Increasing ambition and action in NDCs through forest landscape restoration

Forest landscape restoration in Nationally Determined Contributions Analysis

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Nationally Determined Contributions and the Paris Agreement

• At COP19 in Warsaw, governments agreed to communicate ‘their nationally determined contributions well in advance’ to the universal accord, now known as the Paris Agreement.

• Through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), governments were to communicate their intended efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions towards limiting global average temperatures rise to below 2 degrees C, at the highest level of ambition possible and according to their common but differentiated responsibilities and respected capabilities’.
Getting NDCs right for increased climate ambition

Why analyze NDCs?

• No single framework was agreed to guide governments’ efforts to submit NDCs that ensure the clarity, transparency and understanding to understand their aggregate expected effect.

• NDCs provide relevant information on what governments considered a fair contribution to global efforts in preparation to the Paris Agreement milestone. Thus understanding current NDCs as statements of political intent rather than as climate action plans allows a more accurate reading of the real story NDCs tell.

• Furthermore, distinguishing current from potential climate ambition, and climate ambition under and beyond the scope of the Paris Agreement allows reflection on the real opportunities for strengthening and increasing climate action through NDCs.
The Forest Landscape Restoration in NDCs Analysis

The analysis and resulting database

• As the 2018 Tanaloa Dialogue approaches and to inform a robust and ambitious review of NDCs in the run up to 2020, IUCN and Climate Focus conducted an in-depth review of all NDCs submitted under the Paris Agreement (PA).

• The in-depth review examined the role and potential of forest landscape restoration approaches for unlocking the climate mitigation and resilience potential for low carbon and productive rural economies.
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Objectives

The FLR in NDCs analysis provides information to:

• Inform governments when reconvening under the Tanaloa Dialogue to take stock on the aggregate effect of their global ambition on the current and potential ambition expressed in NDCs;
• Inform the submission of new or revised Nationally Determined Contributions, by reflecting on the opportunities and barriers to achieve the magnitude of the transformational changes required to achieve the net-zero emissions required by 2050.
Initial findings at a glance

- **Reforestation, afforestation and silviculture** are the most prominent land-based mitigation actions considered in NDCs for enhancing carbon sinks.

- While 77 per cent of NDCs contain commitments for restoring forest landscapes, only 30 per cent express numerical targets. Those with numerical targets add up to 43,610,200 tons of CO2 equivalent under unconditional targets and 3,486,461,370 tons of CO2 equivalent under conditional targets.

- To a large degree, **mitigation commitments continue to be expressed in changes in forest cover**. Governments refer to 24,019,017 hectares of degraded landscapes that could be restored unconditionally, plus restoration of 36,906,523 hectares would be conditional on international support.
The Forest Landscape Restoration in NDCs

Methodological considerations for interpreting NDCs

- Understanding the opportunities for greater climate action by reflecting in current and potential climate ambition and action in NDCs was made possible by applying a common approach to interpret the story NDCs tell.

- This common approach was applied to all 165 NDCs submitted as of February, 2018, in an attempt to compare and aggregate current and potential ambition and action. Overarching methodological considerations applied include:
  
  - **Ambition** as the mitigation and adaptation *political will* expressed in NDC commitments under and beyond the PA.
  - **Action** as those policies, plans and actions detailed by countries *under and beyond* the scope of the PA.
  - **Current** ambition / actions *under* the PA as that expressed by governments to be measured and reported upon when implementing their NDC contributions.
  - **Potential** ambition / actions *beyond* the PA as expressed by governments as on-going or planned efforts to be conducted in additional / complementarity to their NDC commitments.
The Forest Landscape Restoration in NDCs Analysis (1)

Methodological considerations, coding and interpreting NDCs

• FLR and land-based negative emissions’ ambition and action considered only;

• Type of commitment distinguished between targets and non-targets, the former as those under the PA and the latter as those beyond the scope of the PA;

• FLR and land-based ambition and action differentiated under adaptation or mitigation approaches;

• Mitigation targets linked to GHG monitoring purposes identified under scope of MRV (economy-wide or sectoral targets);
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Analysis (2)

Methodological considerations, coding and interpreting NDCs

- The nature of targets has been differentiated between unconditional and conditional targets;

- All target and no-target ambition and action expressed in NDCs has been disaggregated by quantitative and qualitative information;

- All quantitative information has been further categorized under the measuring metrics expressed by governments: either hectares and/or tons of CO$_2$eq.
The Forest Landscape Restoration in NDCs

Analysis

Methodological considerations and assumptions in interpreting NDCs

• In an attempt to compare and aggregate numerical targets and non-targets expressed by governments in NDCs, for reflecting on their current and potential aggregate effect, standardized implementation timeframes and metrics have been applied:
  – All NDCs have been assessed within the same implementation period: 01 Jan 2021 to 31 Dec. 2030, considering the first two implementation reporting periods under the PA.
  – All quantitative FLR targets and non-targets expressed in NDCs are recorded in the table as either hectares and/or tons of CO₂eq.

• When different timeframes or metrics from the above mentioned have been used by governments in describing NDC targets or non-targets, assumptions described in the methodological framework were applied.
The FLR approach in interpreting NDCs

- The FLR approach is a nature-based solution for improving both ecological integrity and human well-being.

