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Harnessing the Power of Nature – How Tropical Countries Can Meet Climate Goals by 2030

By protecting and restoring forests and agricultural lands, more than 30 countries could meet their Paris climate targets

Arlington, VA – January 27, 2020 – A new paper concludes that better stewardship of land, forests, and coastal wetlands could reverse emissions in 30 tropical countries, and that in most of these countries, natural climate solutions offer the best option for achieving Paris climate targets.

The new research in a special issue of the journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society – Biological Sciences* identifies those tropical countries that are best positioned to help lower global temperatures and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from an investment in [natural climate solutions](#) – that is, the protection, restoration, and responsible management of the forests, agricultural lands, peatlands, mangroves and other ecosystems that store and absorb massive amounts of carbon. These solutions represent one of the most promising climate mitigation opportunities available right now. Yet they're under-represented in national climate action planning in the Paris Agreement process and receive a tiny fraction of public climate mitigation finance.

In fact, the paper finds that if cost-effective natural solutions are prioritized, half of medium and large tropical countries could see a more than 50 percent reduction in their national emissions. Just 12 natural climate solutions across 79 tropical countries could cost-effectively deliver 6.6 gigatonnes CO₂e of climate mitigation per year: reversing more greenhouse gas emissions than the entire annual emissions of the United States.

Collectively, tropical regions release the highest level of greenhouse gas emissions as a result of environmental degradation and destruction, yet these same areas have the greatest carbon storage potential.

Authored by scientists from Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and 15 other organizations, the new paper serves as a follow-up report to the Conservancy's [landmark 2017 study](#) identifying natural climate solutions as a necessary and cost-effective method to stabilize rising global temperatures. This research found that natural climate solutions can provide one-third of the cost-effective climate mitigation needed between now and 2030 to limit warming to below 2C.

“It’s becoming more and more imperative that we realize nature as a major climate change solution, rather than only a climate change victim. Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by the energy and fossil fuel industry is more urgent than ever, but it is not enough. We also need a massive investment in natural climate solutions – and in ways that help deliver sustainable development goals,” said Bronson Griscom, Senior Director of Natural Climate Solutions for Conservation International and formerly Director of Forest Carbon Science for TNC. “Our new research clarifies that if most tropical countries are to meet and even surpass our shared goal of carbon neutrality by mid-century, a priority focus should be preserving, restoring, and better managing these carbon-dense ecosystems.”

“Protecting, preserving, and better managing the world’s land not only makes sense ecologically, but economically as well,” said Peter Ellis, TNC’s Natural Climate Science Lead. “Every year, science tells us that nature is a powerful, cost-effective tool to combating the climate crisis. In tropical countries, the potential is enormous. Not only can natural climate solutions significantly reduce annual greenhouse gas emissions, but they can also protect biodiversity, control flooding, filter water and air, and increase soil health.”

Griscom, Ellis, and the team analyzed more than 100 tropical countries to clarify a suite of 12 actions that countries can take to care for their land sustainably in a way that also benefits the climate.

New analyses enabled the research team to improve previous estimates and disaggregate national NCS opportunities from the global total.

The outcome: A new database quantifying nature’s contribution to tackling climate change, country by country and action by action. This database can help countries reach their goals under the Paris Climate Agreement, helping them to choose the actions that provide the highest climate impact at the lowest cost.

Summing across all tropical countries researchers noted that “protection” actions represent the majority (3.5 gigatonnes CO₂e per year) of total cost-effective NCS potential, followed by improved management of working lands (1.7 gigatonnes) and restoration (1.4 gigatonnes).

Additional key findings:

- Twenty countries hold 80 percent of pantropical cost-effective natural climate solution potential;
- Four large countries (Indonesia, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, and India) hold over half (53 percent) of pantropical cost-effective potential;
- A variety of small and medium-sized tropical countries are best positioned, in terms of governance and magnitude of NCS relative to national emissions, to become carbon negative nations with NCS; and
- In half of tropical countries, cost-effective natural climate solutions could mitigate more than 50 percent of their individual greenhouse gas emissions and in more than a quarter of tropical countries that potential is greater than their national emissions.

The report also highlights the scale of investment needed, relative to the size of national economies. Full-scale cost of implementation of these solutions range from 46 percent of gross domestic product in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to less than one percent in India. But the median cost of implementation is 5.5 percent of national GDP for all tropical countries, indicating a huge opportunity for increased investment from the global community, and re-structuring of national policies, to achieve sustainable development goals linked with NCS.

The authors conclude by noting that their findings “are intended to set the stage for more in-depth consideration of complex national and subnational circumstances, both internationally and domestically, about prioritizing financial and governmental support for natural climate solutions.”

About Conservation International

Conservation International uses science, policy and partnerships to protect the nature that people rely on for food, fresh water and livelihoods. Founded in 1987, Conservation International works in more than 30 countries on six continents to ensure a healthy, prosperous planet that supports us all. Learn more about [Conservation International](#), the groundbreaking "[Nature Is Speaking](#)" campaign and its series of virtual reality projects: "[Drop in the Ocean](#)", "[My Africa](#)," "[Under the Canopy](#)" and "[Valen's Reef](#)." Follow Conservation International's work on [Conservation News](#), our blog, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

About The Nature Conservancy

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