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UN Environment Programme Statement regarding SDG 15

We live on a cultivated planet. The future of 'Life on Land' depends largely on how manage forests and agricultural landscapes. In particular, saving terrestrial biodiversity requires that we decouple agriculture from tropical deforestation – this remains the largest single cause of terrestrial biodiversity loss. Increasing food production without any further deforestation is a defining challenge of the coming decades, and requires that we improve the productivity and livelihoods of 900 million small-holder farmers in the world.

Land-use is the next frontier, the 'next big thing' in climate action. The world needs the same sustainability transformation in forestry and agriculture as we have achieved on renewable energy. Land-use and forests could provide more than 30 per cent of the solution to the climate crisis. However, right now, less than 3 per cent of climate finance, public or private, goes to sustainable land-use. We need significant increase in climate-finance, from public and private sources, to improve agriculture, save our forests, and restore degraded landscapes world-wide. Private investments into agriculture commodities stand at 1.7 trillion USD. With the right policies and incentives, and much of this could be re-directed to sustainable, deforestation-free agriculture.

Land and how we use it might be the next big thing for the Sustainable Development Goals as whole, too. Today, 3.2 billion people are already impacted by land degradation, and desertification is spreading. We need to turn the tide. Sustainable landscapes can provide decent jobs, water security, clean energy, ample food, and a sound basis for the transition to a green economy. Saving remaining forests; restoring degraded lands; and improving agriculture could create millions of new jobs in fragile rural areas; slow climate-induced migration; and stabilize fragile communities and nations.

In particular, restoring degraded landscapes world-wide holds huge potential for biodiversity and climate action. 47 countries have already committed to bring 160 million hectares of degraded landscapes into restoration by 2020. And the 'Bonn Challenge' has set a restoration target of 350 million hectares world-wide by 2030 - an area larger than India. Achieving this target could generate 9 trillion USD worth of ecosystem benefits; and sequester more than 21 Gigatons of greenhouse gases. Forest and landscape restoration at scale is an idea whose time has come.