- By applying the FLR approach for interpreting and coding NDC land-based and negative emissions’ targets and non-targets, a broad range of sustainable land-use pathways can be considered.

- Efficiency and effectiveness is at the core of the FLR approach: FLR simultaneously fulfils mitigation, adaptation and development priorities and commitments.
Findings and preliminary recommendations
Scaling up FLR and land-based action provides an opportunity for greater NDC ambition

- While 137 NDCs submitted by governments underscore the importance of the FLR approach in climate mitigation and adaptation, only 127 NDCs express such climate ambition in the form of both mitigation and adaptation targets.

- Only 31 per cent of NDCs with FLR and land-based targets express such commitments in mitigation numerical targets and 5 per cent more for adaptation purposes.

- Only 14 NDCs explicitly refer to REDD+ implementation, and in all cases this has been under either conditional targets or non-targets

Only 30 per cent of NDCs provide quantitative commitments. If the 52 per cent of NDCs currently presenting qualitative targets only – and the additional 13% expressed as non-targets - were translated into numerical targets, the level of ambition in NDCs could be significantly higher.
Scaling up FLR provides an opportunity for greater NDC ambition and action

- If aggregated, all quantitative values expressed in NDCs targets, under both adaptation and mitigation, would add up to 56,709,908 ha, and 3,276,978,501 tons of CO$_2$eq*.

- When considering non-targets expressed in hectares, however, climate ambition refers to an additional 51,402,524 ha under mitigation and 5,668,955 ha adaptation FLR approaches.

- When considering non-targets expressed in mitigation outcomes, additional sequestration of 5,454,545 tons of CO$_2$eq through FLR approaches would be possible.

* Values consider only those 49 NDCs providing quantitative targets, in ha or tons of CO$_2$eq.
Means of implementation are urgent for moving from political intent to action on the ground

- Of the 127 NDCs submitted by governments that contain information expressed as targets, only 38 per cent of NDCs commit to unconditionally implementing their targets; 68 per cent of NDCs refer to the implementation of both mitigation and adaptation targets as conditional.

- If quantitative targets are aggregated, unconditional targets would add up to 24,792,799 ha, and 53,563,714 tons of CO$_2$ eq yet conditional targets would add up to additional 31,917,110 ha, and 3,209,064,787 tons of CO$_2$ eq.

- Non-targets entail potential ambition that adds up to 57,070,478 ha, and 5,454,545 tons of CO$_2$ eq.

The large degree of conditionality identified when interpreting NDCs, as well as the significant level of ambition referred to as beyond the scope of the PA, suggests the urgent need to scale up and leverage means of implementation, including international support and/or improved national implementation capacities.
Strengthening of monitoring, measuring and reporting capacities is essential

- While 56 per cent of NDCs refer to GHG accounting objectives for the LULUCF or AFOLU sectors under economy-wide approaches, and 35 to a sectoral GHG MRV approach, 24 per cent have explicitly excluded the forest and land sector from mitigation accounting purposes under the PA.

- In contrast, while 30 per cent of NDCs express FLR and land-based commitments in numerical commitments, only 24 per cent do so under a mitigation approach and 22 per cent of NDCs have expressed their mitigation ambition without stating measurable commitments.

- Interestingly, only 9 per cent of those NDCs with mitigation numerical targets, express them as mitigation outcomes (in tons of CO$_2$eq).

The large degree of NDCs presenting mitigation targets as qualitative information, or expressing mitigation commitments in changes in hectares rather than in tons, or even excluding the sector for GHG reporting purposes, suggests the urgent need for improved and sustained national capacities for both monitoring and measuring changes in forest and land uses, as well as for estimating and reporting associated CO$_2$eq emissions and sequestration.
Scaling up FLR approaches for enhanced NDC implementation

• The analysis reinforces the broad acknowledgement of nature-based solutions – such as FLR approaches – as essential for delivering climate action.

• Planted forests and woodlots, silviculture and agroforestry are by large the most prominent land-based mitigation actions in NDCs:
  – 45 per cent express targets for planted forests and woodlots
  – 22 per cent express targets for silviculture
  – 24 per cent express targets for agroforestry

• However, while almost half of the commitments for planted forests and woodlots or silviculture contain numerical targets, only 15 per cent of those targets for agroforestry are supported with numbers.

Initial findings on the overall absence of science-based numerical targets for FLR activities suggests the need for improved NDC design, implementation and monitoring capacities to enable adequate estimates and reports on the performance for mitigation efforts at the landscape level.
Urgent need for policy alignment and integrated landscape management policies

- When contrasting political intent expressed in NDCs, under and beyond the Paris Agreement, figures suggest a significant mismatch with other global commitments.

- Total targets under the PA expressed by 49 NDCs, out of 127 with FLR targets, add up to 56,709,908 ha, both adaptation and mitigation commitments.

- When considering all pledges made by 53 national and subnational governments, NGOs and private companies under the Bonn Challenge as of June 2018, they add up to 162,500,000 ha.

In the run to the Tanaloha Dialogue, and to the first iteration for new or revised NDCs to be submitted by governments under the Paris Agreement, the analysis suggests a huge opportunity to increase ambition in NDCs via scaling up FLR and increased policy coherence and alignment to inform greater and science-based targets in NDCs.