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Community-led forest restoration helps fight climate change

December 19, 2017 (Brussels) - Restoring natural biologically diverse forests could remove 500 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere, making a significant impact in the fight against climate change, says a new report by forests and rights NGOs Fern and Rainforest Foundation Norway.

Drawing on existing scientific evidence and highlighting case studies from around the world, the report shows how restoring the world's forests would also stem catastrophic biodiversity loss, improve human and land rights and benefit local communities.

"So far, forest restoration has attracted remarkably little attention from the climate community, despite its potential to head off the worst impacts of climate change while delivering great social and ecological benefits," said Hanna Aho, forests and climate campaigner at Fern.

"Unlike other options currently being considered for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, community-led forest restoration is both scientifically certain and would not threaten human rights abuses through large-scale land grabs," Anders Haug Larsen, policy advisor at Rainforest Foundation Norway added.

To achieve the Paris Climate Agreement's target of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees, scientists say that we will have to find ways of removing CO_2 from the atmosphere – "negative emissions" in climate jargon. According to research cited in the report, the amount of CO_2 that we need to remove is roughly 500 billion tonnes.

The report also cites evidence showing that in tropical forest areas alone forest restoration could absorb 230-330 billion tonnes of CO_2, and that a further 150 billion tonnes could be removed through reforestation. That amount could be increased, perhaps dramatically, if forest restoration efforts were systematically extended to temperate and boreal regions.

In very different corners of the globe, the report demonstrates how the process could work – in each case showing how local people are leading successful forest recovery.

From the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal, to once denuded farmlands of Costa Rica, and from the remote northwest coast of Scotland to the Amazon rainforest, the report details examples of local people actively bringing back natural diverse forests.

“Governments everywhere must do more to support forest restoration, but such projects should always also benefit forest-dependent local people and ecosystems, as well as respect the planet’s carbon budget,” said Aho.

Aho stressed though, that however great the potential drawdown of CO_2 from the air from restoring the world’s forests, it is emphatically not an alternative to stopping deforestation and cutting CO_2 emissions from fossil fuels and land-use to zero as soon as possible.

Report Return of Trees: www.fern.org/returnofthetrees