

World Environment Day

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Each year on June 5th; governments, businesses, and citizens all around the globe celebrate the World Environment Day. The tradition started in 1974 to draw attention to urgent environmental issues. The main goal set for this year is to restore the ecosystem to combat climate change and the loss of biodiversity (1). The community behind the World Environment Day goes by the title Generation Restoration, and consists of people from many diverse backgrounds, allowing everyone to be a part of it.

Since the Industrial Revolution we have been rapidly destroying our planet. We have already lost half of our wetlands (2). Every three seconds, we lose forest space equal to the size of a football pitch. If we keep going at this rate, soon there will be no planet left for us or most other life on Earth (3). Therefore, this year, the World Environment Day is planned as the start of the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, an international action plan to restore billions of hectares of various natural landscapes (4).

Every year the celebrations are hosted by a different country, this year, the host is planned to be Pakistan. In 2014, Pakistan undertook a massively ambitious project to plant a billion trees to combat deforestation. In 2021, the country also put the Ecosystem Restoration Fund in place to deal with climate change and to support biodiversity by creating green jobs and encouraging eco-friendly solutions. Last year, Pakistan was found to be the 5th most affected country by climate change between the years of 1999 and 2018, costing it 3.8 billion US Dollars. There is no doubt that being selected as the host will direct the attention of its public to environmental issues and the state of our planet (6).

The theme of World Environment Day 2021 is Ecological Restoration and we will examine the significance of this theme for the global environment improvement. First, we need to dive into the goals and the benefits of the Ecological Restoration on a global level. Ecological Restoration is the revival of damaged or destroyed ecosystems around the world by taking steps such as revegetation, habitat enhancement, remediation, and mitigation. These goals strive to awaken the damaged ecosystems as a whole, and we should expand the definitions of these goals.

Revegetation is the insertion of vegetation on the areas that have previously lost its endemic life, and the reduction of corrosion is the main goal. Habitat enhancement is the process of improving the living conditions for the anticipated species in an ecosystem. Remediation is the advancement of the damaged ecosystems or adding a new ecosystem to nature to replace a destroyed one. Lastly, mitigation is the “remediation for loss of protected species or ecosystems” and it is legally mandated. (7)

Potential environmental benefits and fiscal profits of the ecosystem restoration is also another important aspect of taking immediate action. Estimated income of the planned restoration of 350 hectares of damaged ecosystems between now and 2030 is 9 trillion US Dollars. Also noted is the economic benefits of these ecosystem rehabilitations, estimated to be more than nine times

of its cost of investment, in contrast, not making those investments is three times more costly.

(8) For the potential naturewise benefits of the ecosystem restoration, we can list reversing desertification and forest clearance, improving air quality on global average, making the urban environments better, and enhancing the living conditions of humans. (9)

Since we clearly see the significance of the ecosystem restoration to the general well being of the global environment, celebration of the World Environment Day in 2021 with this theme is very crucial to the sustainability of an habitable earth for humanity. On the other hand, celebrating a day and forgetting about the environment the next day will not help anyone, and certainly not the already degraded ecosystems worldwide. In order to maintain a habitable environment for all creatures living on earth, we need to take immediate action following both instructions and the advice given by the United Nations and its various committees working on this issue. These actions, as expected, mostly rely on the conscience of multinational corporations to reduce their own negative impacts on nature by both adjusting their procedures and directing their investments towards restoration of the ecosystems. Unfortunately, due to the fiscal benefits of these investments in nature not being returned in short-term or them not being in the shape of literal money, corporations tend to avoid environmentally conscious investments. Even though corporations are not keen on improving the environment, they usually promote themselves as “green” which you can read more about “green-washing” in the linked article here. (4) In conclusion, as people, we have the power to hold accountable these corporations for their false advertisements and wrong-doings to nature. We need to emphasize the urgency of these improvements for a sustainable future for humans on earth.