement the Conventions	
Convention	National instruments
CBD	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)
UNCCD	Action programme to Combat Desertification LDN target setting programme Transformative Projects and Programs (TPP)
UNFCCC	Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Long Term Strategies (LTS) National Adaptation Plans

² Decision 4.- XXII Forum of Ministers of the Environment for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Managing land better and massively scaling up land rehabilitation are essential for building drought resilience and water security, which is a common challenge many LAC countries are facing nowadays, and the land restoration is the cheapest and most effective solution to improved water storage, mitigating impacts of drought and addressing biodiversity loss while adapting to climate change for more productive lands.

The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean

The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean provides a unique regional space for Ministries of Environment to discuss and agree on regional environmental priorities, exchange knowledge and experiences, promote regional cooperation and generate input to global processes (UNEA, HLPF, MEA COPs, etc.).

In 2022, this mechanism will turn 40 years coinciding with the global commemorations of Stockholm+50, UNEP@50 and Rio+30. It is a perfect moment to restate the commitment of the region towards sustainable development and define the vision, role and contributions of the Forum in this regard. To increase its political relevance and link it to the current socioeconomic context, the debate and way forward on the synergistic implementation of the Rio Conventions is a key one in which the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region could lead by example.

A Special Session of the Forum of Ministers will be held from 27-28 January 2022 in Costa Rica to address the progress achieved in the decisions made in the XXII Forum and to convene on the new strategies to be presented during the next Forum. A segment has been included in the meeting to discuss the advances in the COPs and the potential for advancing synergies in implementing the MEAs.

During the XXII meeting of the Forum, in February 2021, a declaration focusing on the environmental dimension of the COVID-19 crisis was negotiated and the need for a sustainable recovery was agreed, as well as eight decisions on different issues (chemicals and waste, circular economy, biodiversity, environmental information, environmental emergencies, gender equality, SIDS). As part of the Decision 4, a Regional Action Plan for Ecosystem Restoration was also approved by all Ministers offering the opportunity to effectively integrate the three Rio Conventions in the implementation of this plan with a priority focus on the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, sustainable land use and landscape approaches.

Promoting synergies in the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for Ecosystems Restoration may facilitate a vision by 2030, where Latin America and the Caribbean have significantly advanced in defining policies and plans and implementing projects in restoration of marine, terrestrial and inland water ecosystems at a spatial scale relevant to revert the negative impacts of degradation and, as a result, strengthen resilience and have ecosystems and natural habitats across the region in process of being restored, protected and managed sustainably.

Table 2 summarizes global and regional commitments relevant for ecosystem restoration.

Table 2: Global and Regional Commitments Relevant for Landscape Restoration

Global and Regional Commitments Relevant for Landscape Restoration	
Framework	Commitment
Multilateral Agreements	
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	All 17 SDGs, including SDG 15 to Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	Draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: 20% of all degraded ecosystems under restoration by 2030
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	Carbon neutrality by 2050 through appropriate mitigation actions from the agriculture, forestry and other land uses (AFOLU) sector as per Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) Paris Agreement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Article 5 on carbon sinks and REDD+ - Article 7.1 commitments on climate change adaptation
UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)	Land degradation neutrality (LDN) by 2030 National Drought Plan as per Decisions 36/COP11, 9/COP12 and 29/COP13
UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030	Proclaimed by the UN General Assembly to prevent, stop, and reverse the continued degradation and loss of all ecosystems and raise awareness of the importance of successful ecosystem restoration.
Action Plan for the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean	Endorsed at the XXII Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean (February 2021). Aimed at promoting cooperation mechanisms and enabling conditions to scale up ecosystem restoration in the region over the next decade.
Other Agreements and Declarations	
Bonn Challenge	350 million hectares of degraded and deforested land under restoration by 2030
20x20 Initiative	Begin to protect and restore 50 million hectares of forests, farms, pasture, and other landscapes by 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean
African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR 100)	The Great Green Wall (Africa): By 2030, the Wall aims to restore 100 million hectares of currently degraded land, sequester 250 million tonnes of carbon and create 10 million jobs in rural areas.
High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People Leaders' Pledge for Nature	30% of world's land and ocean protected by 2030 Reverse biodiversity loss by 2030
G7 2030 Nature Compact (Cornwall, June 2021)	Commitment to a nature-positive approach. Support global commitments on nature, including the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration
G20 Ministers of Environment joint communiqué (Naples, July 2021)	Restoration featured as a central aspect of achieving proposed biodiversity and sustainable finance pillars
COP 26 Glasgow Declaration Climate Action in Tourism	Restore and protect ecosystems, supporting nature's ability to draw down carbon, as well as safeguarding biodiversity, food security, and water supply. As much of tourism is based in regions most immediately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, ensure the sector can support affected and at-risk communities in resilience building, adaptation and disaster response.
COP26 Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use	Commit to working collectively to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 while delivering sustainable development and promoting an inclusive rural transformation.

Enhancing regional political ambition to the implementation of the objectives of Rio Conventions

The Secretariat would like to introduce the following points to Member States for consideration:

- Establish and coordinate the framework to implement the Regional Action Plan for Ecosystems Restoration, including joint monitoring and stock-taking by the Forum of Ministers based on national progress on ecosystem restoration and considering land degradation as a common driver of concern.
- In alignment with the Regional Action Plan for Ecosystem Restoration, establish a common agenda based on the three following paths of change: 1) Generating a Regional Movement that engages society in ecosystem restoration, 2) Fostering the political will so that decision makers in public and private entities champion restoration, and (3) Catalysing research and development so that there is technical capacity to restore ecosystems at the relevant scale.
- Develop a common agenda to be validated by Ministers and developed during the intersessional period to be approved in the XXIII meeting of the Forum of Ministers.
- To define flagship subregional initiatives on restoration of ecosystems and a mass scale project which tackles drought in LAC from a holistic and sustainable perspective backed by the JLG and oversight by UNCCD Secretariat and the Global Mechanism.
- Exchange knowledge, best practices, lessons learned of existing projects related to ecosystem restoration in the region and promote regional cooperation.
- Develop trainings in collaboration with universities and research centres from the region and abroad. These trainings should be designed for technicians and operators that are responsible for day-to-day project implementation and field tasks, and another for professionals that will be responsible for designing, supervising, evaluating and monitoring projects as indicated in the Regional Action Plan - Action 10.
- Labelling the foundations for the Latin American and the Caribbean region to become a leader in the ambition and implementation of the Environmental Conventions, including by strengthening capacities towards planning and policy implementation and mobilize resources for supporting enabling activities at regional and national levels.

Possible outcome of the Special Session of the Forum (January 2022)

The inclusion in the Chair summary of the following:

1. Request the JLG of the Rio Conventions to advise, within the following three months, on the development of a clear and concrete line of work to support the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for Ecosystems Restoration enhancing synergies among, at least, the three Conventions.
2. Engage in the development of this framework the Interagency Technical Committee of the Forum (ECLAC, UNDP, UNEP, WB, IDB, PAHO/WHO) and

other key partners to identify a concrete action plan, technical assistance and funding aligned to the objectives and targets of the Regional Action Plan for Ecosystems Restoration.

3. The presentation of this framework to biodiversity working group of the Forum and the High-Level Officers of the LAC countries to get countries' feedback before the XXIII Forum of Ministers of Environment.
4. Engage implementing agencies since the beginning in the development of a draft version, and build consensus around a decision for the endorsement by the Ministers in the XXIII meeting of the Forum.
