Addressing rights, biodiversity, and agroecology for climate action

Context and Rationale
Three mutually-reinforcing change areas for transformational impact: rights, restoration, and agroecology.

An overview of the contribution
IPCC Special Reports indicate the urgency of immediate scale-up of solutions in the land sector while drastically reducing fossil emissions. Scalability, development of co-benefits, and lower relative costs are key factors in pathways to 2030. CLARA’s 2018 report ‘Missing Pathways’ aligns with the IPCC Special Report on the 1.5°C goal, but finds further ambition in: considering gains that can be achieved through political and societal change in response to the enormity of the climate challenge; making explicit the question of global inequality; putting food sovereignty at the center of the ‘co-benefits’ question; calling for an end to the conversion of natural forests; and by privileging ecosystem integrity over the extractive value of landscapes. Using these parameters and the data reflected in ‘Missing Pathways’, we developed three synergistic theories of change (TOC):

• The lowest-cost, largest-scale-up of ambition for both mitigation and adaptation in the land sector will come through expanding collective tenure rights to lands and securing community management of those lands. A number of CLARA partners work on land rights and community forest management, and our submissions reflect this. At least a quarter of the total carbon stored in subtropical and tropical forests lies in collectively managed lands, much of it in areas where Indigenous Peoples and local communities lack legal recognition. TOC: Securing legal title for community-based tenure systems is a solution where marginal cost decreases sharply with the scale of ambition. For example, a study from Brazil showed that the cost of securing forest tenure for 20 years was at most 1% of total ecosystem benefits. The Rights and Resources Initiative showed that doubling the demarcation of community forestlands globally would cost only US $2B. At a time when almost half of the Amazon is under threat of conversion to extractive mining and commodity agriculture, this rights-based solution should be taken seriously.

• Protecting all remaining primary forests along with restoring one-quarter of the world’s degraded natural forests by 2030 would result in half of global forest cover represented in intact ecosystems. Avoiding forest loss and protecting primary forest is the first priority for safeguarding both the climate and biodiversity. The second priority is restoration of secondary/degraded forests to intact ecosystems (with full carbon carrying capacity). The third priority is responsible use of production forests. TOC: Focusing restoration efforts on the recovery of ecosystem integrity provides a meaningful benefit to sustainable development, resilience, and food security.

• Agroecology applies ecological concepts to the design of sustainable agro-ecosystems. TOC: Six pathways help achieve substantial mitigation benefits while improving food security: a) integrating trees into cropping systems; b) enhancing soil fertility through improved in situ nutrient cycling; c) prioritization of local food crops and shorter food value chains; d) planting and management for agro-biodiversity; e) limiting livestock production to ‘ecological leftovers’ within particular landscapes; and f) more ecologically-based eating patterns.
Leveraging natural systems

Reduction in carbon emissions and carbon capture
Ecosystem-based approaches in the land sector, and agroecological system change in food production and consumption, could deliver over 13 Gt CO₂eq/year in avoided emissions, and almost 10 Gt CO₂eq/year of additional carbon sequestered into the biosphere by 2050. Community-based tenure systems would continue to protect the equivalent of at least 293 Gt C as carbon stocks.

Increasing climate resilience
Buffering and reconnecting areas of primary forest enhances ecosystem resilience and longevity. Studies from a wide variety of crop and livestock systems around the world demonstrate that enhancing agrobiodiversity can reduce vulnerability and increase system resilience.

Net economic impact
Integrated solutions can be achieved at lower cost, delivering improved outcomes for climate, biodiversity and ecosystems, and human health. Securing land rights represent a low-cost, high-benefit investment, due to overlap between intact conservation areas and collectively managed lands globally.

Food security
Human diets based primarily on plants are nutritionally beneficial, produce far less GHGs, and require considerably less land than feeding grains to livestock. Expanded use of cereals as animal feed threatens food security by reducing the grain available for humans. Over-consumption of livestock in wealthy countries must be reduced, while food security in poorer countries is enhanced. Agricultural emissions from non-CO₂ gases cannot be reduced to zero; but significant emissions reductions in these sectors are possible while prioritising food security and healthy diets.

Fostering an increase in biodiversity
CLARA’s chosen pathways rely on respecting principles of ecosystem integrity to promote the greatest biodiversity and ecosystem resilience possible; and on securing the rights of indigenous and rural communities that have demonstrated the greatest ability for land protection.
Indigenous and community lands across 64 countries store >293 gigatonnes of carbon.

At least 293 Gt C is stored in collectively managed lands across all forest biomes. This represents a fraction of the carbon stored in collectively managed lands, given the large areas for where data are not available.

1 Forest biomes are based on FAO 2015 classifications. Source: (Rights and Resources Initiative, 2018).

Countries, organisations, and stakeholders involved

A diverse south-north network of organizations including faith-based networks, sustainable agriculture organizations, conservation groups, academics, land rights campaigners, right-to-food groups, and representatives of people’s movements. We are the stakeholders developing this contribution, with solutions that can be pursued in different parts of the globe, appropriate to local circumstances.

See CLARA members at:
www.climatelandambitionrightsalliance/members

Delivery of contribution:
see accompanying submissions from CLARA members

This CLARA submission builds on our 2018 report ‘Missing Pathways’ to indicate the synergistic nature of people-led climate solutions with respect to community land rights, ecosystem-based approaches, and agroecology with food system change. CLARA members have made companion submissions using a simplified version of the UN’s template. These deepen attention to the social benefits of our approaches while also addressing the scale-up and transformational potential of specific practices. CLARA member websites and reports provide multiple examples of mitigation and adaption experiences, plus participatory monitoring approaches.

The CLARA network includes climate justice advocates, faith groups, conservation groups, land-rights campaigners, agroecologists, and representative of peoples movements around the globe. Our commitment to social justice brought us into the climate debate and informs our approaches to climate solutions. For more information about CLARA, visit climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org.

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