

Management of Natural Resources

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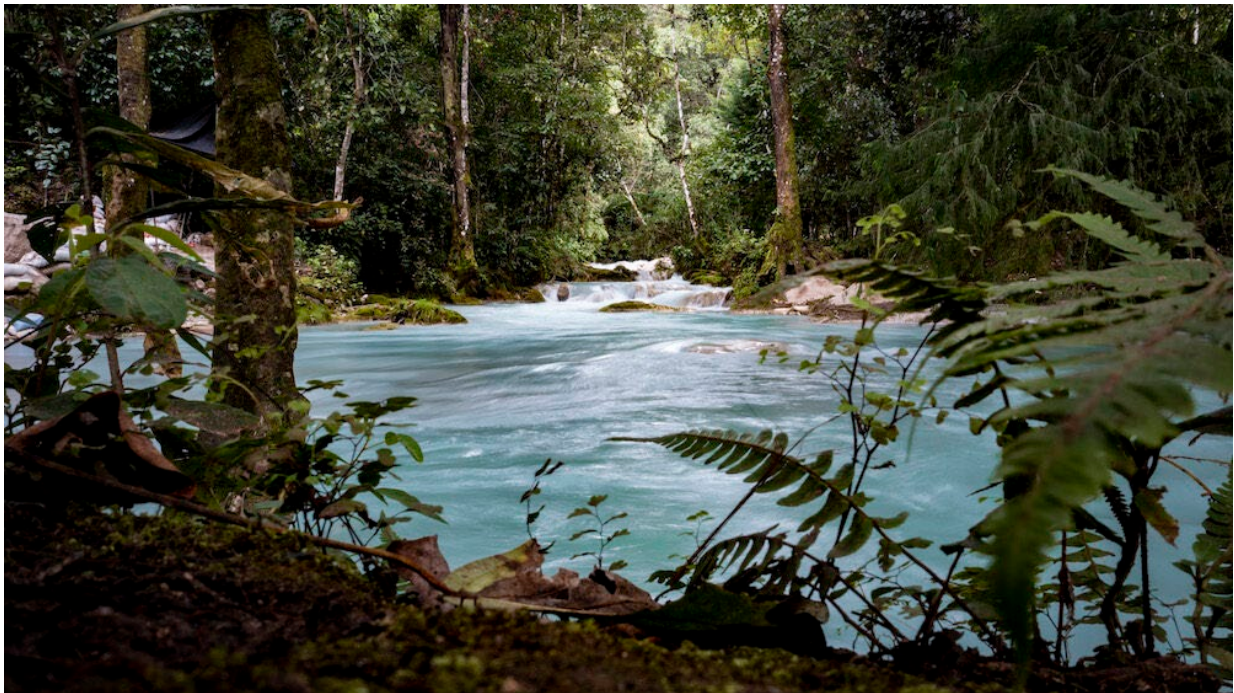
Forest area in Guatemala. Photo: Carlos Zaparolli

Nature is being destroyed

Nature is crucial for human existence and a good quality of life because it regulates environmental processes (air quality, water quality, climate, pollination), provides material goods (energy, food, fuel, medicines), and offers non-material recreation (outdoor activities, learning, culture, identity). However, nature is not important "just" because it forms the basis of human life; it has inherent value of its own. This is a fundamental view, for example, in the Convention on Biological Diversity, which requires all UN member states – with the exception of the USA, which has not signed – to work together to ensure biodiversity on the planet (CBD, 2011).

Nature has a significant place in the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015. Goal 15, for instance, aims to "protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss" (UNDP, n.d.). These international commitments were further strengthened by the global Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (also known as the Nature Agreement), adopted in 2022, with the aim of implementing a global effort to reverse the loss of biodiversity.

