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14. © Ecosystem restoration is now a global priority: time to roll up our sleeves.

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EDITORIAL OPINION

Ecosystem Restoration is Now a Global Priority: Time to Roll up our Sleeves

James Aronson^{1,2,3} and Sasha Alexander⁴

Abstract

Ecosystem restoration is now globally recognized as a key component in conservation programs and essential to the quest for the long-term sustainability of our human-dominated planet. Restoration scientists and practitioners are now on the frontline and will be increasingly called upon to get involved in large scale programs addressing immediate environmental crises and challenges. Here, we summarize the advances in mainstreaming ecological restoration in global environmental policy deliberations during the last year, culminating in the recent meeting of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. We

also provide key references for those seeking more information, and set out an agenda as to how the restoration community could respond to and act upon these recent developments. However, we underline the need for caution and prudence; we must not promise more than we can deliver. Thirty years after the emergence of ecological restoration as a scientific discipline and practice, there remain many obstacles and misconceptions about what can be achieved at large scales. Yet, clearly the old adage applies here: nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Key words: CBD COP11, enabling factors, Hyderabad Call.

Good News from Hyderabad

In October 2012, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held its 11th Conference of the Parties (COP11) in Hyderabad, India. This historic meeting was attended by over 8,000 delegates from 193 countries. During the opening plenary, India announced the “Hyderabad Roadmap” intended to guide the efforts of all 168 signatory countries in achieving the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the Strategic Plan 2011–2020 agreed to in Nagoya, Japan (CBD 2010). Of these, Targets 14 and 15 set out ambitious but attainable goals for scaling up efforts to restore and rehabilitate degraded ecosystems and landscapes around the world.

Inspired by the wealth of information on the science and practice of restoration, the CBD Executive Secretary emphatically exclaimed that his three main priorities for the next 8 years are “implementation, implementation, and implementation.” In essence, he was inviting countries, communities, corporations, and relevant organizations to integrate ecosystem restoration into legislative, regulatory, and planning frameworks that would facilitate and incentivize action on the ground. Perhaps, the most important legacy of this meeting

will prove to be the Hyderabad Call for a concerted effort and the CBD COP11 decision on ecosystem restoration, both of which are described below.

Ecosystem Restoration as a Conduit for Achieving Multiple Objectives

In 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the three Rio Conventions were established, including the above-mentioned CBD and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as well as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Twenty years after the adoption of the CBD Convention Text and Article 8(f), which states that each Party shall “rehabilitate and restore degraded ecosystems and promote the recovery of threatened species” (CBD 1992), the Parties have now fully recognized the critical role of restoration in the implementation of the Convention and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets for 2020.

The Hyderabad Call (CBD 2012a), like other major initiatives and declarations, affirms that conservation and sustainable use alone are no longer sufficient to stem the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Recognizing that ecosystem restoration is not a substitute for conservation nor is it a rationale for intentionally damaging extant ecosystems (Moreno-Mateos et al. 2012), the CBD has called for a global partnership to not only help achieve the objectives of the Rio Conventions but also help address the urgent global priorities on poverty alleviation, assuring food and water security, and generating sustainable livelihoods.

¹Centre d'Ecologie Fonctionnelle et Evolutive (CNRS – U.M.R. 5175), 1919, Route de Mende, Montpellier 34293, France

²Missouri Botanical Garden, PO Box 299, St. Louis, MO 63166, U.S.A.

³Address correspondence to J. Aronson, email james.aronson@cefe.cnrs.fr

⁴Society for Ecological Restoration, 1017 O Street, Northwest, Washington, DC 20001, U.S.A.