

Land: 13 facts you need to know



Restoring degrading lands can help us mitigate climate change. Land can be our greatest ally in fighting climate change, but first we need to restore it to full health.

Solutions that slow climate change, restore nature and biodiversity, protect us against pandemics, allow us to produce more food, create jobs, reduce inequalities, build peace.

Restoring degrading land can do all of that quickly, at relatively low cost, and with modest technological solutions. We must pull out all the stops to unlock the full potential of the land as the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#) gets underway.



Over 1.3 billion people trapped on degrading agricultural land. Farmers on marginal land, especially in the drylands, have limited options for alternative livelihoods; millions of people have abandoned ancestral lands for urban areas. [Global Land Outlook](#)

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70 per cent of agricultural land is used to grow feed crops and grazing (livestock production); nearly **30% of total food value** of global crop production lost by “processing” it through inefficient livestock systems. [Global Land Outlook](#)

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Between 1998-2013, **20-30 per cent of Earth’s vegetated land surface showed persistent declining trends** in productivity: 20% of cropland, 16% forest land, 19% grassland, and 27% rangeland. [World Atlas of Desertification 2018](#)

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Africa and Asia projected to lose 80% of the global cropland due to urban area expansion. Expansion often happens on prime agricultural lands that often are twice as productive as national averages. [World Atlas of Desertification 2018](#)

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Between 2000 and 2009, **annual emissions from land degradation were 3.6–4.4 billion tonnes of CO₂-e.** by 2050, losses of 36 Gt of carbon from soils projected – mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa. [The IPBES assessment report on land degradation and restoration](#)



Economic cost of biodiversity and ecosystem services loss from land degradation is over 10% of annual global gross product. [The IPBES assessment report on land degradation and restoration](#)



75% of the land surface is significantly altered (described as “negative land transformation” as opposed “land degradation”, which is attributed to steady in-place degradation e.g. overgrazing). [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)





Under 25% of Earth's land surface free from substantial human impacts; by 2050 it will drop to under 10% –mostly in deserts, mountainous areas, tundra and polar areas unsuitable for human use or settlement. [The IPBES assessment report on land degradation and restoration](#).



Land degradation has reduced productivity in 23% of global terrestrial area, 66% of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, 85% of wetland areas have been lost. [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)



Over 1/3 of the terrestrial land surface being used for cropping or animal husbandry (agriculture). [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)





Well-being of over 3.2 billion people undermined by land degradation. [The IPBES assessment report on land degradation and restoration](#)



Every 5% loss of GDP, itself partly caused by degradation, associated with 12% increase in likelihood of violent conflict. [The IPBES assessment report on land degradation and restoration](#)



Land degradation and climate change are likely to force 50 to 700 million people to migrate by 2050. [The IPBES assessment report on land degradation and restoration](#)



Land is our wealth and our future. A better future is possible if we care, protect, recover, restore and invest in LAND.

Current commitments from **over 100 countries** specify the [restoration of almost 1 billion hectares of land over the next decade](#) – an area almost the size of China. If we restore this land, we can deliver massive benefits for people and the planet.

[Between now and 2030, it is estimated that the restoration of 350 million hectares of degraded ecosystems](#) could remove up to 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere – close to almost half of what the world emitted in 2019 – and return USD 9 trillion in ecosystem services.

[Transitioning to low-carbon growth could generate USD 26 trillion and create over 65 million new jobs by 2030.](#)

[Investing in land restoration also boosts food security. Of the 1 billion hectares covered by these commitments, 250 million can be restored to produce food.](#) In addition to increasing food and nutrition security, economic security is also improved when degraded land is restored. This in turn facilitates economic empowerment, which raises the standard of living and quality of life for communities.

Numbers can tell a compelling story. In the brochures below, the numbers highlight how land has sustained us over millennia. They also show the extent to which our land resources are under pressure. In the face of growing demand from an exploding population and the impacts of climate change, the ability of the land to provide the goods and services we need is at breaking point. Despite the ominous facts and figures about pressures and risks, there is a story about opportunity too. There has never been a better time to invest in the rehabilitation of the world's degraded landscapes and make land degradation neutrality a reality for us and for future generations.

Further Reference resources:

- [Restored Land, Healthy People, Green Recovery. Build Forward Better with Land-Centered Solutions](#)
- [The Land in numbers 2019. Risks and opportunities.](#)
- [UNCCD infographic with land facts and figures](#)

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