The UN's Nature Panel states that nature on Earth is unfortunately disappearing at a rapid pace and that humanity is destroying ecosystems, many of whose functions are irreplaceable. The current rate of species extinction is already ten to a hundred times higher than the average over the last 10 million years, and the pace is increasing. The five major direct drivers of biodiversity loss are changes in land use, direct exploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasion of alien species (IPBES, 2019).



Forest and river in Guatemala. Photo: Carlos Zaparolli

How does the loss of nature hinder the fight against hunger and poverty?

Extensive loss of nature hinders the fight against hunger and poverty because humans rely on nature for a good life. For example, more than 75 percent of the world's food crops, including fruits and vegetables, as well as important commercial crops such as coffee, cocoa, and almonds, depend on animal pollination (IPBES, 2019).

The world's forests are an essential resource, and their loss blocks sustainable development. For example, there are more than two billion people who rely on wood as their primary source of energy (IPBES, 2019). This is the case for many of The Development Fund's programme participants. Forests are home to more than half of the world's terrestrial species of animals, plants, and insects. Furthermore, forests reduce global warming due to their ability to remove and store carbon

from the atmosphere, and they mitigate the effects of storms and floods (UNEP, n.d.). Millions of people, especially indigenous groups and local communities, are directly dependent on the forest for food and income. For these people, deforestation is a direct threat to their livelihoods and food security.

The genes and gene combinations that make up biodiversity are called genetic resources. Plant genetic resources maintain current food production and provide livelihoods for farmers worldwide. But we also need plant genetic resources to meet future needs. Access to locally adapted plant varieties is crucial for farmers to adapt to a changing climate. The Nature Panel states: "Globally, local varieties and species of domesticated plants and animals are disappearing. This loss of diversity, including genetic diversity, poses a serious risk to global food security by undermining the resilience of many agricultural systems to threats such as pests, pathogens, and climate change" (IPBES, 2019). Thus, biodiversity is also a vital source of our resilience and ability to cope with shocks – the less diversity, the more vulnerable we become.



Coffee farmer in Guatemala. Photo: Carlos Zaparolli

What does The Development Fund do?

The Development Fund supports various measures that strengthen local communities' participation and rights over forests and other natural resources. This can be done through the establishment of local forest management groups, water committees, or climate adaptation committees. The groups both manage natural resources and implement measures to prevent or reverse the deterioration of natural resources, such as planting trees or building terraces to prevent erosion and increase soil moisture. Our initiatives aim to ensure that those most dependent on natural resources, and who are hardest hit when they deteriorate, are heard. Strengthening their rights is crucial to ensuring sustainable natural resource management.

Some more examples of our activities

Forest conservation: The key to sustainable forest conservation lies in finding answers to how best to preserve the forest while ensuring people's livelihoods. Communities in forested areas have, over many generations, preserved and used the forest in a sustainable manner. To preserve the forest and the people who depend on it, it is important to create good laws and regulations that both ensure that communities have the right to use the forest sustainably and prevent resource depletion and deforestation. For this to happen, communities must be actively involved in both planning and management.



Farmer in Ethiopian rain forest. Photo: Harald Herland

Local seed banks to strengthen farmers' seed systems: Preservation and use of seeds are the cornerstone of food production. The Development Fund establishes and supports the operation of local seed banks that farmers can use. Through the seed banks, farmers have a stable and secure source of seeds at the beginning of each season. If a crisis occurs and a drought or flood destroys farmers' crops, the seed banks store a selection of various important seed varieties that farmers can use. Without such a safety net, farmers risk significant losses, and important plant varieties may be lost.

Rehabilitation of varieties that have been disappearing: Over time, plant varieties may lose some of their characteristics. The Development Fund, through our partners, facilitates farmers' ability to map and identify wild relatives in an area. For example, there may be wild relatives of rice that have not yet been developed into rice plants. These can be shaped for use as breeding material so that traditional characteristics are not lost.

Would you like to support The Development Fund's work?

- ✦ [Here you can read about how you can get involved in our work against hunger and injustice](#)

References

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